

## Book Essay

**Does Grand Strategy Matter?***Alexander Kirss***Abstract**

The key debate among contemporary academics over grand strategy pertains to what grand strategy the country should follow: whether the United States should engage in restraint, deep engagement, or liberal hegemony. Recent work has pushed back against the consensus that grand strategy matters. It questions whether academics and policy elites place too much stock in grand strategy as a cure-all for American foreign policy woes. This essay evaluates these pessimistic claims regarding both historical and contemporary grand strategy.

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*On Grand Strategy* by John Lewis Gaddis. Penguin Press, 2018, 368 pp.

*Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy* by Ionut Popescu. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017, 233 pp.

*The End of Grand Strategy* by Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski. Cornell University Press, 2017, 238 pp.

*The Guardians* by Susan Pedersen. Oxford University Press, 2015, 571 pp.

The American foreign policy elite has long displayed a curious fascination with “strategists,” larger-than-life figures whose reputation rests on their purported ability to confidently answer the most important—and difficult—questions regarding diplomacy and statecraft.<sup>1</sup> Although

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guilty of similar hagiographic impulses at times, scholars have traditionally eschewed studying individual strategists in favor of strategy writ large.<sup>2</sup>

Where academics and policy elites have generally agreed, though, is that strategy, particularly grand strategy, “matters” when it comes to the conduct of foreign policy. Commentators therefore consistently explain foreign policy failure as the result of a lack of strategic planning and imagination. Virtually all modern presidents, including Barack Obama<sup>3</sup> and Donald Trump,<sup>4</sup> have therefore been upbraided for either failing to enact a grand strategy or enacting a strategy that was not to a particular commentator’s liking.<sup>5</sup> The key debate among contemporary academics over grand strategy pertains to what grand strategy the country should follow, not whether it needs a strategy. Arguments over whether the United States should engage in “restraint” when it comes to foreign policy or embark upon a grand strategy of “deep engagement” or “liberal hegemony” have filled op-ed pages and bookshelves.<sup>6</sup>

A more recent wave of scholarship, however, has pushed back against the consensus that grand strategy matters. It questions whether academics and policy elites place too much stock in strategy, particularly grand strategy, as a cure-all for American foreign policy woes.<sup>7</sup> More generally, it argues that the complexity of the modern world precludes the conceptualization of a single, uniform grand strategy that would be responsive to the full range of threats a country faces. Even if such a strategy is conceivable, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to implement.

This essay evaluates these pessimistic claims regarding both historical and contemporary grand strategy. It reviews several recent books on grand strategy that collectively illustrate many of the problems with the existing academic and policy consensus that grand strategy “matters” when it comes to conducting a successful foreign policy. These works are part of a broader critique of the concept of grand strategy writ large.

First, this essay defines the concept of grand strategy before moving to the central question of whether grand strategy “matters.” It explicates recent criticisms of grand strategy, namely that it won’t inevitably lead to foreign policy success, and how there is friction between grand strategy and operational demands. Looking to the past, it highlights a particularly interesting case of grand strategic blowback, when a successfully executed grand strategy results in unanticipated negative results. The League of Nations has often been seen as a failure due to its inability

to prevent the rise of fascism in Europe that culminated in the Second World War. Recently, however, historians have rethought the League of Nations' record, noting how certain branches of the League, such as the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC), were surprisingly successful in enacting change in the international system. Even more importantly, they were able to do so contrary to the geopolitical interests of their purported great power masters. The essay concludes with opportunities for future research regarding grand strategy.

### Defining Grand Strategy

What is grand strategy? Scholars, commentators, and policy makers have laid out a series of competing, and at times incommensurable, definitions. Barry Posen's seminal definition of the concept, dating from the early 1980s, remains a touchstone for many later writers. Grand strategy, for Posen, is "that collection of military, economic, and political means and ends with which a state attempts to achieve security." It is "a political-military, means-ends chain, a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, for Hal Brands, grand strategy is "an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources and policies" that represent a "conceptual framework that helps nations determine where they want to go and how they ought to get there."<sup>9</sup>

Recently, Nina Silove has argued that differing conceptions of grand strategy can be grouped according to whether scholars see such strategies as a plan for action, a set of theoretical or organizing principles, or a pattern of behavior.<sup>10</sup> There is therefore no "true" definition of grand strategy but rather a series of equally justifiable conceptions. While Silove's typology goes a long way towards rectifying the muddled state of defining grand strategy, it unfortunately skews towards relativism. Silove's categories are incredibly broad, and she doesn't provide enough direction towards determining the difference between helpful and unhelpful definitions of grand strategy.

When scholars adopt overly broad definitions of grand strategy, they are not only engaging in inappropriate "concept stretching," they risk fundamentally misstating what grand strategy represents.<sup>11</sup> For instance, otherwise distinguished historian John Lewis Gaddis gravely errs in how he conceptualizes grand strategy in his most recent book, *On Grand Strategy*. Gaddis defines grand strategy, generally, as "the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities."

Regarding when strategies should be considered “grand,” he notes that “it has to do . . . with what’s at stake . . . . Strategies become grander even as they remain within the beholder’s eye.”<sup>12</sup> This definition appears unsatisfying.

As Silove and others have noted, grand strategies do not need to be limited to the realm of international security. Nor do they need to be located at the level of states. Individual leaders, for example, may hold unique grand strategic views.<sup>13</sup> Gaddis’s definition, however, strips away all aspects of grand strategy that would help differentiate it from strategic certainly have potentially unlimited aspirations, perhaps including winning a championship, becoming the best player of their generation, and earning endorsements to augment their salary. If they match their limited capabilities to achieving these goals, would Gaddis say that they possess a grand strategy? Even if he would, should scholars and policy makers follow him down this path?

Frustratingly, Gaddis makes clear that his goal in writing the book is not to contribute to scholarly discourse on grand strategy or international politics. Rather, he is seeking to distill for a popular audience the strategic insights he has acquired during the course of a long career at Yale University. Specifically, he seeks to replicate the wisdom he has taught to undergraduates in his renowned seminar on grand strategy. Gaddis notes in the preface that because he “seek[s] patterns across time, space and scale,” he feels “free to suspend” the “constraints” of conventional scholarship in order to place a bafflingly large array of thinkers, both historical and contemporary, in conversation with one another.<sup>14</sup> His introductory chapter therefore whiplashes the reader between a startling array of figures, from Xerxes to Isaiah Berlin, Tolstoy to Herodotus, Philip Tetlock and Daniel Kahneman to F. Scott Fitzgerald. Gaddis essentially requires an incredibly broad definition of grand strategy to match his ambition in trying to link such otherwise disparate individuals. In doing so, however, he ensures that he won’t be able to formulate an argument about grand strategy that will be intelligible to either scholars, commentators, or policy makers who are already familiar with the topic. In that respect, *On Grand Strategy* is unfortunately similar to the work of Charles Hill, Gaddis’ colleague in the grand strategy program at Yale, who embarked upon a similarly ill-conceived attempt to read works of fiction alongside grand strategy in *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order*.<sup>15</sup>

*On Grand Strategy* might optimistically be read as a window into how Gaddis thinks. It takes a meandering, mostly thematic route through a variety of topics such as Athenian democracy; Caesar's mentorship of his successor, Octavian; and the interplay between religious belief, nationalism, and the motivating power states have over their citizens. The connection between these topics and grand strategy, however, is thin to say the least. That is not to say that there is no value to Gaddis' analysis. Indeed, at times Gaddis touches on incredibly interesting questions, for instance regarding the role of individual leaders in determining a state's strategic direction. By clothing his analysis in frivolous, cryptic anecdotes that bounce aimlessly across time periods and characters, however, Gaddis ensures that such questions remain unanswered. This is incredibly disappointing, since Gaddis' work on US grand strategy during the Cold War, *Strategies of Containment*, and his seminal biography of George Kennan, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize, remain enduring classics.<sup>16</sup> *On Grand Strategy*, in contrast, appears by comparison a cheap self-help book designed to capitalize on Gaddis' hard-earned scholarly acclaim rather than a serious attempt at scholarship.

### **Does Grand Strategy Matter?**

Although debates about the appropriateness of individual definitions of grand strategy are important, they are far less so than answering the question of whether grand strategy matters for the conduct of foreign policy. In his recent book, *Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy*, Ionut Popescu argues that most academics and policy makers ascribe to what he terms the "grand strategy paradigm," whereby foreign policy success or failure is determined by whether a state possesses the correct grand strategy. In other words, if a state engages in logically sound strategic thinking—and can implement that thinking by linking it to strategic planning, force deployment, and operational action—it is more likely to have a successful foreign policy.

In contrast, however, Popescu believes that this grand strategic faith is woefully misplaced. In his reading of history, US presidents have rarely succeeded by adhering to a single, unchanging strategy. Rather, the most successful foreign policy presidents were flexible enough in their strategic thinking to respond to shifting circumstances and adapt their views and beliefs to the changing world.

Popescu's main theoretical insight is to import the notion of "emergent strategy" from the business world into international relations. In contrast to the grand strategy paradigm, emergent strategy allows strategy to evolve as a process rather than, as with grand strategy, being "fully formulated in advance."<sup>17</sup> Policy makers are therefore free to learn from past experiences and adapt their thinking as they receive new information when embracing an emergent strategy. Having delineated this alternate approach to strategic planning and execution, Popescu then tests whether following a grand strategy or emergent strategy process leads to greater foreign policy success across presidential administrations during and following the Cold War.<sup>18</sup> He concludes, contrary to conventional wisdom, that presidents will generally be more successful with their foreign policy when they follow an emergent strategy as opposed to grand strategy approach.

The argument, as a whole, is sound, and Popescu should be lauded for moving beyond the current debate over which grand strategy the United States should adopt to successfully challenge the grand strategy paradigm itself. Nevertheless, three major issues stand out with his analysis. First, Popescu is skirting a straw man argument in constructing his grand strategy paradigm. The point of differentiation between grand strategy and emergent strategy is clear; the former is reliant on advance deliberation, the latter in improvisational adaptation. It would be unfair, however, to argue that any strategic adaptation is evidence of an emergent strategy and that to qualify as a grand strategy there can be no improvisation or strategic adjustment whatsoever. Popescu, to his credit, recognizes this issue. He therefore notes that "proponents of Grand Strategy of course allow for some degree of learning and adaptation during the course of implementing one's plans."<sup>19</sup> This ecumenical impulse, however, is somewhat lost in his empirical analysis, where the difference between tactical adaptation, which is allowed under the grand strategy paradigm, and strategic adaptation, which is not, risk being conflated.

Second, Popescu's empirical approach leaves a lot to be desired. Although he does a good job of identifying moments where presidential administrations adopt either a grand strategy or emergent strategy approach, Popescu falters somewhat when it comes to identifying whether foreign policy success or failure is the direct result of this choice. Among other issues, it is often difficult to clearly code a president's foreign policy as successful or unsuccessful. How, for instance, should one judge the

success of the US invasion of Afghanistan following September 11th? Although the United States has clearly spent tremendous amounts of money for little strategic benefit, it has also not seen Afghanistan emerge as a new haven for terrorists dedicated to striking at the homeland. The legacy of the Vietnam War also bears re-evaluation. Although clearly a strategic quagmire at the time, the war did not significantly hamper the United States' eventual triumph in the Cold War or preclude the establishment of positive economic and security cooperation in modern times.

Popescu also has a problem when it comes to controlling for alternate explanations for foreign policy successes or failures. Certainly grand versus emergent strategy is not the only factor which will determine whether US foreign policy is successful or not. There could be any number of additional causes, such as US domestic politics, the international balance of power, or the state of military technology to name but a few. His qualitative empirical approach does a poor job of controlling for these factors.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the counterfactuals he uses for his inferences are often unclear. For example, Popescu codes Harry Truman's administration as primarily engaging in an emergent strategy approach. What, however, would a Truman doctrine based on a grand strategy approach looked like? Would it have perceptibly altered the outcome of Truman's foreign policy? There is no obvious answer to either question.

A final point of criticism regarding Popescu's analysis is his reliance on large scale strategic reviews such as National Security Council documents and, more recently, the regularly mandated *National Security Strategy*, for coding the content of an administration's strategic thinking. While these documents are certainly important, it is not clear that they should be the only, or main, source of evidence for an administration's strategy. This is chiefly because these strategic documents oftentimes have little direct influence on resultant strategic planning or operations. The *National Security Strategy*, for instance, primarily influences the material acquisition process rather than operational planning.<sup>21</sup> Popescu, therefore, could have done a better job by relying on alternate sources for his determination of the content of each administration's strategic approach.

Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski share Popescu's distaste for the grand strategy paradigm in their recent book *The End of Grand Strategy*, but they attack it from a different theoretical position. Their major contention is that grand strategies are ineffective because they do not align

with the operational demands that militaries face in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. “The notion of a grand strategy,” they write, “entails the vain search for order and consistency in an ever-more complex world.” More specifically, “the very idea of a single, one-size-fits-all grand strategy has little utility in the twenty-first century. Indeed, it is often counterproductive.”<sup>22</sup> There are two major reasons why this is the case. First, the proliferation of new threats means that a grand strategy can’t guide operations. Second, and related, operational demands will mean that bureaucratic politics will inhibit the successful implementation of a grand strategy.

Empirically, Reich and Dombrowski look to the present rather than the past, centering their critiques in the current operational challenges that the US Navy faces. They therefore analyze how operational demands are misaligned to grand strategic dictates in the Persian Gulf and Arctic Ocean, the execution of multilateral military exercises, the suppression of pirates, and the interdiction of nuclear weapons technology and drug trafficking. While the broad strokes of Reich and Dombrowski’s theoretical argument are thought provoking, it is their descriptive empirical analysis that stands out for its concision and clarity. Any one of their empirical chapters could serve as a high-level primer on the topic it discusses. Their discussion of multilateral exercises in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean, for example, is incredibly well suited as an introduction to contemporary security challenges, such as the disinclination of China from the most recent iteration of the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises.<sup>23</sup>

As helpful as their descriptive analysis is, though, Reich and Dombrowski’s case studies also reveal a potential disconnect regarding the level of their analysis. Grand strategy, as its name implies, is primarily located at the strategic level of analysis. This level is often contrasted with the lower operational level of analysis that forms the basis of their empirics.<sup>24</sup> Grand strategy proponents may be tempted to cry foul when Reich and Dombrowski shift their level of analysis from the strategic level in their theoretical critique to the operational level in their empirical analysis. This criticism, however, would be misplaced, since this disconnect represents Reich and Dombrowski’s core dissatisfaction with the concept of grand strategy. It is precisely the friction between the strategic and operational levels which drives strategic inefficiency and operational dysfunction.



A more potent critique is that Reich and Dombrowski's theory is underdeveloped and essentially untested, in so far as they fail to clearly lay out the consequences of this friction and align them to their empirical cases. For example, the first major consequence they identify, that grand strategies do not provide operational direction, is rendered moot if operational strategy exists to help guide military officers. Conversely, if the major consequence is the difficulty of implementing a grand strategy that conflicts with operational demands, then Reich and Dombrowski should have spent more time identifying what the conflict is and how it plays out in the bureaucratic arena.

A second problem of Reich and Dombrowski's argument is that many of the operational demands that they identify, for instance drug trafficking and piracy, do not represent a direct security threat to the United States. Many grand strategy scholars, such as Barry Posen, John Mearsheimer, and Stephen Walt, argue that such low-level security issues are essentially outside the scope of grand strategy.<sup>25</sup> For them, the fact that grand strategies do not provide operational guidance is a feature, rather than a bug, since it concentrates the military's focus on core, rather than peripheral, security interests. Reich and Dombrowski's argument would therefore be outside the scope of their grand strategic arguments.

This challenge, however, is less serious than it might appear. Reich and Dombrowski can firstly argue that Posen, Mearsheimer, Walt, and others are wrong to restrict grand strategy to core national security interests. Secondly, they can, and do, try to link what might appear to be peripheral strategic interests to core geopolitical conflicts. They note, for example, that the United States might have an interest in maintaining a naval presence in the Persian Gulf as a way to manage the global threat that China poses. A robust presence in the Persian Gulf might be able to prevent the flow of oil to China in any future conflict, limiting its military effectiveness.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, however, these geopolitical linkages remain underdeveloped throughout the course of the book.

## **When Grand Strategy Goes Wrong**

Whereas many authors have argued that foreign policy failure occurs because of a lack of strategic thinking, far fewer have documented the phenomenon of grand strategic blowback, where policy failure occurs despite the otherwise successful implementation of a grand strategy.

Susan Pedersen provides a gripping, if perhaps unconventional, account of how these unforeseen consequences can arise in *The Guardians*, her monumental history of the League of Nations's Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC).

Scholars often see the League of Nations as an abject failure. Not only was it unable to prevent the rise of fascism in Europe in the lead-up to World War II, but it furthermore helped perpetuate colonial injustices across large swaths of the globe. Nevertheless, even as the United States never joined the League, it formed a central part of the grand strategies of the major continental European powers, most notably England and France. Although they may not have been the primary advocates for the League during its initial formulation, the great powers begrudgingly accepted its creation, perhaps believing that they would be able to mold it to serve their needs.

Pedersen convincingly demonstrates that these beliefs were foolish. Rather than an empty shell or a simple reflection of great power interests, the League of Nations, and the PMC in particular, had a strikingly unanticipated yet powerful effect on the conduct of world politics that ran counter to, rather than alongside, the desires of the large European states. Specifically, Pedersen demonstrates how the PMC was able to subtly, but decisively, shift international norms regarding imperial conquest and colonialism, therefore laying the groundwork for the eventual dissolution of the great European empires.

Beginning her story with the infamous Paris Peace Conference that ended the First World War, Pedersen chronicles the mix of idealism and realism that led to the creation of the mandates system, a process whereby fully industrialized states would be tasked with overseeing a mix of former German colonies and the remnants of the defunct Ottoman Empire. Importantly, these mandatory powers would not be allowed to integrate the mandates as direct colonies. Rather, they were tasked with guiding the political and economic development as a benevolent administrator.

Tracing the evolution of the mandates system throughout the interwar period, Pedersen varies her narrative between the operation of the PMC, the formal league apparatus tasked with keeping tabs on the mandates, and the administration of the mandates themselves across the Middle East, Africa, and South Pacific. She can therefore contrast the surprisingly tight cast of former European diplomats and colonial of-

ficials located in Geneva who formed the actual commission with their variable allies and opponents in European colonial ministries and the mandated territories. More than just a chronological narrative, however, Pedersen interjects taut discussions about the common themes the PMC was forced to adjudicate, such as the standing of persons in the mandates to petition the PMC, the role of the mandatory powers in sparking economic development, and the thorny issues of sovereignty and eventual independence. She furthermore makes sure to illustrate these themes with the key historical events that defined relations between indigenous populations in the mandates and the mandatory power, including the Syrian revolt against French authority from 1925 to 1927, the Mau movement in the South Pacific, and the fraught negotiations over the future of Palestine.

Pedersen's work will unquestioningly remain the definitive history of an underappreciated, yet incredibly important, experiment in international governance far into the future. Nevertheless, it is understandable that such a monumental work will itself contain some inconsistencies and problematic areas. First, it is clear that Pedersen is wrestling throughout the course of the book about how to convincingly, yet honestly, argue for the overall impact of the PMC. She settles upon a not wholly satisfying—and decidedly counterintuitive—conclusion. Rather than directly influencing the conduct of imperial powers, she maintains, the PMC had an indirect impact through shifting discourse about imperialism and beliefs about the appropriate relationship between European states and colonized peoples. To complicate this story further, she notes that the members of the PMC themselves were not particularly liberal or anti-imperialist. Rather, their single-minded devotion to strict textual interpretation and fervent, if patronizing, belief in the civilizing mission of mandates led to the unintentional delegitimation of more coercive colonial relationships. Although Pedersen ably demonstrates the effects of the PMC, it is difficult to fully comprehend how it could have such a large effect given that virtually none of the major actors intended for such a result to occur.

The lack of a clear counterfactual to weigh against the PMC's purported effect further complicates matters. What would have been the trajectory of imperialism if the PMC and the mandates system hadn't existed? It certainly seems plausible that European powers would have simply absorbed the mandated territories into their existing empires.

Conversely, however, Pedersen herself acknowledges that much of the effect of the PMC could also be attributed to the existence of the League as a whole and the ideals embedded in its covenant.<sup>27</sup> Even absent a mandate system, therefore, the legitimacy of colonialism may still have decreased during the interwar period. She also notes how nongovernmental organizations such as the Zionist Organization, the Anti-Slavery Society, and various diaspora populations played a central role in shifting public opinion against both the mandate system and colonialism in general. Pedersen could have done a better job of differentiating the mechanisms whereby the PMC, as opposed to these other bodies, impacted global opinion.

Finally, Pedersen's otherwise admirable impartiality can become problematic when she documents some of the worst atrocities visited by mandatory powers upon the populations under their care. For the bulk of her narrative Pedersen adamantly refuses to take sides regarding the morality or immorality of individual actors. She therefore consistently, albeit calmly, details the discriminatory, racist underpinnings of the mandate system but reserves ultimate judgment on it. She furthermore attempts, to the best of her ability, to allow under-represented native views to speak. Her aloof position, however, is challenged when confronted with unquestionably immoral behavior. To cite but one example, Pedersen errs when discussing the practice of British adventurers in the South Pacific indiscriminately killing native islanders and paying for sex with local women. Pedersen attempts to recover the agency of native women, noting that by engaging in transactional sex they discovered that the British were not gods or spirits, but rather men.<sup>28</sup> Interrogating the complexities of these relationships and other imperial interactions is important. Still, although clearly not her intent, Pedersen at times comes dangerously close to minimizing or justifying the violence of the mandate system.

### **Whither Grand Strategy?**

What direction should future research on grand strategy take? The chorus of skeptical scholarly voices is likely to grow as grand strategy advocates have yet to formulate convincing counterarguments. There are also additional inconsistencies in grand strategy arguments that remain underexploited. For instance, the main arguments in the prescriptive debates over US grand strategy remain at best woefully underspecified

and at worst indeterminate. Similar to the problems with Popescu's arguments regarding emergent strategy, theories of grand strategy often omit key causes that could function as alternate explanations for their documented outcomes.

Additionally, grand strategy advocates sometimes curiously censor the types of outcomes that they attempt to explain. For example, advocates of restraint often highlight how adopting their preferred grand strategy will decrease the number of wars the United States will be involved in. Advocates for deep engagement, however, counter that the overall number of wars in the international system will likely increase under restraint, a question where restraint advocates are noticeably silent.<sup>29</sup> By highlighting some implications of individual grand strategies and not others, scholars fail to lay out the full consequences of adopting any individual strategy and make direct comparisons between competing strategies difficult. At worst, this could indicate cherry-picking outcomes that fit their arguments best. Not only does this selective reporting risk charges of bias, but also it conceals that the theories may not be determinate, that is lead to one clear prediction such as success or failure.

Future work on grand strategy should also look toward midrange theories of grand strategy rather than the current emphasis on broad depictions of foreign policy success or failure. Amid a larger move toward midrange theory in the study of international relations,<sup>30</sup> grand strategy scholars would benefit from articulating the relationship between grand strategy and a variety of other aspects of domestic and international politics rather than continually rehashing underdeveloped prescriptive debates. Thomas Oatley's recent work on the relationship between US grand strategy and domestic financial crises represents a prime example of the potential value of such midrange theories.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, grand strategy scholars should better articulate and test the mechanisms that link variation in grand strategy to potential outcomes. For instance, when advocates of restraint argue that a strategy of deep engagement costs the United States more since it incentivizes "cheap-riding" by US allies, they fail to provide convincing evidence either that allies truly are cheap-riding or that the US is spending more as a result. Without adequate counterfactual baselines for either allied or US defense spending, these mechanisms are not fully evidenced.<sup>32</sup> Amidst the potential rise of future great power competitors and an influx of funding for research on grand strategy, debates over the importance of grand

strategy will certainly persist in the foreseeable future. These arguments will be greatly enriched if, rather than simply repeating the consensus view that grand strategy “matters” for the conduct of foreign policy, participants seriously engage with the growing skepticism of the concept. **SSQ**

## Notes

1. See for instance, the lionization of Henry Kissinger long past his governmental prime. A recent profile lauds him as “the most consequential and controversial American foreign-policy maker of the past several decades (or maybe ever),” and he has been a frequent informal advisor to the presidential administration of Donald J. Trump. Jeffrey Goldberg, “The Lessons of Henry Kissinger,” *The Atlantic*, December 2016. See also Niall Ferguson, “The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (October 2015): 134–43. For a contrasting view of Kissinger’s legacy, see the roundtable in *Politico Magazine* entitled “Henry Kissinger: Good or Evil?,” *Politico Magazine*, 10 October 2015.

2. There has been a proliferation of recent scholarly works on grand strategy, such as Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Christopher Hemmer, *American Pendulum: Recurring Debates in U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, “From Hope to Audacity: Appraising Obama’s Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 1 (February 2010): 16–30; Jackson Diehl, “Obama’s Foreign Policy Needs an Update,” *Washington Post*, 22 November 2010; Ryan Lizza, “The Consequentialist,” *New Yorker*, 2 May 2011; Daniel W. Drezner, “Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy?,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (August 2011): 57–68; Peter Beinart, “Obama’s Foreign Policy Doctrine Finally Emerges with ‘Off-Shore Balancing,’” *The Daily Beast*, 28 November 2011; Leslie Gelb, “The Elusive Obama Doctrine,” *The National Interest*, October 2012; Peter D. Feaver, “Not Even One Cheer for Offshore Balancing?,” *Foreign Policy*, 30 April 2013; David Remnick, “Going the Distance,” *The New Yorker*, 27 January 2014; Lee Smith, “As George Kennan Inspired Truman’s Foreign Policy, Now Stephen Walt Inspires Obama’s,” *Tablet*, 5 February 2014; Fred Kaplan, “The Realist,” *Politico Magazine*, April 2014; Gideon Rose, “What Obama Gets Right,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (October 2015): 2–12; Bret Stephens, “What Obama Gets Wrong,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (October 2015): 13–17; Stephen M. Walt, “Don’t Knock Offshore Balancing Until You’ve Tried It,” *Foreign Policy*, 8 December 2016.

4. Peter D. Feaver, “A Grand Strategy Challenge Awaits Trump,” *Foreign Policy*, 29 November 2016; Micah Zenko and Rebecca Friedman Lissner, “Trump Is Going to Regret Not Having a Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Policy*, 13 January 2017; Walter Russell Mead, “The Jacksonian Revolt: American Populism and the Liberal Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 2 (April 2017): 2–7; Hal Brands and Peter D. Feaver, “Trump and Terrorism: U.S. Strategy After ISIS,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 2 (April 2017): 28–36; Jennifer Lind, “Asia’s Other Revisionist Power: Why U.S. Grand Strategy Unnerves China,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 2 (April 2017): 74–82; Matthew Kroenig, “The Case for Trump’s Foreign Policy: The Right People, the Right Positions,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 3 (June 2017): 30–35; Elliott Abrams, “Trump the Tradi-

tionalist: A Surprisingly Standard Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 4 (August 2017): 10–16; Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Micah Zenko, “There Is No Trump Doctrine, and There Will Never Be One,” *Foreign Policy*, 21 July 2017; Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski, “Has a Trumpian Grand Strategy Finally Stepped Into the Light?,” *War on the Rocks* (blog), 29 January 2018; Keren Yarhi-Milo, “After Credibility: American Foreign Policy in the Trump Era,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 1 (February 2018): 68–77; Barry Posen, “The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony: Trump’s Surprising Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (April 2018): 20–27; Charles A. Kupchan, “The Clash of Exceptionalisms: A New Fight over an Old Idea,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (April 2018): 139–49; and Daniel J. Arbess, “Is Trump Following a Grand Mideast Strategy?,” *Wall Street Journal*, 5 June 2018.

5. Other modern presidents, for instance George W. Bush, have also been criticized for their grand strategic thinking. For example see John Lewis Gaddis, “Grand Strategy in the Second Term,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 1 (February 2005): 2–15; Joseph S. Nye, “Transformational Leadership and U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (August 2006): 139–49; Charles A. Kupchan and Peter L. Trubowitz, “Grand Strategy for a Divided America,” *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 4 (August 2007): 71–84; John Lewis Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy of Transformation,” *Foreign Policy*, 10 November 2009; and Melvyn P. Leffler, “9/11 in Retrospect: George W. Bush’s Grand Strategy, Reconsidered,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 5 (October 2011): 33–44. Still, the volume and vitriol of grand strategy commentary seems to have increased exponentially during the Obama and Trump administrations.

6. In terms of arguments in favor of a grand strategy of “restraint” or “offshore balancing,” see A. Trevor Thrall and Benjamin H. Friedman, eds. *US Grand Strategy in the 21st Century The Case for Restraint* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 95 (August 2016): 70–83; Barry R. Posen, “Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (2013): 105–16; Campbell Craig, Benjamin H. Friedman, Brendan Rittenhouse Green, Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Debating American Engagement: The Future of U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 181–99; and Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, “Come Home America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Face of Temptation,” *International Security* 21, no. 4 (1997): 5–48. For criticisms of restraint and arguments for “deep engagement” or “liberal hegemony,” see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016); Hal Brands, “Fools Rush Out? The Flawed Logic of Offshore Balancing,” *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 7–28; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Don’t Come Home America: The Case against Retrenchment,” *International Security* 37, no. 3 (Winter 2012/13): 7–51; and Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, “Lean Forward: In Defense of American Engagement,” *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (2013): 116–30.

7. Beyond the reviewed works, other scholarship in this camp includes Milevski, *Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*; David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs, “Delusions of Grand Strategy: The Problem with Washington’s Planning Obsession,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 6 (December 2015): 109–16; and Jordan Tama, “Does Strategic Planning Matter? The Outcomes of U.S. National Security Reviews,” *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 4 (2015/2016): 735–65. For an earlier argument, see Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 5–50.

## *Does Grand Strategy Matter?*

8. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 7, 13.
9. Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy*, 3.
10. Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27–57.
11. For a classic argument regarding concept stretching, see Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 4 (December 1970): 1033–53.
12. John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 21.
13. Like Hal Brands' definition cited above, Colin Dueck generalizes Posen's security-centric definition of grand strategy to include "the prioritization of foreign policy goals" writ large, including "the identification of existing and potential resources, and the selection of a plan or road map that uses those resources to meet those goals." Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1. Similarly, Robert Art thinks a grand strategy "tells a nation's leaders what goals they should aim for" without specifying that these goals must be security related, Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1. On how strategic beliefs can adhere to individual leaders, see Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).
14. Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, xii.
15. Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
16. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1982); and John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).
17. Ionut Popescu, *Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 9.
18. This includes all presidential administrations except John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter. Popescu notes that his "selection of cases aimed to examine critical moments of strategic change when an administration, either in a designed or emergent manner, significantly altered the course of US strategy in a positive or negative way. The four presidents not examined here, in my judgment, do not fit this bill." Popescu, *Emergent Strategy*, 21.
19. Popescu, *Emergent Strategy*, 7.
20. Popescu could have benefited from a more structured qualitative research design, such as those described in Sherry Zaks, "Relationships Among Rivals (RAR): A Framework for Analyzing Contending Hypotheses in Process Tracing," *Political Analysis* 25, no. 3 (July 2017): 344–62.
21. For an analysis of the most recent national security and defense strategies, see Kelly A. Grieco, "The 2018 National Defense Strategy: Continuity and Competition," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 3–8; and W. Michael Guillot, "2017 National Security Strategy Perspective," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 22–24.
22. Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski, *The End of Grand Strategy: US Maritime Operations in the 21st Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).
23. For background, see Helene Cooper, "U.S. Disinvites China from Military Exercise Amid Rising Tensions," *New York Times*, 23 May 2018; and Travis Sharp, "The Pragmatist's Case for Keeping China in RIMPAC," *War on the Rocks* (blog), 1 June 2018.



24. Studies of military effectiveness, for instance, often employ this bifurcation, for example, Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman, "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations," *International Security* 11, no. 1 (Summer 1986): 37–71.
25. Posen, *Restraint*; and Mearsheimer and Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing."
26. Reich and Dombrowski, *End of Grand Strategy*, 61–64.
27. Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 232.
28. Pedersen, *Guardians*, 312–4.
29. See the contrast in the arguments about war occurrence and US involvement in Posen, *Restraint*, versus those in Brooks and Wohlforth, *America Abroad*.
30. David A. Lake, "Theory Is Dead, Long Live Theory: The End of the Great Debates and the Rise of Eclecticism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 567–87.
31. Thomas Oatley, *The Political Economy of American Hegemony: Buildups, Booms, and Busts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
32. For a similar argument, see Alexander Kirss, "How Cheap Are Cheap-Riding Allies?," *Charged Affairs*, 10 October 2016.

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