

# Implementing ideas

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**Les Carnets du CAP :** *Ideas have always played a role in international relations, for instance to clarify our understanding of the international system (the “balance of power”, the “Iron curtain”, the “Cold War”, “non alignment”, the “domino effect”, “mutual assured destruction”), to frame the foreign policy debate (“containment” vs “roll-back”), but also to promote a specific world order (“collective security”) and to push for specific policies or interests (“free trade”, “nationalism”, “Nazism”, “communism”, the UN 1948 convention on “genocide”, Truman’s 1949 speech about “development”, “global public goods”). But ideas seem to play an even greater role today, in each of these three dimensions, as the world seems less easy to understand, more difficult to organise and less adapted to a solely-hard power foreign policy. What would be your assessment of the role of ideas in international relations? Are they still relevant in the current international system? At which level and through which conduit do they play a role?*

**David Gordon :** We must begin any discussion of the role of ideas in international politics today with a recognition that our terms of discourse – globalization, human rights, sovereignty, international law, the rules of war, and other understandings of the sources and limits of international order – are the latest manifestation of the common intellectual heritage of the west. We are in Europe's intellectual debt for defining and developing the ideas with which we understand the world. Consider, on the positive side, the development of capitalism, the evolution of the meaning of sovereignty, the development of constitutionalism, the definition and universalization of our belief in "les droits de l'homme." The founders of the United States invoked the best traditions of the European Enlightenment – humankind's natural or God-given rights to be free from oppression, the equality and dignity of the individual, limited government whose sovereignty is vested in the people, the rule of law, and representative self-government. In the 20th century, the United States also embraced ideas developed by British intellectuals, especially John Stuart Mill and John Maynard Keynes, with regard to an open international economy, free trade, and freedom of the seas. Europe has also been the source of alternative political traditions, such as imperialism and authoritarianism of the right and left. The European Union, of course, embodies the rejection of such traditions.

**James Kariuki :** I agree that there has always been a strong link between ideas – or political philosophy – and international relations. As David says, 20th century international relations were dominated by the struggle between systems – capitalist liberal or social democracy on one hand; totalitarianism, state socialism and then communism on the other – which had their origins in the ideas of 18th and 19th century European thought: Rousseau, Kant, Mill, Hegel, Marx etc. My three dimensions would be as follows: the ideas that help us understand the world we are in; the ideas we use to influence others and motivate action; and the ideas which – reflecting our values - define where we want to get to. Some say that Marxism had value as a critique of the harshest elements of early industrial capitalism; and that Communism was an effective call to action to address inequality and injustice. But

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they were fundamentally flawed as a blueprint for an alternative society – or for relations within or between states.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall we have struggled to find the intellectual framework that accurately reflects our worldview – and not for lack of trying. Shortly after Fukuyama declared the end of history and the victory of liberal democracy, we were confronted with old-fashioned nationalism and ethnic conflict in the Balkans and in Rwanda. Some in the West (especially “post-modern Europeans”) were motivated to invoke a right of intervention or a responsibility to protect civilians, transcending old principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention. Whilst there was progress on advancing democracy and universal human rights in the 1990s, concern was rising at the impact of poverty, inequality, health crises (HIV/AIDS) and environmental degradation on our global sustainable development. At the turn of the century economic globalisation was accelerating growth and opportunities, but our interdependence had exposed new inequalities – both real and perceived. 9/11 reminded us of man’s ability to commit mass murder in the name of religion – and left us contemplating a clash of civilisations. And now, some people argue that the entire western model of democratic capitalism is in question.

**Pierre Levy :** To follow-up on James’ three dimensions. “Ideas that help us understand the world we are in” are more important than they used to be because the world is less understandable: bad ideas, often simplistic, can play a terrible role (the “clash of civilisations”), and good ideas are often too complex and/or too partial to readily answer our expectations. “Ideas we use to influence others and motivate action” are also more and more important, and there is a great deal of diversity in the way we interpret and use them : Human rights and the way they are understood being a good example of this category. But the third category, “Ideas which define where we want to go” are particularly rare, and we are obviously paying some price for that : there are only a few available (effective multilateralism, sustainable development) and the other global players scarcely feel compelled to buy them.

**James Kariuki :** Since the uneasy “clarity” of the cold war, what are the defining characteristic of the 21st Century? Is it economic (globalisation versus marginalisation, emerging powers versus the bottom billion)? political (autocracy versus democracy; sovereignty versus human rights; balance of power between strong and failing states)? sustainability (climate, energy and resources)? or cultural (clash of civilisations; religious motivated violence)? Of course it is some combination of the above. But the complexity of our interdependence can make both policy makers and “thinkers” feel powerless. In these circumstances, I believe that ideas become more important, not less, in international relations.

**David Gordon :** Today, the West’s discourse on the sources and limits of international society has gone global. China upholds and defends a definition of state sovereignty more akin to Europe’s in an earlier age; Brazil lectures the United States about agricultural protectionism as an obstacle to free trade in global trade negotiations; India proudly proclaims its status as “the world’s fastest-growing free-market democracy,” a claim Britain might have made two centuries earlier. A key challenge for the West is working with rising, non-Western powers to develop definitions of sovereignty consistent with a 21st rather than a 19th century ideal – including requirements for good governance and the protection of human dignity -- and to prevent them from acting as free riders rather than responsible stakeholders in an international system that has accommodated and even propelled their own geopolitical and geo-economic ascent. While today’s main trend remains the spread of market democracy and capitalism, the existence of authoritarian capitalism in Russia and China, and important debates in emerging powers about how to organize societies, highlights the compelling role that ideas will continue to play in defining the rules and practices of international order. The West should not shun such debate but welcome it, because of the continuing attraction of the liberal ideal. Indeed, the further embrace of market capitalism in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East will help consolidate a pluralistic international society in which our ideals and interests can continue to flourish despite the rise of new centers of power.

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**Les Carnets du CAP :** *Ideas and concepts are key elements of international relations: sustainable development, global governance, the end of history, the clash of civilisations, human development, “droit d’ingérence” and the responsibility to protect, cultural diversity, the war on terror... Where are they framed (IOs, think tanks, national governments, NGOs, academics)? Which actors set them on the international agenda? What makes them play a role in States’ behaviours? How are they reappropriated by States, and how are they constrained by and transformed into foreign policy?*

**James Kariuki :** Today there is a fluid international market in ideas and concepts. Politicians, diplomats, academics, NGOs and journalists engage in the same debates, read the same publications, mix at the same conferences. Taking the example of the UK over the last decade, the increase in focus on Africa and development issues is the product of a dynamic debate between NGOs and faith groups; politicians (from across the spectrum) and their civil servants; a global media and an activist entertainment industry; think-tanks and academics. Slogans like “drop the debt” or “make poverty history” became appropriated by decision makers and communicators.

**Pierre Levy :** Of course, the momentum is vital to make an idea fly. And it also depends of our own political cycles. Political capacity will be weak or strong depending our national agenda. But momentum can be built. And ideas can be shaped. It is striking, to take two examples particularly striking to French eyes, to see how different “cultural exception” within trade negotiations and “cultural diversity” within the UNESCO sounded, and the same is true for “devoir d’ingérence” and “responsibility to protect”. Nobody has a monopoly, as James rightly stated. But some actors have more influence than others, and some are more committed to develop adapted and effective strategy in this field.

**James Kariuki :** Nobody has a monopoly on ideas. At any moment in time, a think-tank or University centre, a UN committee or EU working group, a Parliamentary caucus or a web-based virtual

community is exploring every international policy idea or concept. What gives them resonance and momentum is when ideas, events, political leadership and mass communication converge. For example, our concern about climate change has for some time been underpinned by science, negotiated by experts and informed by green advocacy. But recently there has been a step change in the breadth of public awareness, as it has evolved into an economic issue (thanks to Nick Stern), a security issue (Margaret Beckett), an existential issue (Al Gore). Increasingly low-carbon is also an energy security issue (ask Washington), a global justice issue (ask India or the Maldives), and a business issue (ask Shell or McKinsey).

**Les Carnets du CAP :** *What about the new importance given, in international relations studies, to the concept of “narrative”? What does it tell us about the international system (the new modalities of war, the importance of cultural relations, the role of mass medias and technologies of communication)? Does this concept increase or diminish the importance of the intellectual dimension of international relations ? To what extent does it simplify the complexities of the contemporary world? Which political relevance or purpose do these narratives have for States? How can States adapt to this?*

**James Kariuki :** The use of narrative in international relations helps practitioners articulate their world view and provide their constituencies with a clear rationale for action. I’m not sure that it’s a particularly new concept – Kennan’s long telegram and the doctrine of containment were a pretty good narrative for the cold war. Perhaps what has changed is the extent to which, in an era of globalised communication, we increasingly rely on non-state actors to achieve our policy goals. A treaty on climate change is meaningless if we can’t change the behaviour of millions of producers and consumers. Countering-terrorism requires not only on military or police cooperation, but the decisions of individuals and communities – in our countries and overseas – to cease to provide shelter and safe haven for the minority of committed terrorists in their midst.

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**Pierre Levy :** True, the narrative is not a new issue and the "long telegram" is a good example. But it is definitely much more difficult for practitioners to adjust each narrative in order to deliver a global and coherent policy. The simplicity of the cold war has been replaced by an intricacy of crisis and issues with more actors, less secrecy, and much less time to understand, explain (narrate), and act. Public diplomacy takes today a lot of this precious time as soon as a crisis erupts, and we can't test anymore our ideas first in the secrecy of our ministries, and then draw conclusions and policy from them. Very often we have to hit the road running !

**David Gordon :** The collapse of the Soviet empire and the globalization of trade, finance, and information that followed, as well as the spread of democratic governance to countries in Africa and Asia that did not previously have a liberal tradition, led some in the West, both in Europe and North America, into the belief that a new consensus on liberal ideals would govern both the internal affairs of states and their relations with each other in a post-Cold War world. This "end of history" systemic narrative - one developed in America, but reflecting a European tradition of Hegelian positivism - has long since proven premature. Interstate conflict, ethnic cleansing, the rise of global terrorism, disputed interpretations of international law and the sanctity of international institutions, the development in Russian and China of forms of authoritarian capitalism that have not yet produced a corresponding political liberalization, and other developments have cast doubt in some circles about the possibilities for liberal ideals to reconstitute the behavior of states in the international system.

These developments have also highlighted the challenge of articulating a compelling narrative to explain the world we live in today or an overarching policy to deal with it. Where once we had "the Cold War" and "containment," we now grapple with the right term by which to describe the current era, which has instead been defined negatively rather than positively: "the post-Cold War era," "the post-9/11 world". Tom Friedman has offered a theory of globalization that captures important realities but seems

overstated; for one, globalization appears to have strengthened the state system in important ways, for instance by privileging the value of good governance and national economic management, rather than weakening it. Robert Kagan has presented a “back to the future” thesis of great power competition along ideological lines, which while insightful looks like it is describing an old rather than a new world. Fareed Zakaria has described a “post-American world,” although he actually concludes that the United States will remain the world’s pivotal power, with unmatched strengths that will endure as far into the future as it is possible to foresee. With regard to policy, the EU has pursued “enlargement,” the United States a “war on terror,” but neither of these approaches constitute an overarching framework for managing international order.

**Pierre Levy :** Another comment would be that a narrative is important to win “hearts and mind”. And this is not true only in a counter-insurgency context. The growing interdependence between foreign and domestic policies makes it more and more crucial to talk to societies, peoples and individuals, and not only governments, or even specialized non-state actors. Hence the stress we can observe on the importance of a narrative in contemporary foreign policies.

**James Kariuki :** Governments need to be better at understanding whose behaviour we need to influence to achieve our goals; and what tools and levers are best suited to achieving them. Our narratives need to be part of sophisticated campaigning and influencing efforts. Even if they are attempts to simplify, they still need to be intellectually rigorous and defensible (otherwise they become propaganda) – reducing complexity, not denying it. We also need to be better at receiving, understanding and engaging with other people’s ideas and narratives. These themes are addressed in some detail in a recently published collection of essays on Public Diplomacy edited by Europe Minister Jim Murphy.

**Pierre Levy :** Last on this question of the narrative, I can’t avoid mentioning the European construction. When we look back, how

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simple was the narrative at the early stage ! Reconciliation, the only way to make war impossible between us, shared prosperity... Today, we find it much harder to convince our societies that Europe is the best answer to globalization.

**David Gordon :** Others have announced the end of the liberal consensus on economic and political development, declaring a new model of authoritarian capitalism based on the contemporary Chinese model, as a competing ideology and organizational principle of the international system. But China has not reached the level of middle-income per capita GDP that political scientists have demonstrated with great regularity leads to political liberalization – in other words, it is too early to tell whether there really is an enduring Chinese model combining liberal economics with closed politics. I also remain skeptical about cultural explanations in favor of authoritarianism – of the kind many elites made during the era of Asian strongmen. These have been largely discredited by the geographically dispersed “people power” movements across a vast region where, today, more people live under democratic rule than anywhere else.

New political centers like China and India are rising within an open international order shaped by Western norms and Western leadership. This suggests the prospect that the system may change rising Asian powers more than rising Asian powers may change the system. To facilitate such an outcome, the West will need to preserve a real degree of unity to ensure that rising powers are integrated into the international system in ways that do not displace our influence but, in fact, help magnify it, by embracing rules and norms including good governance as a source of systemic stability, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and the responsibility to preserve the global commons through constructive contributions to solving problems like global climate change, proliferation, and sustaining the open international economy that undergirds our prosperity and security.

**Les Carnets du CAP :** *The “war on terror”, itself a disputable idea, is very often characterised as a “war of ideas”. How does it relate*

*to the so-called battle of values? Is this war just about public diplomacy? Isn't the ongoing "war of ideas" much broader than only about fighting terrorism (or aren't there many more wars than only in the context of terrorism)? Is it really a "war" (or a "battle") or is it something else (confrontation of ideas, in other words, the simple art of dialectics)? What are the tools that States can use to have their ideas (or those of their civil society) prevail? Is "cultural hegemony" (Gramsci) likely in a multi- or non-polar world? Or should we aim at managing the coexistence of diverse cultures and values... each and all translating shared ideas?*

**David Gordon :** The struggle against violent extremism is one of the most significant national security challenges of the 21st century. The challenge is not to persuade populations where anti-Americanism or anti-Westernism is rampant to adopt more favorable views toward our countries and our policies. Instead, our goal should be to ensure that negative sentiments toward America and the Western world, and day-to-day grievances, do not manifest themselves in the form of violent extremism. While the idealistic objective of winning hearts and minds would be a tremendous feat if achieved, our more practical goal should be diverting impressionable segments of the population away from the recruitment process into violent extremism. In order to successfully divert, we need to look for ways to drain the swamp of potential recruits by overwhelming the target populations with alternatives, opportunities, and choices. These alternatives need not necessarily be pro-U.S. or anti-anything, so long as they unshackle populations from a situation where extremists provide the only alternatives. With the target demographic becoming more tech savvy, many of these alternatives can exist in the digital space. In this sense, we should look at the road ahead less as a "war of ideas" and more as a "challenge of alternatives". We have an under-explored wild card in this fight. The vast majority of these societies are under the age of 30 and are the impressionable un-decideds that will determine the future. More than any other time in history, these populations are reachable because of the advent of new technologies. Because technology offers openings and channels that did not previously exist,

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partnerships with the private sector, educational institutions, NGOs, foundations, and citizens are not only essential, but also fruitful as we look to sever the links between violent extremists and their target audience.

**Pierre Levy :** Over simplification is certainly a danger (for instance to equate Islam and terrorism), but sometimes we just can't tell the story as it is. "Si vis pacem para bellum"... but, at all cost, without using the word "war" even as a potential risk to avoid ! On 13 May 1940, Winston Churchill made his famous speech "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat", which was a simple, but very honest way to tell the story. Would it be possible today ?

**James Kariuki :** One of the most successful narratives in international relations is Al Qaeda's "single narrative": Western infidels, with Israel, are at war with Islam; our stooges and collaborators are in power across the Muslim world; Jihad and the restoration of the Caliphate is the only response to injustices perpetrated against muslims. Under this narrative, separate regional and local insurgencies or conflicts – political, ethnic or religious – become part of a global campaign. The language of the "war on terror" risks reinforcing the AQ narrative by aggregating disparate groups, when our objective should be – as David Kilcullen says – to disaggregate our opponents. Personally I think that the "war" or even "battle of ideas" is also risky. When those in the west talk of the war of ideas, we usually mean the ideas and values of openness and tolerance versus control, intolerance and extremism. But it is easy to slip from war of ideas to war of beliefs (Christian or secular versus Islamic); and from there to clash of civilisations. We leave "moderate" (or even conservative but non-violent) Islamic groups wondering which side of our war of ideas they are on.

**Pierre Levy :** We should be careful, also, not to reduce the "battle of ideas" to an opposition, a clash, or a dialogue, between civilizations or religions. The fact that, among Europeans, and between the United States and Europe, we disagreed on the concept of "war on terror" illustrates this.

**James Kariuki** : I think that in the last few years we have become much better at what Jack Straw called “Engaging with the Islamic World” (or Khatami called “Dialogue of Civilizations”). This is partly about recognising the many shared values and ideas that unite different communities, societies and religions; embracing diversity and difference ; reducing misunderstanding and managing potential conflict. But we also are entitled to promote our values (through dialogue) and defend them under threat. This will become as important in the future with respect to the various “Asian” systems of values and beliefs as it now appears towards Islam.

**Pierre Levy** : On this point, I’d like to comment on the “dialogue of civilizations” idea. We have spent some time, at the CAP, working on this way to frame the debate, and stressed the fact that it was only a symmetric idea taken from the “Clash of civilizations” perspective, accepting for instance the presuppositions that civilizations exist as international actors, and that cultural or religious issues are at stake more than political or national ones. “Neither clash, nor dialogue”, as says Olivier Roy, the famous Middle East expert.

**Les carnets du CAP** : *Even though there has never been such thing as a unipolar moment in the world of ideas, the US played and still plays a vital role in animating and nurturing the world debate of ideas about international relations (force of persuasion). How is Europe doing in this regard? And what should the EU and/or European countries do to promote their ideas and capabilities in this regard? Do policy planning staffs have a role to play in that respect? How should they go about, in terms of relationships with intellectuals and experts?*

**James Kariuki** : As I said at the start, ideas from Old Europe – good and bad – cast a pretty long shadow over 20th century international relations. And we Brits will never forget that the idea of Liberty is a Franco-American conspiracy against the Crown. More recently I think that the track record of European international thought is not bad: Ostpolitik and all those complicated German

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words to describe relations with Russia; Vedrine and Hyperpuissance; Kouchner and Droit d'Ingerence. Indeed, with Kouchner and Fischer you have good examples of "activists" becoming decision-makers. You have serious intellectuals within your political class, your public administration, your media and your Stiftung.

But it is true that in the West, the US has been particularly successful at forging links between the world of ideas and the world of policy making. This is partly about the soft power of the dominant nation. In my view, it is also a positive spin-off from the politicisation of public service. The significant turnover of staff with each change of administration means that the think-tanks are full of people with real and recent policy experience in the administration, and the administration fills up with those who have spent time outside thinking (in well resourced foundations). In Europe, certainly in Britain, the lines between officialdom and intellectual activity are more sharply drawn.

We British pragmatists are historically suspicious of grand ideas and theories, especially when it comes to Europe. The fact that our current Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary are both considered big thinkers, fond of stepping above the detail and taking the long view, having time to read books and engage in intellectual debate, is more often than not a source of domestic criticism rather than praise. David Miliband often articulate his policy vision through concepts and ideas : Britain as a "global hub", Europe as a "model power" or "Environmental Union"; the devolution of power to a "civilian surge"; the need for emerging world powers to exercise "responsible sovereignty". There is more of this in his recent debate in *Prospect Magazine* with Robert Cooper and others. The Foreign Secretary would argue that providing a clear strategic framework for the organisation, and applying rigorous thinking to the development of policy, doesn't get in the way of the day job. On the contrary, it ensures that the important and strategic issues don't get crowded out by the urgent business of handling the latest crisis.

**Pierre Levy :** The barrier between officialdom and intellectual activity is certainly as high in France, where the diplomatic culture is particularly restricted to professional diplomats. There is still little sharing with academics or experts from outside. We are still too much reluctant to “informal diplomacy” or “track 2” activities. We may have a lot of chateaux, we have not yet been able to devote one of them to some kind of Wilton Park “à la française” ! Opening up the Quai d'Orsay and favoring cross-fertilization between diplomacy and external expertise are among the objectives which have been studied by the *Livre Blanc* recently released. I'm wondering what we could learn from the US experience in that regard, and also from Germany where the political foundations seem to play an important role in the debates on international relations.

**James Kariuki :** I think that as Policy Planning Staffs we have a role to play in helping our senior management shape the long term direction of foreign policy. This can be done in different ways: through the French Livre Blanc or the UK Strategic Framework; through support to speechwriting in Berlin and Washington; through papers and projects on long-term or emerging themes; through dissemination of ideas amongst ourselves and other counterparts, and with those in the think-tank and academic communities. I also believe we will need to spend an increasing amount of time understanding the ideas and motivations of the thinkers and strategists in the non-Western countries as they play an increasingly influential role on the international stage.

**Les Carnets du CAP :** *Our common ancestor, the Department of State's Policy Planning Staff, was established in 1947 by George Kennan at the request of Secretary of State George C. Marshall to take a longer term, strategic view of global trends and frame recommendations. Among others, its mission is to bring fresh ideas, either new or taken from the international debate on world policy. How do you understand the role of Planning Staffs today, in this regard? What are the national constraints due to the way public debate is organized in each of our individual country?*

**Pierre Levy** : Policy Planning Staffs do play a role to bring down those barriers. *Les Carnets du CAP* where this paper will be published, helps disseminate the ideas and issues at stake. Several past and present members or consultants of the CAP have published books and articles. There is an important evolution between the CAP as it was during the cold war and what it is today. But is our role only to forge new ideas, or to go and pick them up where they emerge? The Planning Staffs as cherry-pickers... But also as radar screen, or even as head-hunters (fresh ideas from new people). Last but not least, the PPS must keep a capacity to dissent (constructively of course !).

**James Kariuki** : When last year I addressed a Cambridge University foreign policy seminar on the history of Policy Planning, I remarked that the authors of the long telegram, the doctrine of containment, and the Marshall plan had left other Policy Planners since 1947 with a pretty hard act to follow. Despite that many leading American foreign policy writers, academics and thinkers – Fukuyama, Kagan, Ikenberry and Haas – have passed through the doors of State Policy Planning; and some may return again to future administration. This system guarantees the flow of ideas through the administration that is unparalleled in the UK.

**David Gordon** : George Kennan's brilliance – and the fate of his concept -- means that all of us who follow in his footsteps need to do so with a special degree of humility. At the dawn of the Cold War, he was right in identifying key future trends – the link between the character of the Soviet state and its external behavior, the nature of its challenge to Western power and values, the superiority of the democratic way of life, and the inherent contradictions of the Soviet regime that would, over time and properly managed, lead to the mellowing of Soviet totalitarianism and the collapse of the Soviet empire. However, Kennan actually lost the bureaucratic battle pitting his limited conception of political containment against the more muscular, militarized doctrine of global containment advocated by his rivals and embodied in NSC-68.

This leads to an important question: what is the measure of success for a policy planner? Should we be judged only by the degree to which our grand designs get implemented as policy? Or should we be judged by the degree to which we stimulate the system, cause second-guessing of established wisdom, and ask hard questions? I believe it is the latter. Policy planners do their job by shaping the foreign policy agenda, and by looking around corners at emerging trends and devising ways to exploit them to advance the national interest. If we do our jobs properly, our fingerprints are everywhere. But our names do not appear at the top of new policy pronouncements. The ultimate test of our success is not how brilliant our memos to our respective foreign ministers are – but whether our ideas are internalized by the system, and by foreign policy Principals. If we do this job properly we don't need to loudly claim credit. Indeed, doing so might actually undermine our effectiveness by revealing the success of our dark arts.

**James Kariuki :** In the FCO working in Policy Planning is usually considered to be evidence that you are a strategic thinker, and (thankfully) often a good step on the way to a successful career. But of my predecessors, only Robert Cooper has really acquired a lasting profile as a foreign policy intellectual. This is partly for the reasons set out above – the strict separation between the world of the academic and public intellectual and the private world of the civil servant. We are constrained by the requirement to give confidential, often sensitive advice to Ministers; and by the perceived risk of displaying evidence of internal government debate or disagreement on a sensitive issue (especially faced with a hostile media). Overseas, many Ambassadors and diplomats may have a public profile; in London, Ministers speak on the record, but civil servants are generally restricted to providing background.

This doesn't prevent us from speaking in debates and seminars under Chatham House rules, or from engaging with the world of ideas – including the media commentariat – in a relatively open way “on background”. But sometimes people outside our organisations

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don't get the chance to see our thinking evolve or develop – they get the final, polished, official policy.

Policy Planning Staffs can play an important role in breaking down barriers between the world of the public servant and the world outside. We are trying to do this in different ways – by greater recruitment and exchange with non-career civil servants; through greater involvement of “outsiders” in our policy projects and papers; by making sure we spend plenty of time ourselves outside the office. Technology can also help – just as an increasing number of Foreign Office staff are blogging, we in Policy Planners are starting to exploring the use of “Wikis” to allow us to put do more of our work in the public domain; and benefit directly from engagements from experts outside our organisation. Security and confidentiality will always be a check on complete openness. But unless we keep pace with the way thinking is developed in the outside world, we will find ourselves and our organisations falling behind.

