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American Grand Strategy

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Senior policymakers are often asked, “Does the United States have a grand strategy?” This chapter argues that a clearly definable American grand strategy exists and is set on firm foundations such as economic strength, nuclear deterrence, alliances and partnerships, and full-spectrum dominance in all warfighting domains. U.S. grand strategy is tied directly to enduring core interests that do not change over time, though the means employed to secure them are constantly evolving as technology and our national security institutions evolve.

From before the American Revolution, the outlines of an evolving grand strategy have been evident in our foreign and domestic policies.¹ Much of that history continues to inform our strategic conduct, and U.S. grand strategy therefore rests today on traditional foundations. Despite a welter of theory and debate, grand strategy as a practical matter is remarkably consistent from decade to decade, its means altering as technology advances and institutions evolve, but its ends and ways showing marked continuity.

Grand strategy can be understood simply as the use of all instruments of national power to secure the state.² Thus it exists at a level above particular strategies intended to secure particular ends, and above the use of military power alone to achieve political objectives. One way to comprehend grand strategy is to look for long-term state behavior as defined by enduring, core security interests and how the state secures and advances these over time. In a way, this means that what the state *does* matters more than what the state *says*. Grand strategy is therefore related to, but not synonymous with, national security strategies, national military strategies, quadrennial defense reviews, or defense strategic guidance. True grand strategy transcends the security pronouncements of political parties or individual administrations. Viewed in this light,

U.S. grand strategy shows great persistence over time, orienting on those things deemed most important—those interests for which virtually any administration will spend, legislate, threaten, or fight to defend.

At the conclusion of more than a decade of counterinsurgency operations, the United States finds itself repeating a familiar historical pattern. In the fiscal retrenchment that accompanies the end of every conflict (exacerbated by the economic collapse of 2008 and the Budget Control Act of 2011), military forces (particularly land forces) are being drawn down.³ Most U.S. ground and air forces have been repositioned to the continental United States, while defense spending (absent remedial legislation) will decline over the next 10 years by approximately 10 percent per year. At the same time, emerging nontraditional threats such as cyber attacks, weapons of mass destruction (whether chemical, biological, or radiological) wielded by nonstate actors, and international terrorism now crowd the security agenda. Increasingly, other threats such as narco-trafficking, illegal immigration, environmental degradation, shifting and unstable demographics, organized crime, and even climate change are also cast as national security threats. What does this portend for U.S. grand strategy?

The Ends of Grand Strategy

First, it is important not to confuse enduring core strategic interests with others that are less central. The current security environment, described in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review as “rapidly changing,” “volatile,” “unpredictable,” and “in some cases more threatening,” is certainly all those. Yet addressing this environment in fact aligns comfortably with U.S. grand strategy over time. Broadly speaking, vital or core national interests remain remarkably consistent. These include the defense of U.S. territory and its citizens and that of our allies, supporting and defending our constitutional values and forms of government, and promoting and securing the U.S. economy and standard of living. Virtually every strategic dynamic and dimension are encompassed in these. Grand strategy is by no means confined to our military forces and institutions but is far broader, encompassing all forms of national power. That said, we must beware of attempts to define everything in terms of national security. Any discussion of grand strategy quickly loses coherence and utility when we do.⁴ Grand strategy is fundamentally about security in its more traditional sense.⁵

Any assessment must begin with looking first at our security environment, and then at threats to our core or vital interests, without either overestimating or undervaluing them. The international security environment is by now well understood and familiar. Raymond Aron’s

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view of “a multiplicity of autonomous centers of decision and therefore a risk of war” holds true today.⁶ The bipolar and traditionally Westphalian state system of the Cold War has given way to a more multipolar system featuring a militarily and economically dominant, but not all-powerful, United States; a rising China and India; a resurgent Russia; an economically potent but militarily declining Europe; an unstable and violence-prone Middle East, wracked by the Sunni-Shia divide, economic and governance underperformance, and the Arab-Israeli problem; a proliferation of weak and failed states, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, and the Russian periphery; and empowered international and non-governmental organizations and nonstate actors.⁷ Terrorist organizations and international organized crime are far more significant than in the past, enabled by global communications and information flows. In absolute terms the world is safer, as the prospect of nuclear mutually assured destruction and world war costing millions of lives seems relegated to the past. Yet most societies feel threatened and insecure, while conflict, if more low-level, remains endemic.

The broad threats that confront us have deep roots but have also evolved over time. In order of importance, they can be summarized as:

- Use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against the homeland. These could be nuclear, biological, chemical, cyber, or explosive/kinetic in nature (such as the 9/11 attacks) delivered by either state or nonstate actors. Single or multiple attacks causing mass casualties could lead to partial or complete economic collapse and loss of confidence in our governance structures, imperiling our standard of living and way of life in addition to causing loss of life.⁸
- Economic disruption from without. The crash of 2008 was largely self-induced, but the health and stability of the U.S. economy could also be affected by the actions of foreign powers. Any major disruption to the global economy, which depends upon investor confidence as much as the free flow of goods and energy, could have catastrophic consequences for the United States, and Presidents have repeatedly shown a willingness to use force to ensure access to markets, free trade, and economic stability.
- The rise of a hostile peer competitor. For centuries, Great Britain aligned against the rise of any power able to dominate the European landmass and upset the balance of power. The United States did the same in opposing Germany in World War I, Germany and Japan in World War II, and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The U.S.

“rebalance” to Asia and opposition to Chinese territorial moves in the East and South China seas can be seen as an attempt to counter the rise of China in a manner consistent with longstanding U.S. grand strategy.

- Direct challenges to key allies. Alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and bilateral security arrangements with close allies such as Japan and South Korea constitute solemn commitments that extend American power and influence globally. To preserve international stability and deter conflict, they must be honored. U.S. leaders can be expected to act decisively when close allies are directly threatened.

There are, of course, other threats of concern to national security practitioners that fall below this threshold. For example, promoting democracy and human rights abroad are sometimes touted as foreign policy “imperatives.”⁹ While consistent with American political culture and ideology, in practice, these are highly case specific. When consonant with the framework and principles of its grand strategy, the United States may act, but more often a pragmatic realism governs.¹⁰ The long nightmare in Syria, with its tragic loss of life, accelerating regional instability, mounting extremism and terrorist involvement, and massive human rights violations on all sides, would seem to be a classic case calling for military intervention. Yet there is no United Nations or NATO mandate, no strong reservoir of public support for military action, no appetite for intervention among our allies and partners, and no desire to dispute the agendas of Russia, China, and Iran in Syria, at least for the time being. With no direct threat to the homeland, U.S. citizens or allies, or the U.S. economy, the prospects for large-scale military intervention at present seem low, despite the humanitarian tragedy unfolding.

The crisis in Ukraine presents a different case study. The North Atlantic Council voted to defer NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine and did not station NATO troops in the new member states, largely out of deference to Russian security concerns. These confidence-building measures notwithstanding, Russia in recent years sent troops into Georgia, Crimea, eastern Ukraine, and Syria.¹¹ The concerns of NATO members, especially the newer ones located in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States, are mounting as Russian leaders assert the right to “protect” ethnic Russian minorities in neighboring countries.

This scenario presents a different challenge to U.S. grand strategy. Should Russia seize more Ukrainian territory, NATO’s Baltic members could possibly come under threat.¹² Direct confrontation with Russia,

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still a major nuclear and conventional power, may seem unthinkable. Yet failure to honor our treaty obligations to NATO would mean the virtual collapse not only of the Alliance but also of our security relationships around the world. Such a loss of global reach and influence would negate U.S. grand strategy altogether. For that reason, however much against its will, the United States will in all likelihood confront Russia should a NATO member be attacked or directly threatened.

The unfolding collapse of Iraq and Syria may fall somewhere in between. Across the United States and in both political parties, there remains a strong aversion to reintroducing a large ground presence into the Middle East. A direct threat to the homeland has not yet emerged (though “lone-wolf attacks” are mounting), and the prospect of lending military and material aid to the Shia regime in Baghdad, itself both supported and at least partially controlled by Tehran, is unpalatable. On the other hand, major human rights violations and the prospect of spillover and accelerating destabilization of the region could compel strong action against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its Sunni confederates. Should ISIL successfully establish a safe haven and launch major attacks against Europe and the United States, decisive U.S. and coalition military action would probably follow. Major disruption to the free flow of oil through the Arabian Gulf and attendant economic shocks could also compel a powerful military response.

These and similar examples raise the question of whether the United States consciously pursues an imperial or hegemonic grand strategy. Many scholars, both domestic and foreign, explicitly or implicitly assert that it does.¹³ On the one hand, the United States, along with other great powers, seeks to provide for its own security by maximizing its power relative to potential and actual adversaries, within limits imposed by its domestic politics. Its political and military leaders are constrained in attempting to balance what Aron called an ethics of responsibility—the pragmatic reality of an international politics that cannot and does not ignore the role of force—and an ethics of conviction, which is normative and classically liberal in seeking accommodation and an absence of conflict where possible.¹⁴ It is thus true that U.S. power, and particularly military power, is often employed to secure and advance American interests. On the other hand, U.S. interventions are marked by an absence of territorial aggrandizement or forced extraction of natural resources. Typically, huge sums are spent on development and infrastructure improvements. On its own or when asked (as in the Balkans, Somalia, Haiti, Panama, and Iraq), the United States usually withdraws and goes home. Even close allies remain free to opt out of military ventures, as seen in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and in Libya in 2011.

The net effect has been to bring into being, largely if not entirely through America's own efforts, a rules-based international and economic order that has widely benefited much of the world:

It falls to the dominant state to create the conditions under which economic interdependence can take hold (by providing security, rules of the game, and a reserve currency, and by acting as the global economy's banker and lender of last resort). Without a dominant power to perform these tasks, economic interdependence does not happen. Indeed, free trade and interdependence have occurred in the modern international system only during the hegemonies of Victorian Britain and postwar America.¹⁵

These are the actions of a preponderant power but hardly of a classically imperialist one. If the United States is imperialist, it appears to be so in a historically benign way; if hegemonic, in a heavily qualified one.

The Means of Grand Strategy

The means of grand strategy are similarly enduring over time. Fostering strong alliances and bilateral security arrangements, maintaining a strong and survivable nuclear deterrent, fielding balanced, powerful, and capable military forces that are dominant in each warfighting domain and that can project and sustain military power globally and prevail in armed conflict, and providing intelligence services that can ensure global situational awareness and provide strategic early warning are basic components.¹⁶ They are intrinsically linked to a powerful economy and industrial base, advanced technology, an extensive military reserve component, an educated and technically skilled population fit for military service,¹⁷ and a political system based on classically liberal democratic values and able to make clear and sustainable policy and resource decisions.¹⁸

America's traditional reliance on forward presence and forward-deployed forces, another strategic linchpin, has declined since the end of the Cold War. Few combat forces remain in Europe (the last tank was removed in 2012, though rotational forces have returned in brigade strength), only a single ground combat brigade is based on the Korea Peninsula, and there are no ground combat troops based in the Middle East. Naval forward presence has also been scaled back in the post-Cold War era as the size of the fleet has declined.¹⁹ On the alliance front, relations with NATO Allies have been damaged by the rebalance to Asia,

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widely perceived by Allies as a devaluation of Europe by U.S. leaders, and by Defense Secretary Robert Gates's stern speech in June 2011 that castigated European Allies for failing to meet targets for defense spending.²⁰ President Barack Obama's "leading from behind" stance in Libya, the pullout from Iraq, and inaction in Syria are interpreted by some as evidence of a disinclination to engage globally in the interests of international stability, though others see prudent and measured restraint.

The use of soft power also deserves consideration in this discussion.²¹ Described by its progenitor as "the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes you want,"²² soft power is concerned with development aid, cultural influence, the power of example (Coca-Cola, American blue jeans, and MTV are often cited), and other forms of suasion that are not coercive or easily directed. Theorists disagree on whether soft power should be considered part of the strategist's arsenal. Diplomacy, for instance, may lack utility when divorced from the military and economic power of the state; the artfulness of the discussion may be useful but will not be decisive absent hard power. On balance, though, the ability of soft power to influence adversary behavior for good or ill is probably incontrovertible, albeit not easily deployable or even controllable.²³ To that extent, it is an important factor that nevertheless falls outside the realm of grand strategy as traditionally understood and practiced.

While U.S. determination to act forcefully in support of the international order may be more open to question, and while U.S. economic and military power may not be as dominant as in the past, in absolute terms the United States remains by far the preponderant power in the world. Possessed of great actual and potential strengths, the United States is unequalled in hard power. Nevertheless, coherent and effective political direction is the essential precondition to strategic success. Since the end of the Vietnam War, mounting conflict between the legislative and executive branches, spurred by a fractious polarization of American politics, has reached alarming proportions. Repeated wars have led to a concentration of the war power in the executive branch, arguably resulting in more frequent uses of force that may not command public support. Unquestionably, a healthy and stable set of political arrangements that provides for effective sharing of power, while ensuring popular backing, is essential.²⁴ When lacking, successful strategic execution is at risk.

The Ways of Grand Strategy

How the United States addresses direct threats to its core or vital interests over time is the essence of grand strategy. Typically, America's solutions are not new, although the technologies employed often are.

U.S. grand strategy since 1945 has been based first and foremost on nuclear deterrence. The ability to deter other nuclear powers dominated strategic thought at least through the end of the Cold War. This meant a survivable nuclear arsenal able to deliver sufficient damage great enough to render any first strike by an adversary unimaginable. Originally, early technology meant bombers attacking cities with nuclear bombs. Eventually this gave way to land- and sea-launched ballistic missiles, whose improved accuracy allowed for targeting of enemy nuclear systems directly. The modern triad of strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and nuclear ballistic submarines dates from this time. Though smaller than during the Cold War, the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal today is survivable, redundant, and accurate, providing an absolute nuclear deterrent against any adversary.²⁵

For the purposes of statecraft and strategy-making, deterrence is best understood in simple terms. Deterrence is the art of instilling in the mind of one's adversary the belief that the costs of a contemplated course of action outweigh the benefits. Here, both capability and credibility are essential. The capability to deliver the threat must exist, or at least the enemy must think so. But one's *willingness* to deliver the threat must also be seen and believed. Ambiguity, not certainty, is allowed if the threatened costs are high; rational decisionmakers are deterred if the price of miscalculation is unacceptably severe, as with nuclear weapons. But if the threatened costs are not seen as unacceptably high, or if there is genuine doubt as to whether the threat will be delivered, deterrence can fail.

This key dynamic explains why deterrence, especially the conventional kind, so often falls short. In Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan, U.S. military power was immeasurably superior. In each case, our opponent was not deterred. Why? In each, the U.S. use of nuclear weapons was correctly discounted. In each, our opponents calculated, again correctly, that we would not bring the full weight of American power to bear. And in each, our adversaries assessed our willingness to accept casualties and to persist over the long term as low. In short, we lacked the *credibility* to effectively deter. Military fiascos such as the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon and the “Black Hawk Down” debacle in Somalia, which were followed by precipitate withdrawal, encouraged potential enemies to believe that high casualties to U.S. forces might cause America to quit.

Finally, the tendency to regard deterrence as a mission rather than an effect should be squarely addressed. Military forces cannot train to deter. They can only prepare to fight. If perceived as superior to one's adversary, and if directed by credible leaders, then effective deterrence can be achieved. The mere existence of forces is not enough. They must be

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trained, equipped, supplied, and led, in numbers and with capabilities enough to overawe one's likely opponent. As Wallace Thies argued in a classic essay:

The value of military forces is often better measured in terms of what does not happen rather than what does. The most capable armed forces are those that prevent trouble from arising because they exist in sufficient number and quality to dissuade troublemakers from threatening American interests. . . [T]he debate over deterrence versus warfighting is one of those rare cases where both sides have managed to miss the point. Winning wars is wonderful, preventing them is even better, but to prevent wars it is first necessary to be able to fight them.²⁶

Effective grand strategy must recognize this simple truth: It is far better to avoid a war than to fight one. But avoiding war cannot rest on good intentions. Hard military power and the will to use it are the coins of the realm.

In the conventional realm, the first principle is to meet the threat as far from the homeland as possible. Thus, since the end of World War II, the United States has established bases, positioned forces, and stockpiled weapons and munitions around the globe, buttressed by economic and development assistance, exercises, formal treaties, coalitions of the willing, and alliances.²⁷ (Counterproliferation may also be viewed in this light.) While U.S. ground forces have largely come home, America's network of overseas bases, airfields, and alliances as well as forward-deployed air and naval forces is still extensive. The Nation's ability to project power globally and sustain its forces almost indefinitely remains unmatched. U.S. satellites survey the globe and monitor adversary communications continuously.

Next, the United States prefers to meet serious threats using different tools at once, in theory reserving military force for last and relying on intelligence, diplomacy, forward presence, and its economic power to forestall, deflect, or defuse security challenges.²⁸ Still, U.S. military power is awesome. Its strength across the warfighting domains, supported by an unmatched ability to project and sustain military forces far from the homeland, remains far ahead of the rest of the world.²⁹ Whenever possible, the United States prefers to address threats in tandem with allies, partners, or like-minded states, working through international organizations such as the United Nations or NATO and conducting preconflict engagement and "shaping" operations on a large scale. Yet

when vital interests are engaged, the United States will act unilaterally if necessary.³⁰ Preemption to disrupt or prevent imminent threats falls well within America's grand strategic calculus.³¹ Prevention—the use of force to defeat threats before they become imminent—has, on the other hand, far less provenance.

As the preponderant global power, the United States attempts to shape the international security environment to prevent or ward off security challenges where it can.³² When it cannot, and when significant or vital interests are engaged, military force often comes into play. Since the end of World War II, the United States has used military force many times, with varying degrees of success, to protect, secure, or advance its security interests.³³ When military force was used, the record of success or failure is illustrative when viewed in light of the grand strategic framework described above. In the previous century, the United States experienced clear success when the threats to vital interests were unambiguous; when the response enjoyed strong support from the public and Congress; when overwhelming force was applied; when strong allies participated; and when the strategic objective was well understood.³⁴ Both World War I and II, the Cold War, and the Gulf War are examples. In cases where the direct threat to U.S. vital interests was less clear, overwhelming force was not applied, public and congressional support was not strong or sustained, and the strategic objective was unclear, defeat or stalemate ensued. Korea, Vietnam, Beirut, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan are the relevant examples here. In some cases (the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, Haiti, Kosovo), the desiderata listed above did not fully apply, but weak opposition and overmatching force led to early success, forestalling loss of public support or stagnation of the conflict.³⁵

These historical lessons are compelling. American political leaders have not always recognized these principles and have certainly not always applied them. Their apparent jettisoning by both Republican and Democratic administrations following the Gulf War has come with a heavy price. America's successes in war, and in deterring war, have resulted at least as much from an industrial and technological superiority, employed en masse by competent political and military institutions, as from any other factor.³⁶ This superiority is best translated into battlefield and campaign success by synergistically applying land, sea, air, space, and cyber power to achieve decisive objectives that see through and beyond the end of combat operations. Single-Service or one-dimensional applications of force have repeatedly failed of their promise to deliver strategic victory.

Relatedly, political leaders and strategists should be mindful of *strategic culture*, that mélange of history, tradition, custom, world view, economy, sociology, political systems, and mores that largely shapes how and why

nations fight. There may be no agreed upon American theory of war, but an “American way of war” surely obtains, based on concepts of joint and combined warfare, mass, firepower, technology, strong popular support, and a focus on decisive and clear-cut outcomes.³⁷ “Good wars” have historically followed this pattern. “Bad wars” have not. While the analogy can be taken too far, it captures central truths that should inform our strategic calculations.³⁸ Strategic culture is real and powerful, whether or not it is acknowledged.³⁹

The Way Ahead

As U.S. leaders assess a complex security environment, historical experience provides useful and helpful context and guideposts to understanding the present—even when security threats are harder to define and address, as in the case of cyber attacks.⁴⁰ U.S. forces are also held to standards increasingly difficult to guarantee; the prospect of even minimal casualties to our own forces or to civilians (however unintentional) or unintended environmental damage now colors every decision in the age of the 24-hour news cycle. On balance, traditional military security concerns often seem less paramount. Absent a clear and present danger, humanitarian considerations, environmental issues, and resource impacts and scarcities compete strongly with military factors in policy deliberations. In the meantime, nonstate actors are increasing their power and influence to effect policy changes across a wide spectrum of issues, many of which directly affect the ability of U.S. military forces to carry out their missions.⁴¹

In the last generation we have often seen the face of the future reflected in the bitter divisions of the past, in failed states, in emerging democracies, and in nations stuck in transition between authoritarian and democratic systems. A persistently uncertain and unstable international security environment places a premium on U.S. leadership. As the only remaining global power and as a coalition leader in organizations such as NATO, the United States is uniquely positioned to influence world affairs in ways that benefit not only the Nation, but also the international community as a whole.⁴² The prudent use of American military power, in concert with the economic, political, and diplomatic instruments of national power, remains central to attempts to shape the international environment and encourage peace and stability wherever important U.S. interests are at stake.⁴³

It is also useful to note that the formerly sharp distinction between the military instrument and others has become blurred. The definition of *national security* is now more expansive, encompassing a great domain

of “homeland defense,” with dozens of civilian agencies and large military organizations (such as U.S. Northern Command) intimately linked with and often working in subordination to other civilian entities. Even in conflict zones, tactical formations engaged in daily combat can find themselves with scores of embedded civilians representing civilian departments.⁴⁴ Informational technologies and a more globalized threat, able to strike from remote and underdeveloped locations with great effect, now force a greater degree of synergy and interoperability between military and nonmilitary organizations than ever before. These trends will continue on a trajectory toward ever greater civil-military integration, particularly in the intelligence, cyber, acquisition, logistics, and consequence management realms.

Taking the long view, and acknowledging the strong impact of new technologies and threats, the framework of U.S. grand strategy as described here will remain relevant and current for decades to come. The international security environment will remain anarchic and uncertain, with the state mattering more than supranational organizations, even as nonstate actors of many kinds proliferate. Conflict will remain endemic, and state-on-state conflict will recur. WMD attacks against the homeland will be attempted and may be successful. Pressures to intervene—in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and perhaps even East Asia—will persist or surface anew. Strategic shocks—unanticipated crises requiring strategic responses—will be more the norm than not.⁴⁵ None of this is new, unique, or even more dangerous than in the past.

Strategists must accordingly consider and refine the ways and means by which our traditional and enduring interests may best be defended. Along the way, a certain humility is helpful; as Henry Kissinger wrote, “The gods are offended by hubris. They resent the presumption that events can be totally predicted and managed.”⁴⁶ At its best, grand strategy is not always or fundamentally about fighting or the military application of force, but rather an appreciation of its potential, along with the other instruments of power, in the mind of the adversary. President Ronald Reagan’s role in bringing about an end to the Cold War is the classic example. In this sense, effective grand strategy may often preclude the need to resort to force. To achieve this, the involvement of society in its own national defense, a strong, stable, and globally networked economy, an effective domestic politics that can make rational decisions over time in support of national security, and the promotion of values that invite support and consensus at home and abroad will count for much. So too will balanced and capable military forces, sized and able to operate globally and in concert with civilian counterparts, international organizations, allies, and partners. The decision when and if to use force should

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never be approached casually, emotionally, or halfheartedly, but, rather, soberly, analytically, and with a whole-of-government and whole-of-society intention to prevail. There should never be doubt that when core interests are engaged, the United States will bring the full weight of its power to bear and will persist until success is achieved. On these foundations will rest an effective U.S. grand strategy far into the future.

Notes

¹ Defining *grand strategy* is admittedly onerous. Colin Gray defines it as the “purposeful employment of all instruments of power available to a security community.” Robert J. Art excludes nonmilitary instruments from grand strategy, while Christopher Layne simply calls it “the process by which the state matches ends and means in the pursuit of security.” Sir Hew Strachan sees grand strategy as forward looking, aspirational, and oriented on preventing or managing great power decline. Edward Luttwak is particularly opaque: “Grand strategy may be seen as a confluence of the military interactions that flow up and down level by level . . . with the varied external relations that form strategy’s horizontal dimension at its highest level.” See Colin Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2007), 283; Robert J. Art, “A Defensible Defense,” *International Security* 15, no. 4 (Spring 1991), 7; Christophe Layne, “Rethinking American Grand Strategy: Hegemony or Balance of Power in the 21st Century,” *World Policy Journal* 15, no. 2 (November 1998), 8; Hew Strachan, “Strategy and Contingency,” *International Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2011), 1281–1296; and Edward Luttwak, *Strategy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 179.

² *Strategy* is more properly limited to “the deployment and use of armed forces to attain a given political objective.” See Michael Howard, “The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1979), 975.

³ Active Army forces, according to Pentagon sources, will fall to 420,000, the lowest level since before World War II. See *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2013), ix.

⁴ As one example of this tendency toward incoherence, Paul Doherty discusses the importance of “walkabout communities” as part of a “new grand strategic construct” in “A New U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Policy*, January 9, 2013.

⁵ This trend is driven in part by a desire to access defense budgets to fund programs not traditionally considered as defense-related. Stanley Hoffman put it succinctly as far back as 1987: “There has been a trend towards indefinite extension of U.S. interests. ‘National security’ is considered to be everywhere and constantly at stake.” See *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 316.

⁶ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1962), 28.

⁷ As recently as 2002, William C. Wohlforth argued that “the balancing imperative . . . will not soon dominate great powers’ strategic choices in today’s novel unipolar system.” In fact, although the United States remains unquestionably the preponderant world power, great powers such as Russia, Iran, and China often combine to limit or deflect U.S. strategic choices in a classic balance of power formulation. See “U.S. Strategy in a Unipolar World,” in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, ed. G. John Ikenberry (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 117.

⁸ The official Department of Defense definition of *weapons of mass destruction* includes nuclear, biological, chemical, and radiological weapons only. The term is used more

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broadly here to include events such as the Oklahoma City bombing and the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, as well as potential cyber events that could cause large-scale loss of life. See Seth Carus, *Defining Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction Occasional Paper 8 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, January 2012).

⁹ *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* lists “respect for universal values at home and around the world” as one of four “core national interests,” 11.

¹⁰ See R.D. Hooker, Jr., “U.S. Policy Choices During the Rwandan Genocide,” unpublished paper, National War College, 2003.

¹¹ In addition to troop deployments to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, “breakaway” regions that remain part of sovereign Georgian territory, Russia maintains 5,000 troops inside Armenia to ensure that neighboring Azerbaijan does not reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh, sovereign Azerbaijan territory occupied by ethnic Armenians.

¹² Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia are 100 percent dependent on Russian natural gas and have large ethnic Russian populations. Without the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), their continued independence is probably unlikely. See Theresa Sabonis-Helf, “Energy Security: Strategic Questions and Emerging Trends,” presentation to NATO national representatives, National Defense University, April 11, 2014.

¹³ Andrew Bacevich is a leading critic of American “imperialism.” See *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Kenneth Thompson, *Masters of International Thought* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 153.

¹⁵ Layne, 15.

¹⁶ “The United States leads a global alliance system of more than 60 partner states that collectively account for almost 80 percent of global [gross domestic product] and more than 80 percent of global military spending between them.” See Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Budgeting for Hard Power: Defense and Security Spending Under Barack Obama* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2009), 24.

¹⁷ The General Accounting Office reports that 16.2 million males aged 18 to 25 are registered for Selective Service. However, only one in four are eligible for military service, severely limiting the pool of prospective recruits. The rest are disqualified for obesity, other physical issues, lack of a high school diploma, or criminal records. See the prepared statement of Curtis Gilroy, Director for Accessions Policy, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, before the House Armed Services Subcommittee, “Recruiting, Retention, and End Strength Overview,” March 9, 2009.

¹⁸ The U.S. industrial base remains a world leader, second only to China as of 2014, according to the United Nations Statistics Division. Ship-building remains a strong industry: “Currently there are 117 shipyards in the United States, spread across 26 states, that are classified as active shipbuilders.” See “The Economic Importance of the U.S. Shipbuilding and Repairing Industry,” Maritime Administration, May 30, 2013, 3. U.S. steel production has declined as a percentage of global market share since 1947, when the United States produced 60 percent of the world’s steel, but remains a world leader. The United States produced 87 million tons of steel in 2013, ranking fourth in the world. (This contrasts with 40 million tons dedicated to military production in 1943, the year of greatest manufacturing output in World War II.) See *World Steel Statistics Data 2013*, World Steel Association, January 23, 2014; and Alan Gropman, ed., *The Big L: American Logistics in World War II* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1997), 137. For a contrary view, see Michael E. O’Hanlon, *The National Security Industrial Base: A Crucial Asset of the United States Whose Future May Be in Jeopardy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2011).

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¹⁹ Currently, 36 percent of the Navy's operational assets are classed as "globally deployed," including 2 of the Navy's 11 fleet carriers, with a third based in Japan. At least two Amphibious Ready Groups with embarked Marines are also always at sea. See Admiral Jonathan Greenert, USN, testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on the Fiscal Year 2015 Navy Posture, March 12, 2014.

²⁰ Thom Shanker and Steve Erlanger, "Blunt U.S. Warning Reveals Deep Strains in NATO," *New York Times*, June 10, 2011.

²¹ "Soft power is not about influence or persuasion—it attracts." See Harry R. Yarger, *Strategy and the National Security Professional* (London: Praeger, 2008), 74.

²² See Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Succeed in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

²³ Chris Schnaubelt, "The Illusions and Delusions of Smart Power," in *Towards a Comprehensive Approach: Integrating Civilian and Military Concepts of Strategy* (Rome, Italy: NATO Defense College Forum Paper, March 2011), 24.

²⁴ Effective civil-military relations is also a *sine qua non* of successful strategy. Despite much hyperbolic academic criticism, the United States is well equipped in this sphere. See R.J. Hooker, Jr., "Soldiers of the State: Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations," *Parameters* (Winter 2003/2004).

²⁵ The most recent arms control agreement with Russia, signed by President Obama and Russian President Dmitrii Medvedev on April 8, 2010, agreed to reduce the number of active nuclear weapons from 2,200 to 1,550.

²⁶ Wallace J. Thies, "A Twenty-First Century Army," *Parameters* (Spring 1991), 68.

²⁷ The Department of Defense maintains prepositioned stocks both ashore and afloat in strategic locations worldwide to support the deployment of forces for contingency operations. Key sites are Japan, Korea, Italy, Qatar, Kuwait, and Diego Garcia.

²⁸ *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, 11.

²⁹ For example, in seapower alone the U.S. lead is staggering. The U.S. Navy operates 10 large aircraft carriers, all nuclear powered; no other country has even one. The United States has 57 nuclear-powered attack and cruise-missile submarines—again, more than the rest of the world combined. Seventy-nine Aegis-equipped surface combatants carry roughly 8,000 vertical-launch missile cells, outmatching the next 20 largest navies. All told, the displacement of the U.S. battle fleet exceeds the next 13 navies combined, of which 11 are allies or partners. Cited in Secretary of Defense Robert Gates's prepared remarks to the Navy League, National Harbor, MD, May 3, 2010. The U.S. Marine Corps alone is larger and more capable than the ground and air forces of all but a few nations. See *The Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 2014).

³⁰ "The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it—when our people are threatened; when our livelihoods are at stake; when the security of our allies is in danger." See President Barack Obama, Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy, May 28, 2014.

³¹ *The National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: The White House, September 17, 2002), 15.

³² For a more detailed discussion of American preponderance and its strategic implications, see Layne, 9.

³³ The list of large-scale combat or "peace enforcement" actions alone is extensive and includes Korea (1950), Lebanon (1958), the Dominican Republic (1965), Vietnam (1955–1975), Beirut (1981), Grenada (1981), Panama (1989), the Gulf War (1991), Somalia (1992), Bosnia (1996), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), and Iraq (2003).

Hooker

On average, the United States has deployed a division or larger force every 6 years since 1950.

³⁴ Both Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Colin Powell promoted similar views on when and how to use force, espousing a conservative “last resort” philosophy stressing overwhelming force and clear objectives and emphasizing decisive results. Weinberger explained his in a speech titled “The Uses of Military Power,” delivered before the National Press Club in Washington, DC, on November 28, 1984.

³⁵ Max Boot attempted to argue in 2002 that “small wars” fought for less precise objectives could advance important, if not vital, interests and represented something of a future trend. On the whole, such thinking has been discredited by Iraq and Afghanistan. See Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

³⁶ “By and large, the virtues of American civilization have not been the military virtues and this has been reflected in American military performance.” See Samuel P. Huntington, “Playing to Win,” *The National Interest* (Spring 1986), 10.

³⁷ Russell Weigley is the principal exponent of this view. For a contrasting view, see Antulio Echevarria II, *Toward an American Way of War* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2004).

³⁸ “We make war the way we make wealth.” See Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 2.

³⁹ See R.D. Hooker, Jr., “The Strange Voyage: A Short Précis on Strategy,” *Parameters* (Winter/Spring 2013), 62.

⁴⁰ “I believe the most pressing threat facing our country is the threat from cyber attacks. The daily occurrences of attacks are damaging on a variety of levels and they are not only persistent and dangerous, the likelihood of serious damage to our national security is very real.” See Lieutenant General Mike Flynn, USA, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, U.S. Senate, April 18, 2013.

⁴¹ The international treaty banning landmines in 1999 and the International Criminal Court, established in 2002, are apposite examples. The United States is not a party to either.

⁴² As the only state able to project and sustain military forces globally, the United States retains this status today; the rise of China will not see an equivalent capability for years to come. See Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China’s Search for Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 312–315.

⁴³ Theorists sometimes cite the maxim that “everybody’s strategy depends on everyone else’s.” This must be the case for weaker or comparable powers. In its current position of preponderance, though its power has definite limits, the United States seeks whenever possible to impose its strategy on adversaries, and not to be imposed upon. All states would behave so if they could. See Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 201.

⁴⁴ For example, Regional Command–East in Afghanistan in 2010 included a Senior Civilian Representative from the U.S. Agency for International Development, of equal rank to the division commander and empowered to co-sign his operational orders. She was supported by more than 100 civilian staff.

⁴⁵ Strachan, 1285.

⁴⁶ Cited in Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 100.