The Grand Strategy of the United States

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Cover: President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden meet with members of the National Security Council in the Situation Room of the White House hours before his national address, September 10, 2014 (The White House/Pete Souza)

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From the earliest days of the Republic, the outlines of an evolving American grand strategy have been evident in our foreign and domestic policy.[1] Much of that history continues to inform our strategic conduct, and therefore American grand strategy 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, with 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 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 them 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. Grand strategy transcends the security pronouncements of political parties or individual administrations. Viewed in this light, American 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.

The Roots of American Grand Strategy

American grand strategy cannot be understood without a historical grounding. Prior to the Revolution, the defense of the colonies as a whole was left to the British crown, and the colonial militia handled local defense. Contention between the great powers (Spain, the Netherlands, France, and Great Britain) on the North American continent bred an enduring distaste among the colonists for international intervention in the Western hemisphere. Prerevolutionary warfare was endemic and nearly constant in North America, fostering on the one hand a familiarity with conflict, but on the other a distrust of standing forces that would condition American strategic thought for several centuries.[3]

As the United States became more firmly established, this impulse found expression in the Monroe Doctrine and in a general aversion to involvement in European wars that dated from President George Washington's first administration.[4] This aversion stemmed in part from military and economic weakness, but the desire not to become enmeshed in the politics of a great power rivalry also played a key role. America was fortunate not to be drawn more deeply than it was into the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, and thereafter the desire to pursue continental expansion and to exclude further European colonization of the hemisphere shaped our policy and strategy for the rest of the 19th century.[5]

From the start, American grand strategy also carried a defining ideological component. While generally pragmatic, early American political and military leaders were strongly influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment and the Revolution and by an emerging American political consciousness.[6] Since the Revolutionary era, most American conflicts have been articulated and justified with some reference to this founding ideology, lending a distinctive, normative dimension to American strategy and strategic culture. Sometimes described as "American exceptionalism," this component has been seen by some as an impulse to promote democratic values and the rule of law abroad as well as at home, and by others as an excuse for intervention.[7]

Although our historical narrative emphasizes reliance on local militia forces, regular forces or volunteer units raised outside the militia organizational structure have formed the center of gravity of America's military establishment as far back as the Revolutionary War.[8] For all significant campaigns at least through the Korean conflict, the pattern or cycle of America at war featured small regular forces, an expansion of the Army during the conflict through a combination of militia call-ups, volunteering, and conscription, and then a drawdown or return to prewar levels. This original aversion to large standing forces was undoubtedly rooted in the English Civil War; many of the original colonists came to the New World to escape the repression and incessant conflict of the Old World, and those memories became firmly imprinted in their cultural DNA.

Throughout the 19th century, the United States grew and evolved as a rising regional power, only achieving great power status at the beginning of the 20th century. The collapse of the Spanish empire in South America and the 1867 emergence of

Canada as an independent commonwealth nation accelerated an effective end to European presence in the Western Hemisphere that was rendered final with the ejection of Spain from Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898.[9] Territorial expansion through the Louisiana Purchase, Mexican-American War, Alaska Purchase, and Indian Wars completed the process of continental growth, accompanied by large-scale immigration from Europe, the transcontinental railroad, a growing and powerful mercantile capacity, and industrialization on a broad scale—thus setting conditions for America's evolution into a superpower in the following century.

Overshadowing everything else in the 19th century is the American Civil War. Vast in scope and scale, the Civil War fundamentally challenged the survival of the Nation and its constitutional system. More Americans died in the Civil War than in all other U.S. wars. Over the course of the conflict, large land and naval forces were raised, conscription was invoked, and modern technologies like mass production, military railroads, the telegraph, breech-loading, rifled artillery, repeating rifles, and iron-clad warships were introduced. Modern military professionalism and generalship replaced the notion of the talented amateur. Profound political questions were settled, most importantly the central role and importance of the Federal Government and the President as chief executive and commander in chief. There would be no going back.

Though the military establishment returned to prewar levels following the Civil War, the precedent of mass mobilization under an organized War and Navy Department and professional generals and admirals had been well established. Professional military education took root, notably at the Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island, and at the Army's School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry (later the Command and General Staff College) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.[10] Up through the Spanish-American War, the Army performed essentially constabulary duties, while the Navy steadily evolved toward a modern, capable, technically proficient arm of the service with a coherent doctrine.

By the end of the 19th century, the general tenets of American grand strategy were well established and consistently applied by Presidents and congressional leaders of both parties. The overriding principle was, and remains, the protection of American territory, citizens, our constitutional system of government, and our

economic well-being. These "vital interests" were secured and enabled in the 1800s through protection of trade and freedom of navigation on the oceans; a prohibition against European military intervention in the Western hemisphere; a capable navy; a small but professional army, capable of rapid expansion in time of crisis; and a readiness to provide support to civil authorities when needed. Protected by two vast oceans, with an industrialized and increasingly global economy and a large and growing population (enabling the raising of a potentially huge land force if threatened), the United States generally enjoyed a stable security environment.

A Century Like No Other

The new century would transform American grand strategy in different but comparable ways. By a wide margin, the 20th century would prove to be the most catastrophic in history. The Spanish-American War, while revealing many shortcomings in organization and supply for the land forces, showcased a powerful and competent Navy with global reach and made the United States an imperial power with newly won possessions in the Caribbean (Puerto Rico) and the Pacific (the Philippines and Guam). America had now moved decisively onto the world stage.

In the second decade of the century, it became clear that war loomed in Europe, as armies assumed massive proportions, professional general staffs perfected the machinery of mobilization, and industrialization and advancing technology equipped armies and navies for large-scale, protracted war. The United States, preoccupied with colonial concerns in the Philippines and protected by an impressive fleet and the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, genuinely pursued a neutrality that would eventually founder on two key strategic dilemmas: the protection of trade and markets, and the potential rise of a hostile power in control of the European landmass. American pride was certainly touched by unrestricted submarine warfare, but what could not be borne was the isolation of U.S. commerce from European markets or the prospect of German control of all of Europe's economic and demographic resources. If that occurred, Germany could conceivably threaten the continental United States both militarily and by setting the terms of trade. While cultural and ideological affinities with European democracies played important roles and a politically powerful isolationist movement offered

resistance, these life-and-death strategic considerations compelled America's entry as an active belligerent.[11]

Unlike World War II, America was no "arsenal of democracy" in World War I. Once committed to war, U.S. grand strategy stressed speed over mobilization of the industrial base and a deliberate buildup of troops and material. Getting large field forces to France in time to prevent an Allied collapse was the driving strategic imperative. France, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia supplied their own weapons and equipment. American forces were largely equipped (with the exception of small arms) by the Allies. Still, the introduction of a one-million-man U.S. field army just as Germany's defeat of Russia enabled the transfer of huge forces to the Western Front proved decisive. In only 3 months of large-scale combat, the United States suffered heavy casualties, but the arrival of the Americans proved decisive to victory. By war's end, the United States had moved to the fore as a great power and a guarantor of the international order.[12]

The armistice was followed in the 1920s by massive demobilization and in the 1930s by economic collapse, repeating the familiar pattern of putting the Army in caretaker or cadre status. In contrast, though limited by treaty restrictions, the Navy pursued the development of carrier aviation and long-range submarines, while inside the Army Air Forces, the foundations of a strategic bomber force were laid. A resurgent Germany, well ahead of its rivals with newly developed armored formations and a modern air force, again raised the specter of a nondemocratic power occupying the European continent and directly threatening the continental United States. This time, however, the strategic challenge was far more complex and dangerous. In Asia, a modern and bellicose Japan invaded China and looked ready to challenge American economic and territorial interests in the Pacific, while an ideologically virulent Soviet Union raised huge forces even as it savagely repressed millions of its citizens, killing more than 14 million peasants in the forced collectivization of the 1930s. At the outbreak of war in 1939, America again found itself with a small and unprepared land force and with unready allies.

U.S. grand strategy in World War II aimed at the defeat and destruction of Germany and Japan, not as ends in themselves but as necessary to the reestablishment of a stable international order, a prosperous global economic system, and a

U.S. population free from military threat at home and abroad.[13] This necessitated strong support for allies—even unsavory ones such as the Soviet Union, which proved essential to victory—massive mobilization, and an economic and industrial effort unparalleled in world history. Even in retrospect, the U.S. effort beggars belief. By war's end, the U.S. Navy was larger than the combined fleets of every other combatant nation, possessing more than 70 percent of the naval strength in the world. The U.S. Army, ranked 17th in size in 1939, grew to more than 8 million soldiers and 90 combat divisions. The Army Air Forces boasted 80,000 aircraft. American ships, planes, and tanks were among the most reliable and effective in the world and were supported by a supply system unrivaled on the planet. Despite beginning slowly, the United States and its Allies advanced progressively throughout the war, gaining the initiative in the Pacific in 1942 and in Europe in 1944.

U.S. grand strategy, as distinct from theater strategies in Europe and Asia, focused first on keeping the British, Russians, and Chinese in the war while the American buildup gathered momentum.[14] Success was far from assured. In 1940, following an embarrassingly inept Allied performance in Norway, France fell and the British were soundly defeated, narrowly escaping annihilation. Further humiliations in Greece, Crete, and North Africa in 1941—while Russian forces were driven back to the gates of Moscow, with millions killed, wounded, and captured—was followed by the near destruction of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. In 1942, Singapore surrendered—the largest capitulation in British history.

In retrospect, Allied victory seems to have been inevitable. At the time, it was anything but. Over time, enemy strategic missteps, the accumulation of experience at all levels, and most tellingly, the sheer size and mass of Allied (particularly Russian and American) forces began to turn the tide. It is difficult to argue that, man for man and unit for unit, the Allies eventually became better than our adversaries (at least in Europe).[15] What is incontestable is that American mass in all domains proved decisive. Coalition warfare on a global scale, enabled by the most powerful economy and industrial base in history, proved a war-winning combination.

Any sound analysis of World War II must conclude that in the end, U.S. material superiority proved the decisive factor.[16] America's ability to produce and transport vehicles, ammunition, food, supplies, and fuel kept its key Allies on their feet. U.S.

industry produced more than 370,000 planes, more than 100,000 tanks and armored vehicles, and more than 7,000 warships during the war. The ability to mobilize and organize the economy for global war and to field trained and very strong forces in all domains (sea, air, and land) arguably counted for more than where and how they were used.

American grand strategy in World War II was simple, consistent, and effective. Comprehensive defeat of the enemy was envisioned from the start, with the liberation of Europe as the first priority. Building up its war capacity at speed while sustaining critical Allies (a dual mission that forced hard resource choices, especially early on) constituted the focus of effort.[17] As the United States built strength, President Franklin Roosevelt ruled against dramatic but overly risky suggestions to reinforce General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines in 1942 and to attempt a cross-Channel invasion of Europe in 1943. Instead, the United States patiently set the conditions for strategic success. In the Atlantic, this meant defeating the submarine threat. In Europe, this meant large-scale strategic bombing to attack German morale, war production, and lines of communication while preparing for and then executing the invasion of the continent. In the Pacific, it meant establishing airfields and naval bases and advancing deliberately across the region in a coordinated campaign to engage and destroy the Imperial Japanese Fleet and commercial shipping preparatory to invasion of the home islands. Overwhelming Allied strength on the ground, in the air, and at sea forced the collapse of Germany and would have done the same to Japan had the advent of nuclear weapons not terminated the conflict.[18]

At war's end, the United States stood alone as leader of the victorious coalition, the greatest economic and military power in the world. In the immediate postwar period, U.S. advantages were absolute. A booming economy, a formidable strategic Air Force and Navy, and sole possession of nuclear weapons ensured American supremacy, fitting it uniquely for a role as the world's superpower. American grand strategy at mid-century continued to rest on the foundations described above and could be summarized concisely as monitoring and enforcing a stable international order and economic system that preserved American sovereignty, security, and prosperity; ensuring the security of the homeland through nuclear deterrence, alliances, forward-deployed ground forces, and airpower and seapower; and preventing the rise

of peer competitors that might challenge its economic and military superiority.[19] The isolationism that had always existed as a strain in American foreign policy would not disappear altogether, but it would never again contend for primacy in grand strategy.

America's supreme effort in World War II did not lead to peace, and unchallenged American dominance proved transitory.[20] As the United States demobilized its Army, the Soviet Union maintained a powerful and dangerous military establishment that soon gained a nuclear component that could reach U.S. targets. Despite incredible losses during the war, the Soviet Union pursued a ruthlessly disciplined political and military program that soon brought all of Eastern Europe under its sway.[21] In Asia, the Communist Chinese finally completed their long civil war, driving the Nationalists to Taiwan and solidifying their status as a regional power. Both China and the Soviet Union espoused political doctrines and ideologies profoundly at odds with the values and interests of the West. The stage was thus set for decades of confrontation.

In June 1950, the United States stumbled into an unexpected confrontation with the Communist bloc when the North Korean army invaded South Korea and took Seoul. Unaccountably, North Korea and its Chinese partners seemed not to fear America's nuclear arsenal. At the outset, the lack of strategic warning, poor military preparedness, and uncertainty over U.S. strategic aims muddled the American response, contributing to the indecisive outcome. Although still in possession of a nuclear monopoly (Moscow detonated its first nuclear weapon on August 29, 1949, but did not have a true deployable nuclear capability until several years later), the United States greatly feared a Soviet lunge into central Europe, clearly a more critical strategic priority.[22] U.S. strategists could not be sure whether the North Korean invasion was directed by Moscow to distract Washington and its allies. Given the intense ideological perspectives that dominated at the time, a judgment was made that communist states acted more or less monolithically and that an armed response was needed to contain further communist expansion. The Korean conflict ultimately absorbed much of the military capacity available against a peripheral, not central, strategic priority—a huge gamble. Its unsatisfying outcome, a negotiated armistice leading to a frozen conflict, reflected America's unwillingness to mobilize or commit

totally to victory in a war not well understood or supported by the public. This "no win, no lose" approach would be seen again, with similar results.[23]

The advent of nuclear weapons, many argued, presaged the dislocation or even negation of grand strategy altogether. Through the 1950s, and despite the example of the Korean war, it was the declared policy of the United States to threaten a nuclear response to any attack. The international system settled into bipolarity, with each armed camp being capable of destroying the other absolutely as nonaligned states struggled to avoid co-option. Direct, armed confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States seemed unthinkable for fear of uncontrolled escalation. Deterrence and containment became the means by which the ends of grand strategy were fulfilled. While powerful conventional forces were maintained, few strategists reckoned that the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies could prevail in a conventional war with the Soviet Union in Central Europe. Instead, nuclear systems at the tactical, theater, and intercontinental levels proliferated on both sides in an arms race only partially limited by arms control treaties. While the willingness of U.S. leaders to use nuclear weapons in Europe—to "trade Washington for Bonn"—was never certain, the consequences of miscalculation for either side were almost unlimited, and deterrence in this sense proved remarkably stable. In only a single instance, the Cuban missile crisis, did the two superpowers approach the abyss, and even then the prospect of mutual destruction induced both to step back.

The long and painful experience of the Vietnam conflict shared almost eerie similarities with the one in Korea. Both featured ethnic populations, artificially partitioned. In both, the aggressor was a communist movement enabled and supported by China and the Soviet Union. Both featured large, conventional forces fighting from protected sanctuaries. In both, the United States fought on the Asian mainland, far from the homeland in a country with weak governance structures and a poorly developed infrastructure. And in both, U.S. airpower and seapower were unable to secure decisive battlefield results, even against a technologically inferior opponent. Like Korea, Vietnam eventually consumed huge military resources at the expense of U.S. forces in Europe, miring the United States in a protracted, peripheral war with weak popular support. [24] In Vietnam, as in Korea, there were no direct threats to U.S.

vital interests, only vague objectives to "resist communism" and to "maintain U.S. credibility."

Korea and Vietnam (and, for that matter, smaller interventions such as Lebanon in 1958 and the Dominican Republic in 1965) took place against the backdrop of the Cold War and were clearly viewed in that light. For nearly five decades following World War II, national security concerns dominated the American political landscape as the United States engaged the Soviet Union in a worldwide struggle. For the first time in their history, Americans supported high defense expenditures in order to sustain large military forces in peacetime. Despite the painful experiences of the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, the United States never faltered in its fundamental commitment to opposing Soviet expansion.[25] Internally or externally, there was little debate: deterrence, or failing that, fighting and winning our nation's wars, went unquestioned as the defining task of the U.S. military.

Though far more dangerous, the Cold War was a simpler era in many respects than today. Our national security objectives were clear and unambiguous. Even at the height of the Vietnam conflict, the primary disagreement revolved around the nature of the struggle, not a questioning of the policy of containment. Sovereignty of individual states was paramount, tempered only somewhat by the moral force of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) or, more concretely, by involvement in traditional security alliances such as NATO. The influence of nonstate actors—whether nongovernmental organizations, private voluntary organizations, terrorist groups, drug cartels, international criminal syndicates, or others—was limited. In the main, national security imperatives were likely to prevail over other considerations in the strategic calculus.

All that changed when the Berlin Wall came down. Whereas superpower rivalry had previously inhibited the actions of ambitious regional powers and limited the influence of nonstate actors, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to immediate changes in the system that had governed international relations for over four decades. Overnight, the manifest threat ceased to exist. As a result, the United States and its allies were forced to adjust their strategic focus. At the same time, an increasingly interdependent global economy and emerging revolutions in information and communications eroded the concept of state sovereignty in fundamental

ways. The result was a rise in international organized crime, quantum increases in international and domestic terrorism, ecological deterioration, disease, mass migration and refugee overflows, multiple outbreaks of ethnic and religious conflict, and a proliferation of failed states. These trends culminated in 9/11 and its painful and protracted aftermath.

The architects of the post–Cold War drawdown assumed, quite naturally, that the military would be far less busy in a world that would be more tranquil than before. Military forces were drawn down across the board. In one of the more interesting paradoxes of history, the end of the Cold War was followed not by retrenchment or relaxation but by a rapid increase in conflict and in U.S. military commitments abroad. No longer driven by superpower rivalry, national security policy evolved to advance U.S. interests in a more fragmented, multipolar system largely defined by ethnic, religious, and cultural enmities as old as they were implacable. New challenges—economic, environmental, and factional as well as national, regional, and ideological—now confronted the United States in an international setting of greater complexity and variety.

These trends also fueled the rise of new actors on the international political landscape. The budget, influence, and level of activity of the UN and its many organizations increased substantially in the 1990s. Nongovernmental organizations and private voluntary organizations became increasingly active, pursuing numerous ambitious agendas in many different areas. Traditional national security concerns receded as the United States and other Western powers attempted to reap the dividends of peace. A fundamental shift took place, largely unnoticed, in the way many Americans viewed national security and the role of the armed forces in providing for the common defense.

The drawdown of the 1990s was wrenching. In a single decade, 700,000 U.S. military personnel slots (about one-third of the active force) were eliminated, but the loss of combat forces was even more severe. In combat structure, the Army declined from 18 active divisions to 10, the Navy went from 566 ships to 354, and the Air Force went from 36 to 20 fighter wings, an overall reduction of 45 percent. The defense budget in general terms dropped by 40 percent. In the midst of these changes, the military was asked to shoulder a heavier operational load. Stability

operations in the Balkans, Haiti, and the Sinai in the 1990s stressed a force preoccupied with massive downsizing. Peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and humanitarian assistance operations as well as "theater engagement" missions exploded. While the military had undertaken these types of missions throughout its history, the sheer number of deployments dwarfed those conducted in the past. Examples include refugee assistance in northern Iraq following the Gulf War, security and disaster relief efforts in Somalia, humanitarian aid to refugees in the Rwandan crisis, restoration of democracy in Haiti, stability operations in Macedonia and peace enforcement operations to implement the Dayton Accords in Bosnia, and the Kosovo air campaign and later enforcement of the Military Technical Agreement in Kosovo.[26] More traditional combat or rescue missions in Panama, Southwest Asia, Liberia, Albania, and elsewhere in the same time frame also stretched American forces and resources.

This dramatic turnaround in the international security environment could not help but impact the world in profound ways. Several trends have heavily influenced American grand strategy since the Gulf War: the dramatic downsizing of U.S. military forces, their increasing use in nontraditional, noncombat missions and at the lower end of the spectrum of war, an increasingly polarized political environment, and a prolonged period of economic distress and malaise. All are interrelated and all have deeply affected the Armed Forces as instruments of national power, shaping U.S. strategy in important ways.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks struck the heart of grand strategy as they represented the first large-scale, direct attack on the homeland by an outside power since the War of 1812. Political unwillingness to confront the gathering threat and serious intelligence shortcomings represented strategic failures for which the United States paid a high price. Following 9/11, defense spending increased substantially as the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq began and endured. Over several years, the active Army grew from 470,000 to 548,000 and the Marine Corps expanded from 158,000 to 202,000, while Air Force and Navy end strengths remained static or declined slightly. In keeping with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's "transformation" initiatives, significant investments were made in command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems and in precision munitions,

as well as in force protection enhancements such as up-armored wheeled vehicles. Nevertheless, legacy combat systems—planes, tanks, and ships—first delivered in the 1970s and early 1980s remained the backbone of the military services (as they do today), while many next-generation programs were canceled or downsized.[27]

As with Korea and Vietnam, the post-9/11 era of conflict came to absorb much of our military effort and resources at the expense of other, more central security concerns.[28] In particular, ground forces were fully committed to the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving minimal Active Duty capacity for other contingencies such as the Korean Peninsula.[29] Air and naval forces played much smaller roles. Over time, the Army in particular minimized its readiness for prolonged, state-on-state, high-intensity conflict, shedding much of its armored, mechanized, and field artillery force structure and focusing its combat training centers on counterinsurgency. The special operations community grew dramatically in size and capability in a single generation but could not play a decisive role in the counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaigns that defined the post-9/11 security landscape. With the U.S. effort in Iraq over and its Afghanistan venture winding down, it seems clear that neither will be seen retroactively as a clear-cut success; nor has the threat to the homeland from international terrorism been destroyed or eliminated.

At the conclusion of more than a decade of counterinsurgency, 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), active Army forces will bear the brunt of defense reductions, while the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps will be less affected.[30] Most U.S. ground and air forces have been redeployed to the continental United States, while defense spending 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 narcotrafficking, illegal immigration, environmental degradation, demography (for example, "youth bulges"), organized crime, and even climate change are also cast as national security threats. What does this portend for American 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 American grand strategy over time. Broadly speaking, U.S. vital or core interests remain remarkably consistent: the defense of American territory and that of our allies, protecting American citizens at home and abroad, supporting and defending our constitutional values and forms of government, and promoting and securing the U.S. economy and standard of living. These four core interests encompass virtually every strategic dynamic and dimension. 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.[31] Grand strategy is fundamentally about security in its more traditional sense.[32]

Any assessment must begin with a look 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 view of "a multiplicity of autonomous centers of decision and therefore a risk of war" holds true today.[33] The bipolar, 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 governmental 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 nongovernmental organizations and nonstate actors.[34] Terrorist organizations and international organized crime, enabled by global communications and information flows, have become far more significant

than they previously had been. 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.

In this regard, we often see references to "asymmetric" threats posed to "thwart U.S. conventional military advantages."[35] While factually true—weaker states find it largely impossible to match U.S. power symmetrically—this characterization can be misleading. It is just as accurate to cast asymmetric threats as less capable offsets employed by weaker powers who cannot match American preponderance. A persistent tendency to inflate the dangers of insurgency, terrorism, "niche" technologies, and so on can distort threat assessments in unhelpful ways. Asymmetric threats deserve careful consideration, but they should not be exaggerated.

The broad threats that face 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 against the homeland. These could be nuclear, chemical, biological, cyber, or explosive/kinetic in nature (such as the 9/11 attacks) delivered by either state or nonstate actors. Single or multiple attacks causing huge 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.[36]

◆ Economic disruption from without. The crash of 2008 was largely self-induced, but the health and stability of the U.S. economy can also be affected by the actions of foreign powers. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which jeopardized the international economic order by threatening the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, is an example. A major cyber attack against the financial sector or the closure of the Straits of Tiran or the Straits of Malacca by a hostile power could be another.[37] Any major disruption to the global economy, which depends upon investor confidence as much as the free flow of goods and energy, can have catastrophic consequences for the United States, and American 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 in 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. A peaceful, nonhostile peer nation or grouping of nations (such as the European Union) poses no strategic threat to the United States. An authoritarian great power, possessed of both military and economic means and an apparent desire to enlarge and expand them, could in time pose a direct, existential threat to American national security. American grand strategy has traditionally opposed such powers and would in all likelihood do so again.[38]

◆ Direct challenges to key allies. Alliances like NATO and bilateral security arrangements with close allies like Japan and South Korea constitute solemn commitments that extend American power and influence globally. Cooperation with allies adds their military forces to ours and secures forward basing and other rights we need to secure U.S. interests around the world. We do not enter into arrangements altruistically, but rather because they serve U.S. interests. To preserve international stability and deter conflict, they must be honored. Failure to do so in one case, such as an attack on Japan or South Korea, would call into question our commitment to all such commitments and would compromise, perhaps fatally, our system of alliances and treaties worldwide.[39] 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. An attack on a U.S. Embassy, the kidnapping of U.S. citizens abroad, or the pirating of U.S.-flagged vessels on the high seas would be examples. U.S. political leaders might also contemplate the use of military force under the evolving doctrine of "responsibility to protect" as in the cases of Somalia in 1991 and Libya in 2011, or when national pride has been touched (as in the *Mayaguez* or *Pueblo* incidents). However, these by definition do not engage grand strategic objectives, and

statesmen assume risk when treating them as though they do, primarily because strong and sustained public support is less assured.[40]

Similarly, promoting democracy and human rights abroad is often touted as a national security or foreign policy "imperative."[41] While consistent with American political culture and ideology, in practice, these instances are highly case specific. When consonant with the framework and principles of U.S. grand strategy, the United States may act, but more often, a pragmatic realism governs. [42] 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 UN 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 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. While the likelihood of committing U.S. forces to defend Ukraine following the seizure of Crimea is low, the postwar security architecture in the Euro-Russian space, so carefully constructed for a generation, has been thrown over. 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 sent troops into Georgia in 2008, where they remain today.[43] In particular, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, under which Ukraine agreed to surrender its nuclear weapons in exchange for Russian guarantees of its territorial integrity, has been seriously compromised, along with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and, apparently, the NATO-Russia Council. Large Russian forces, having seized Crimea, are massed on the eastern and southern borders of Ukraine. Concerns by NATO members, especially the newer ones 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 American grand strategy. Should Russia seize more Ukrainian territory, NATO's Baltic members could very possibly come under threat, an altogether different matter.[44] Russian subversion or military action in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia may be deterred by NATO's Article 5 guarantee, and U.S. leaders and their Allied and partner counterparts will work hard through energetic diplomacy and severe economic sanctions to dissuade any thought of further aggression. Still, should Russia reprise its Crimea land-grab in the Baltic states, it is more likely than not that the United States will respond militarily under the Washington Treaty and encourage its NATO allies to do the same. Direct confrontation with Russia, 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 the Iraqi state may fall somewhere in between. Across the American public and in both political parties, there remains a strong aversion to reintroducing a large ground presence into Iraq. A direct threat to the homeland has not yet emerged, 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 Syria (ISIS) and its Sunni confederates. Should ISIS successfully establish a safe haven and launch attacks against Europe and the United States, decisive U.S. and coalition military action would almost certainly follow. Major disruption to the free flow of oil through the Arabian Gulf and attendant economic shocks would 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.[45] 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 that of potential and actual adversaries, within limits

imposed by its domestic politics. Its political and military leaders are constrained in attempting to balance what Raymond 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.[46] It is thus true that American 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 infrastructural 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.*[47]

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.[48]

The Means of Grand Strategy

The "means" of grand strategy are similarly enduring over time. Its basic components include fostering strong alliances and bilateral security arrangements;[49] maintaining a strong and survivable nuclear deterrent; fielding balanced, powerful,

and capable military forces, dominant in each warfighting domain, 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. These components 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,[50] and a political system that is based on classically liberal democratic values and able to make clear and sustainable policy and resource decisions.[51]

In important ways these tools and capabilities are, or are perceived to be, eroding. The U.S. economy, still the largest in the world, has not fully recovered from the 2008 crisis. Mounting alarm over record deficits and an inability to control spending resulted in the 2011 Budget Control Act, approved against all expectations and mandating a 10 percent cut in defense spending over the next 10 years, triggering sequestration and a succession of budget crises. Confidence in America's economic and fiscal future has been shaken.

America's traditional reliance on forward presence and forward-deployed forces, another strategic linchpin, has also declined since the end of the Cold War. Few combat forces remain in Europe (the last tank was removed in 2012), only a single ground combat brigade is based in Korea, 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.[52] On the Alliance front, relations with NATO allies have been damaged by the Rebalance to Asia, widely perceived as a devaluation of Europe by U.S. leaders, and by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates's stern speech in June of 2011, which castigated European allies for failing to meet targets for defense spending.[53] President Barack Obama's "leading from behind" stance in Libya, the pullout from Iraq, the pending withdrawal from Afghanistan, 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 it as prudent and measured restraint.

The use of "soft power" also deserves consideration in this discussion.[54] Described by Joseph Nye, the term's progenitor, as "the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes you want,"[55] soft power is concerned with development

aid, cultural influence, the power of example, and others forms of suasion that are not coercive or easily directed. Theorists disagree on whether soft power should be considered as 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, although the ability of soft power to influence adversary behavior for good or ill is probably incontrovertible, it is not easily deployable or even controllable.[56] 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 U.S. economic and military power may not be as dominant as it has been 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.[57] When this element is 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. 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.[58] (Counterproliferation may also be

seen in this light.) While U.S. ground forces have largely come home, and key installations such as Torrejon Air Base in Spain and Clark Air Base and Naval Base Subic Bay in the Philippines were closed after the Cold War, America's network of overseas bases, airfields, and alliances as well as forward-deployed air and naval forces is still extensive. America'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. Though smaller than during the Cold War, the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal is survivable, redundant, and accurate, providing an absolute nuclear deterrent against any adversary.[59]

Next, the United States prefers to meet serious threats using different tools at once, relying on intelligence, diplomacy, forward presence, and economic power to forestall, deflect, or defuse security challenges and reserving military force as a last resort.[60] 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.[61] Whenever possible, the United States will address threats in tandem with allies, partners, or like-minded states, working through international organizations like the UN or NATO and conducting preconflict engagement and "shaping" operations on a large scale. Yet when vital interests are at stake, the United States will act unilaterally if necessary.[62] Preemption to disrupt or prevent imminent threats falls well within America's grand strategic calculus.[63] 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.[64] 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 success, to protect, secure, or advance its security interests.[65] 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 20th 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.[66] Both World Wars, 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 of course the relevant examples here. In some cases (the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, Haiti, and 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.[67]

These historical lessons are compelling and deserve careful and objective study. 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 both fighting and deterring 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.[68] This superiority is best translated into battlefield and campaign success by synergistically applying air, space, sea, cyber, and land power in time and space 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.

Likewise, political leaders and strategists should be mindful of *strategic culture*, that mélange of history, tradition, custom, worldview, economy, sociology, and political systems and mores that largely shapes how nations fight and for what causes. 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.[69] "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.[70] Strategic culture is real and powerful, whether acknowledged or not.[71]

The Way Ahead

As we assess a complex security environment, our historical experience provides useful context and guideposts to understanding the present, even when security threats are harder to define and address, as in the case of cyber attacks.[72] 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 bring about 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.[73]

In the last generation, we often saw 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 like NATO, the United States is uniquely positioned to influence world affairs in ways that benefit not only it, but also the international community as a whole.[74] 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. [75] As George Kennan put it, "We have learned not to recoil from the struggle for power as something shocking or abnormal. It is the medium in which we work . . . and we will not improve our performance by trying to dress it up as something else."[76]

Much of the prevailing academic discussion, on the other hand, distracts or frustrates practitioners. One leading theorist offered Presidents a choice from among strategies of "neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, primacy, or enlargement and engagement."[77] Another proposed "strategic restraint, offshore

balancing, forward partnering, selective engagement or assertive interventionism" as strategic alternatives.[78] Others argue for regional priorities (Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Europe), threat-based priorities (weapons of mass destruction [WMD], cyber, insurgency), or capabilities-based strategies (for example, the maritime strategy of the 1980s). Each approach offers useful perspectives, but true grand strategy looks beyond these choices, orienting on American strengths and interests to address the global challenges of the moment in a larger framework of diplomacy, economic strength, military power, and global leadership. Presidents do not really have the choice to embrace isolationism, ignore alliances, eschew engagement, or ignore important regions of the world. The current administration may highlight the Rebalance to Asia as its top priority, but potential conflict in the Arabian Gulf, another WMD attack on the homeland, or Russian military action against the Baltic States would immediately become the pressing, consuming challenge and would remain a critical priority until resolved.

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.[79] 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 American 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, in Africa, in Eastern Europe, and perhaps even in East Asia—will persist or surface anew. Strategic "shocks"—unanticipated crises requiring strategic responses—will be more the norm than not.[80] 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."[81] 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 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 calls it simply "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." Colin Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 283; Robert J. Art, "A Defensible Defense," *International Security* 15, no. 4 (Spring 1991), 7; Christopher 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 (November 2011), 1281–1296; and Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 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* 57, no. 5 (Summer 1979), 975.

[3] The list includes the Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652–1654, 1665–1667, 1672–1674, 1780–1784), King William's War (1688–1697), Queen Anne's War (1702–1713), the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–1748), King George's War (1744–1748), and the French and Indian War (1754–1763). The first clash in North America between European powers was the 1565 Spanish massacre of French Huguenots at Fort Caroline in present-day Florida.

[4] The War of 1812 entangled the United States peripherally in the Napoleonic wars over questions of trade restrictions with France, impressment of U.S. Sailors (many of whom were British born but naturalized American citizens) on the high seas, and British support for Indian tribes resisting expansion into the Northwest territories. Expansion into Crown territories in Canada was also a war aim. Though arguably a victory, the War of 1812, which saw the burning of Washington and numerous other defeats, confirmed the view that military engagement with the great European powers was not in American interests.

[5] Eugene V. Rostow, *A Breakfast for Bonaparte: U.S. National Security Interests from the Heights of Abraham to the Nuclear Age* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1993), 143.

[6] Ibid., 78.

[7] Described by Seymour Martin Lipset as a new American ideology, based on notions of personal liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, republicanism, populism, and laissez-faire. Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double Edged Sword* (New York: Norton, 1997), 17–19.

[8] For example, the Second Seminole War (1836) was fought with 10,000 regulars and 30,000 volunteers. Local militia forces played no significant role. Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 68.

[9] The Monroe Doctrine (1823) had specifically excluded Cuba.

[10] Weigley credits Newport with being "the first institution of its type anywhere in the world." Weigley, 172.

[11] Rostow, 245.

[12] World War I casualties included 37 million civilian and military dead and wounded, including 120,000 U.S. dead and 205,000 wounded.

[13] President Franklin D. Roosevelt put it succinctly in a "fireside chat" early in the war: "If Great Britain goes down, the Axis powers will control the continents of Europe [and] Asia, and the high seas—and they will be in a position to bring enormous military and naval resources against this hemisphere." Russell E. Buhite and David W. Levy, eds., *FDR's Fireside Chats* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 163.

[14] This approach was indisputably successful. For every U.S. Soldier killed in the war, the Germans lost 15, the Russians 53. John Lewis Gaddes, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 8.

[15] The German army retained a qualitative edge right up to the end of the war. In the summer and fall of 1944, U.S. infantry regiments were averaging 100 percent casualties every 90 days. John English, *On Infantry* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 79.

[16] "The war was decided by the weight of armaments production." Alan S. Milward, *War, Economy, and Society, 1939–1945* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 75.

[17] American material support to Allies, who did the brunt of the fighting and suffered far more casualties, was unquestionably the strategic center of gravity of the war effort. Some 75 percent of all German casualties in World War II occurred on the Eastern Front, while the Chinese army inflicted 2.1 million casualties on Japan, compared to 600,000 by the United States. The United States supplied a staggering 11,450 planes, 7,172 tanks, and 433,000 trucks to the Soviets during the war, as well as armor plating for another 20,000 tanks. Alan Gropman, ed., *The Big L: American Logistics in World War II* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1997), 287.

[18] Worldwide, the cost of the war far exceeded that of World War I, with an estimated 85 million dead from all causes. U.S. deaths totaled 418,000—far fewer than every other major combatant.

[19] This meant not only rebuilding Germany and Japan as allies and economic partners but also restraining their military power—in effect containing them as well as the Soviet Union. Layne, "Rethinking American Grand Strategy," 12.

[20] According to Dean Rusk, "By the summer of 1946 . . . we did not have one combat ready division or air wing in the U.S. military." Cited in Rostow, 355.

[21] "The Red Army suffered 29,629,205 casualties from 22 June 1942–9 May 1945, of which 11, 285,057 were [deaths] and 18,344,148 [wounded]." Colonel General G.F. Krivosheyev, cited by Lawrence G. Kelley, "The Soviet Soldier in World War II: 'Death is But Four Steps Away'," *Parameters* 27 (Winter 1997/1998), 167.

[22] At this point, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was only 2 months old and the German army had not been reconstituted, while the Red Army was far stronger than the U.S. Army.

[23] At its highest point, 327,000 U.S. troops served in Korea. U.S. war dead totaled 36,500.

[24] U.S. troop strength in Vietnam eventually peaked at 536,000 in 1968. U.S. Servicemember deaths totaled 58,000.

[25] The People's Republic of China, far weaker militarily and economically, played a role as a strategic balancer or counterweight but never approached superpower status during the Cold War.

[26] Bosnia and Kosovo both evolved into lengthy and protracted commitments lasting many years.

[27] The F-22 and F-35 aircraft programs, intended to replace the F-15 and F-16, experienced significant cost overrun, production delays, and operational problems and were curtailed but protected in the Pentagon budget.

[28] Despite a clear and compelling priority in Europe, both Korea and Vietnam eventually became the central focus for the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, leaving a much weaker land force in the Central Region. In much the same way, the Department of Defense (DOD) arguably lost focus on nuclear deterrence and readiness and on major theater war in scenarios such as the Korean Peninsula, accepting risk in order to focus on Iraq and later Afghanistan.

[29] Large National Guard combat forces, up to 28 brigades, exist in the force but require lengthy mobilization and would not be available to participate in a near-term crisis. Their sustained use also raises political questions that, in all but the most serious scenarios, are problematic.

[30] Active Army forces, according to Pentagon sources, will fall to 420,000, the lowest level since before World War II. See *The Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 2014), ix (hereafter QDR).

[31] As one example of this tendency toward incoherence, Patrick Doherty discusses the importance of "walkabout communities" as part of a "new grand strategic construct" in "A New U.S. Grand Strategy," *ForeignPolicy.com*, January 9, 2013, available at <www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/01/09/a_new_US_grand_strategy>.

[32] 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 Stanley Hoffman, *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 316.

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

[34] 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, though 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. William C. Wohlforth, "U.S. Strategy in a Unipolar World," in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, ed. G. John Ikenberry, 117 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[35] Julianne Smith and Jacob Stokes, *Strategy and Statecraft: An Agenda for the United States in an Era of Compounding Complexity* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, June 2014), 9.

[36] The official DOD definition of *weapons of mass destruction* includes nuclear, biological, chemical, and radiological weapons only. The term is used more broadly here to include events such as the Oklahoma City bombing and 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).

[37] One quarter of the world's traded goods and 25 percent of the world's oil supply carried by sea passes through the 2.8-kilometer-wide Phillips Channel south of Singapore.

[38] This does not necessarily mean through military confrontation. In the case of China, for example, the fact that many neighbors with substantial military establishments (Japan, Russia, India, South Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore) can check possible military expansion when acting in concert suggests that U.S. security and economic assistance and diplomacy may be the primary venues to constrain the rise of a potentially expansionist China.

[39] Treaties and alliances are means to an end, not an end in themselves, but preserving them is clearly a core interest for which the United States will use force if necessary.

[40] "Ironically, a war fought in the name of high moral principle intensifies violence and is more destructive of political stability than a war based on national interest." Kenneth Thompson, *Masters of International Thought* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 153. An almost tragic example is provided by Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the height of Vietnam, who was quoted as stating, "the United States cannot be secure until the total international environment is ideologically safe"; cited in Christopher Layne, "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace," *International Security* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1994), 46.

[41] The 2014 QDR lists "respect for universal values at home and around the world" as one of four "core national interests." QDR, 11.

[42] See R.D. Hooker, Jr., "U.S. Policy Choices During the Rwandan Genocide," unpublished paper, National War College, 2003.

[43] 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.

[44] Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia are 100 percent dependent on Russian natural gas and have large ethnic Russian populations. Without 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, Washington, DC, April 11, 2014.

[45] Andrew Bacevich is a leading critic of American "imperialism." See his *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[46] Thompson, 175.

[47] Layne, "Rethinking American Grand Strategy," 15.

[48] The "Western postwar order has also been rendered acceptable to Europe and Japan because American hegemony is built around decidedly liberal features." See G. John Ikenberry, "Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Persistence of the American Postwar Order," *International Security* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1998/1999), 49.

[49] "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." Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Budgeting for Hard Power: Defense and Security Spending Under Barack Obama* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2009), 24.

[50] The Government Accountability 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 Dr. 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.

[51] 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," according to *The Economic Importance of the U.S. Shipbuilding and Repairing Industry* (New York: Maritime Administration, 2013), 3. U.S. steel production has declined as a percentage of global market share since 1947, when the country produced 60 percent of the world's steel, but it 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 Gropman, 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*, 20th Century Defense Initiative Policy Paper (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, February 2011).

[52] 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, "Testimony Before the House Armed Services Committee on the FY2015 Navy Posture," March 12, 2014.

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

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

[55] See Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Succeed in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

[56] Christopher M. Schnaubelt, "The Illusions and Delusions of Smart Power," in *Towards a Comprehensive Approach: Integrating Civilian and Military Concepts of Strategy*, ed. Christopher M. Schnaubelt, 24 (Rome: NATO Defense College, March 2011).

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

[58] DOD 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.

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

[60] QDR, 11.

[61] For example, in seapower alone, the U.S. lead is staggering. The U.S. Navy operates 11 large aircraft carriers, all nuclear powered; no other country has even one. It 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. Robert Gates, prepared remarks to the Navy League, National Harbor, Maryland, May 3, 2010. The United States 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: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 2014).

[62] "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." President Barack Obama, commencement address at the United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, May 28, 2014.

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

[64] For a more detailed discussion of American preponderance and its strategic implications, see Layne, "Rethinking American Grand Strategy," 9.

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

[66] Both Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 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 views in a speech entitled "The Uses of Military Power" at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, on November 28, 1984.

[67] 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).

[68] "By and large, the virtues of American civilization have not been the military virtues and this has been reflected in American military performance." Samuel P. Huntington, "Playing to Win," *The National Interest*, no. 3 (Spring 1986), 10.

[69] Weigley is the principal exponent of this view. For a contrasting view, see Antulio Echevarria, "Toward an American Way of War," U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, March 2004.

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

[71] See R.D. Hooker, Jr., "The Strange Voyage: A Short Précis on Strategy," *Parameters* 42, no. 4/43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2013), 62.

[72] "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." Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 18, 2013.

[73] 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.

[74] 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. Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China's Search for Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 312–315.

[75] 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.

[76] George F. Kennan, *Memoirs* (Boston: Little and Co., 1967), 494.

[77] Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/1997), 5–53.

[78] Frank G. Hoffman, "Forward Partnership: A Sustainable American Strategy," *Orbis* 57, no. 1 (Winter 2013), 24.

[79] 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.

[80] Strachan, 1285.

[81] 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.

About the Author

Dr. Richard D. Hooker, Jr., became the National Defense University's Director for Research and Strategic Support and Director of the Institute for National Strategic Studies in September 2013. As a member of the Senior Executive Service, Dr. Hooker previously served as Deputy Commandant and Dean of the NATO Defense College in Rome. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, International Institute of Strategic Studies, and Foreign Policy Research Institute. He is also a Fellow of the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society. A former White House Fellow, he previously taught at the United States Military Academy at West Point and held the Army Chair at the National War College in Washington, DC. He also served in the Office of National Service at the White House during the George H.W. Bush administration, in the Arms Control and Defense Directorate at the National Security Council (NSC) during the Clinton administration, and in the NSC Office for Iraq and Afghanistan during the George W. Bush administration. While at the NSC, he was a contributing author to *The National Security Strategy of the United States*.


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