Empathetic analysis: Assessing actors in the international system from the standpoint of geopolitical imperatives, strategy, and constraints while being aware of and guarding against personal bias and normative judgment.

Geopolitical imperatives: The main objectives of a state, regardless of who is in power

- Domestic political, economic, and security consolidation
- Protection from neighbors/external powers
- Expansion of regional/global influence (political, economic, and security)

Geopolitical constraints: The main constraints for a state to achieve its objectives

- Geographic - internal geography, climate, neighbors, regional/global context
- Demographic - population size, diversity, birth rate
- Economic - resource endowment, accessibility, distribution
- External - geopolitical imperatives of other states

Strategy: The approach of a specific government/administration to achieve particular objectives

- Political objectives - stay in power
- Economic objectives - keep economy afloat
- Security objectives - protection from internal threats
- External objectives - protection from/competition with other countries/actors

Strategic constraints: The main constraints to the implementation of a strategy

- Political - mandate/level of support of government, opposition groups, median voters/citizens
- Economic - commodity prices, sanctions, investment climate
- Security - rebels, insurgencies, separatist groups
- External - imperatives and constraints of other countries/actors

Tactics: Specific actions taken toward a strategy