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# WHAT IS GRAND STRATEGY? SWEEPING A CONCEPTUAL MINEFIELD

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Amidst acute geopolitical flux, the study of grand strategy is necessary for scholars and strategists alike. As a framework for scholarship, it trains attention on highest-order questions of international relations: why, how, and for what purposes states employ their national power, including the crucible of military force. For policymakers, grand strategy defines a nation's international role, guides the alignment of means and ends, and serves as a lodestar for discrete foreign policy decisions. Yet, despite its importance, the proliferation of academic and policy-analytical work on grand strategy has left the field disjointed, conceptually inconsistent, and difficult to navigate. This article resolves that confusion by distinguishing between three component research agendas within the grand strategy literature: those that treat grand strategy as a variable, process, and blueprint. The "grand strategy as variable" agenda provides a prism through which academics may study the origins of state behavior, with particular attention to the perennial question of how agency and structure interact to produce grand-strategic outcomes. The "grand strategy as process" agenda foregrounds the importance of grand strategizing, whether as a governmental strategic-planning process or as a more generic mode of decision-making. Finally, the "grand strategy as blueprint" agenda proffers broad visions in hopes of influencing future governmental behavior. Identifying these component research agendas and placing them in dialogue yields important policy insights and highlights ripe opportunities for future research.

Does the United States have a grand strategy? Scholars, analysts, and policymakers vigorously debate this question, and for good reason: The answer has profound implications for American foreign policy, both in theory and in practice. After nearly three decades in which overwhelming grand strategic continuity rendered the “Kennan Sweepstakes” little more than an inside-the-Beltway parlor game, Washington faces raised

geopolitical stakes. The unipolar moment is undoubtedly over, and the United States must now advance its interests as the most powerful state in an increasingly multipolar international system characterized by sharpening competition among great powers. Meanwhile, social, political, and economic fractures at home create a faulty foundation for a renewed grand-strategic consensus.[1]

While the election of Donald Trump did not create these challenges, his presidency has exacerbated them through two years of policy uncertainty, rhetorical whiplash, and strategic drift. Despite some of the chief executive's long-standing proclivities — antagonism toward free trade, antipathy for American alliances, admiration for strongmen — these preferences have not always served as a reliable guide to his administration's policy.[2] Instead, the Trump doctrine is best characterized by its ethos: a "tactical transactionalism" in pursuit of apparent foreign policy "wins";[3] a chauvinistic militarism;[4] and an assertion that "We're America, Bitch."[5]

In short, the need for an American grand strategy is great at the very moment when its feasibility is diminished. There is thus no better time to revisit the vast literature on grand strategy — a field that spans multiple academic disciplines as well as the realm of policy analysis — and consider how it might help extract the United States from its grand-strategic deficit.[6] An assessment of this literature's accumulated wisdom yields decidedly mixed results. Grand-strategy scholarship is rightly critiqued for employing its animating concept inconsistently, which has hindered the advancement of social scientific attempts to "describe, explain, and predict" the causes and effects of grand strategy.[7] Yet, focusing unduly on the incoherence of the grand-strategy literature obscures the coalescence of its three component research agendas: those that treat grand strategy as a variable, process, and blueprint.

Each of these agendas offers a distinct lens for scholars and practitioners of international relations. The "grand strategy as variable" agenda provides a prism through which academics may study the origins of state behavior, with particular attention to the perennial question of how agency and structure interact to produce grand-strategic outcomes. Far from a theoretical abstraction, this question has immediate relevance for policy practitioners who seek to understand other states' grand strategies as well as influence the trajectory of their own. The "grand strategy as process" agenda foregrounds the importance of grand *strategizing*, whether as a governmental strategic-planning process or as a more generic mode of decision-making. In training attention on formulation, this line of inquiry assumes both that grand strategy matters and that individuals can influence its design; consequently, it seeks to extract procedural principles that maximize the likelihood of "good" grand strategy. Finally, the "grand strategy as blueprint" agenda proffers broad visions in hopes of influencing future governmental behavior. These prescriptions may entail defenses of the status quo or — more often — recommendations for redirecting the ship of state.

Identifying these component research agendas and placing them in dialogue highlights ripe opportunities for future research. Despite inquiry into the origins of grand strategy, historical case

1 Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "The Day after Trump: American Strategy for a New International Order," *Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 7–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1445353.

2 For distillations of these proclivities: Thomas Wright, "Trump's 19th Century Foreign Policy," *Politico Magazine*, Jan. 20, 2016, http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-foreign-policy-213546; Colin Kahl and Hal Brands, "Trump's Grand Strategic Train Wreck," *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 31, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/31/trumps-grand-strategic-train-wreck/. On the gap between the president's views and his administration's policy statements, particularly the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, see: Peter Beinart, "Trump Doesn't Seem to Buy His Own National Security Strategy," *Atlantic*, Dec. 19, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/nss-trump-principled-realism/548741/; Hal Brands, "Trump Doesn't Believe in His Own Foreign Policy. Does That Matter?" *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 16, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/16/trump-doesnt-believe-in-his-own-foreign-policy-does-that-matter/; Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "The National Security Strategy Is Not a Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Dec. 19, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-12-19/national-security-strategy-not-strategy.

3 Micah Zenko and Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "Trump Is Going to Regret Not Having a Grand Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 13, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/13/trump-is-going-to-regret-not-having-a-grand-strategy/; Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Micah Zenko, "There Is No Trump Doctrine, and There Will Never Be One," *Foreign Policy*, July 21, 2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/21/there-is-no-trump-doctrine-and-there-will-never-be-one-grand-strategy/.

4 Stephen Wertheim, "Quit Calling Donald Trump an Isolationist. He's Worse Than That," *Washington Post*, Feb. 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/02/17/quit-calling-donald-trump-an-isolationist-its-an-insult-to-isolationism/.

5 Jeffrey Goldberg, "A Senior White House Official Defines the Trump Doctrine: 'We're America, Bitch,'" *Atlantic*, June 11, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/a-senior-white-house-official-defines-the-trump-doctrine-were-america-bitch/562511/.

6 The term "grand strategic deficit" is borrowed from John Lewis Gaddis: John Lewis Gaddis, "What Is Grand Strategy?" (Karl von der Heyden Distinguished Lecture, Duke University, Feb. 26, 2009).

7 Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 27–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073; Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, and Simon Reich, "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay," *Security Studies* (2018): 58–86, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2018.1508631.

studies, and examination of grand-strategic planning, the literature bears too little insight into the determinants of effectiveness. What distinguishes successful grand strategies from those that have foundered, whether in their encounters with international or domestic hurdles? And while international obstacles are well theorized, domestic political constraints are much less so. Although Trump's election initially appeared to be a death knell for American global leadership, public support for internationalism has actually increased since he took office. How will Trump's presidency and the highly polarized political environment over which he presides shape the future of U.S. grand strategy — including the likelihood that a novel blueprint will be adopted? Lastly, as this article amply demonstrates, the field focuses overwhelmingly on American grand strategy. Although the United States is certainly a crucial case, all three research agendas would benefit from a wider international aperture.

The literature's faults, gaps, and ambiguities notwithstanding, this article concludes with a defense of the continued study of grand strategy. Studying grand strategy trains academics' and analysts' sights on the highest-order questions of international relations: why, how, and for what purposes states employ their national power, including the crucible of military force. For academics, this focus counterbalances growing tendencies toward narrowly construed, methodologically myopic, or policy-irrelevant research in political science and history. For policymakers, grand strategy persists as an essential enterprise. Even if grand strategy is seldom discussed as such in the White House Situation Room, an overarching strategic vision defines a nation's international role, guides the alignment of means and ends, and serves as a lodestar for discrete foreign policy decisions. Consequently, strategists within and outside the ivory tower share the task of advancing the study of grand strategy, so as to better inform both scholarship and policy. This task begins by clarifying the meaning of grand strategy and distinguishing among the vast literature's component research agendas.

## What Is 'Grand Strategy'?

The study of grand strategy constitutes a rich and growing literature. Yet a confounding breadth of subjects fall under what is nominally a single conceptual umbrella.[8] In many cases, works on grand strategy talk past each other, use definitional quibbles to invalidate competing ideas, and define alternative explanations selectively. Notably, these divergences occur despite a remarkable degree of agreement over the basic definition of grand strategy. Indeed, two complementary definitions are cited by nearly every major recent study of grand strategy. The first is from Paul Kennedy and draws on earlier work by Edward Mead Earle and Basil Liddell Hart[9] to contend, "The crux of grand strategy lies therefore in *policy*, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests."[10] The second is by Barry Posen, who draws on a similar strategic tradition and offers an even more succinct definition: Grand strategy is "a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself."[11]

These definitions co-exist comfortably without intrinsic contradictions. Their complementarity is well demonstrated by Hal Brands' elaboration of the conception of grand strategy in his study of the subject:

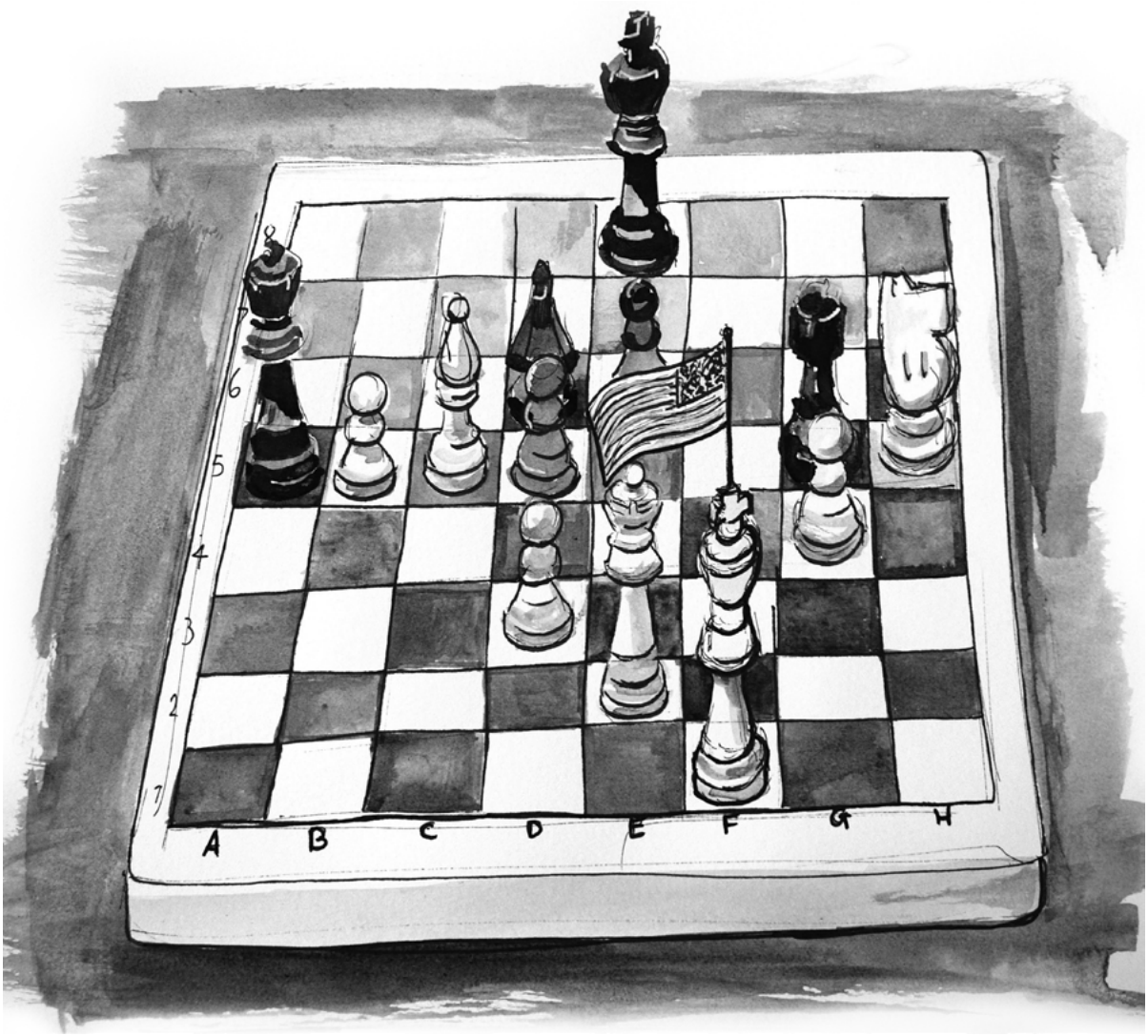
> At its best, then, a grand strategy represents an integrated scheme of interests, threats,

8 For in-depth conceptual analyses, see: Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy.'"

9 According to Earle: "Strategy is the art of controlling and utilizing the resources of a nation — or a coalition of nations — including its armed forces, to the end that its vital interests shall be effectively promoted and secured against enemies, actual, potential, or merely presumed. The highest type of strategy — sometimes called grand strategy — is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory." Edward Mead Earle, "Introduction," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, ed. Edward Mead Earle, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944), viii. For his part, Liddell Hart offered this definition: "Grand strategy should both calculate and develop the economic resources and manpower of nations in order to sustain the fighting services. Also the moral resources — for to foster the peoples' willing spirit is often as important as to possess the more concrete forms of power. ... Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy — which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent's will... It should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace — of its security and prosperity." See: Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 322.

10 Paul Kennedy, "Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition," in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Paul Kennedy (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

11 Posen proffers a slightly different formulation in *Restraint*: "A grand strategy is a nation-state's theory about how to produce security for itself." Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.




> resources, and policies. It is the conceptual framework that helps nations determine where they want to go and how they ought to get there; it is the theory, or logic, that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world.[12]

Accordingly, grand strategy is, as Nina Silove argues, long term in its vision, holistic in its treatment of all instruments of national power, and important in its focus on the most consequential interests.[13]

These attributes distinguish grand strategy from its narrower cognates — strategy and military strategy — as well as from foreign policy and statecraft. The concept of strategy has a long genealogy: Its ancient precursors date to Thucydides and Polybius. First appearing in European military analyses in the late 18th century, it evolved from an exclusively military character to incorporate political objectives after World War I. Strategy then assumed a general meaning over the course of the 20th century.[14] "Military strategy" has come to occupy the historical domain of "strategy" in referring exclusively to the employment of military force: In Liddell Hart's words, "[T]he art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill

12 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), 3.

13 Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" 19–23.

14 Lawrence Freedman, "The Meaning of Strategy, Part I: The Origins," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 1 (November 2017), https://tnsr.org/2017/11/meaning-strategy-part-origin-story/#_ftnref9; Lawrence Freedman, "The Meaning of Strategy, Part II: The Objectives," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 2 (February 2018), https://tnsr.org/2018/02/meaning-strategy-part-ii-objectives/#_ftnref126; Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought.*

the ends of policy."[15] Strategy, by contrast, is a generic term without clear temporal, instrumental, or substantive dimensions; rather, it refers to the process of careful marshalling of means to achieve desired ends in pursuits as diverse as football, poker, and marketing.[16] Nor is "grand strategy" synonymous with foreign policy and statecraft. Foreign policy lacks the time horizon and emphasis on vital interests intrinsic to grand strategy: The United States may, for example, have a foreign policy toward Bolivia that is short-term and of minor consequence.[17] Finally, statecraft — though rarely defined — typically refers to the practical conduct of international relations, with a focus on tools and implementation.[18]

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Even as most scholars who research and write about grand strategy agree on its basic definition, they employ the concept in markedly different ways, each associated with a component research agenda within the grand-strategy literature. The "grand strategy as variable" camp seeks to develop analytical arguments that explain the origins of states' grand strategies and account for their change over time. The "grand strategy as process" camp sees the strategic planning process as the essence of grand strategy and focuses on the improvement and/or generalization of such processes. Finally, a "grand strategy as blueprint" camp outlines prescriptive broad visions for grand strategy, particularly in the United States.

Of course, this article is not the first attempt to bring clarity to the study of grand strategy.[19] While most review the literature without clearly delineating the various meanings of grand strategy, Silove's recent contribution presents an alternative tripartite typology focused on "theories of the concept of grand strategy." Based on a careful intellectual history, Silove describes how scholars often subtly diverge on whether grand strategy refers to detailed plans ("grand plans"), general organizing principles ("grand principles"), or emergent patterns of state behavior ("grand behavior").[20] This contribution, though important, is primarily methodological: Plans, principles, and behavior are distinguished by the standard of evidence required to establish the existence of grand strategy. What's more, these three categories are not easily distinguished from each other in practice, as Silove readily admits:

> Grand plans specify ends and the means by which to achieve them in detail. Grand principles do the same in more general terms. Grand behavior is a pattern in the relative allocation of means to certain ends, regardless of whether that pattern is the result of a grand plan, a grand principle, or some other factor.[21]

In more concrete terms, this means that America's early Cold War grand strategy was simultaneously animated by grand principles

15 Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 321. On the distinction between military strategy and grand strategy, see: Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" 19–21. Nevertheless, this distinction can be muddled by scholars who operationalize grand strategy as military strategy; Balzacq et al. call this the "classicist tradition of grand strategy." Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich, "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay," 11–14.

16 An exception to the means-ends conception of strategy is that used by game theorists. When Thomas Schelling employed the word "strategy," he clarified: "The term 'strategy' is taken, here, from the *theory of games* … The term is intended to focus on the interdependence of the adversaries' decisions and on their expectations about each other's behavior. This is not the military usage." Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 3 fn 1.

17 Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" 21.

18 Statecraft lacks a widely accepted definition but is frequently invoked in the context of particular instruments of national power, such as "economic statecraft."

19 For example: Kennedy, "Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition"; Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?*; William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought.*

20 For instance: the "grand plans" camp is exemplified by the work of military historians such as Paul Kennedy and Basil Liddell Hart, as well as iconic government documents like National Security Council Paper 68 (NSC68) and Eisenhower's Project Solarium; "grand principles" are manifest in studies that treat containment as a grand strategy, those that examine the strategic ideas of seminal leaders like John Quincy Adams, and the prescriptive literature on American grand strategy; and "grand patterns" are instantiated by the work of particular scholars, including Edward Luttwak and Christopher Layne, who are united less by their subject than their use of evidence. Silove even points to different conceptualizations of grand strategy within the oeuvre of a single prominent scholar, Hal Brands. Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" 8.

21 Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" 19.

(containment), detailed in grand plans (NSC-68), and manifested in grand behavior (the Korean War, defense budgets, and so on). These three methods of measuring grand strategy as a phenomenon may assist in answering different research questions, but they do not in themselves qualify as distinct research agendas.[22] Despite its methodological contribution, therefore, the three meanings of grand strategy Silove identifies provide little help for those seeking to organize the major debates in the current grand-strategy literature. Instead, analysts will find greater value in recognizing the thematic coherence in a field that frequently coalesces around similar research puzzles — a task better served by the variable-process-blueprint typology developed here.

## Agenda 1: Grand Strategy as Variable

Social scientists have produced a vast literature that treats grand strategy as a subject to be explained — that is, as a dependent variable. Scholars in this vein focus predominantly on the origins of grand strategy: theorizing where grand strategy comes from and the conditions under which it might change. This emphasis trains scholars' attention on cases in which states (usually great powers) engage in major strategic pivots. Consider the most salient 20th-century examples: Why did Japan turn toward autarky in the late 1930s?[23] Why did Germany seek to overturn the European order through expansionism in the years leading up to World War II?[24] Why did Britain abandon its initial strategy of appeasement in favor of a more confrontational posture toward Nazi Germany?[25] Why did Russia turn toward "new thinking" in the 1980s?[26]

Within the international relations literature, theories of grand strategy track closely with broader debates about whether the sources of state behavior lie at the international, domestic, or individual level. Scholars debate the role of the international environment in determining states' grand strategies, as compared with domestic considerations such as public opinion, bureaucratic politics, strategic culture, or political leadership that may explain why states respond differently when they face similar international circumstances. Distinguishing between arguments about how grand strategy is generated is more than an exercise in rehashing the contest between the "isms" of international relations theory; rather, it reveals practically relevant assumptions about whether grand strategy is an output or a tool. If grand strategy is merely an output, there is little room for strategic choice. If future Chinese grand strategy were determined by Beijing's relative power position, it matters little whether the nation is guided by Xi Jinping or another leader. Similarly, American grand strategy would dramatically reorient only if international conditions change, notwithstanding Trump's heterodox designs. If grand strategy is a tool, however, individual agency may change the course of history by developing and implementing grand strategies that transcend structural constraints — or prove ill-equipped to surmount them.

According to the structural-realist perspective, grand strategy is essentially the conveyer belt between systemic incentives and state behavior — or, an output. When John Mearsheimer contends that states "are aware of their external environment and they think strategically about how to survive in it,"[27] he is referring to a process of automatic adaption according to a predictable pattern of state behavior. Grand strategy changes when the international system changes. The act

22 Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" 25–26.

23 Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 122–42; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 112–53; Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

24 Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 66–112; Legro, *Rethinking the World*, 84–122; Dennis E. Showalter, "Total War for Limited Objectives: An Interpretation of Germany Grand Strategy," in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Kennedy, 105–25; Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); John S. Duffield, *World Power Forsaken: Political Culture, International Institutions, and German Security Policy After Unification* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). Glaser identifies Nazi Germany's bid for power as a crucial case: Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 221–27.

25 E.g., Stacie E. Goddard, "The Rhetoric of Appeasement: Hitler's Legitimation and British Foreign Policy, 1938–39," *Security Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 95–130, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2015.1001216; Arthur A. Stein, "Domestic Constraints, Extended Deterrence, and the Incoherence of Grand Strategy: The United States, 1938–1950," in *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, ed. Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), chap. 3.

26 Condoleezza Rice, "The Evolution of Soviet Grand Strategy," in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Paul Kennedy, 145–67; Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 212–55; Legro, *Rethinking the World*, 142–60. Matthew Evangelista, "Internal and External Constraints on Grand Strategy: The Soviet Case," in *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, ed. Rosecrance and Stein; Chris Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

27 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 31.

of *strategizing* has no place in this view of grand strategy. Because grand strategy derives directly from the structure of the international system, any apparently intentional acts of grand-strategic articulation are merely epiphenomenal — in other words, they may reflect underlying factors but have no independent influence on observed outcomes.

Indeed, structural-realist, or neorealist, theories of international relations emphasize the role of the international system in determining states' grand strategies. Material attributes of the system — most importantly, the distribution of power — create pressures that "shape and shove" strategic choice.[28] For offensive realists like Mearsheimer, the anarchic, self-help nature of the international system yields constant great-power competition, as each major state seeks to maximize its share of world power. While all major powers desire hegemony, they may temporarily adopt strategies oriented to maintain the status quo when "the costs and risks of trying to shift the balance of power are too great, forcing great powers to wait for more favorable circumstances."[29] Defensive realists also treat the international system as determinative, but they describe the attributes of the system with more nuance and make more sanguine assumptions about states' default grand-strategic modes, emphasizing the quest for security rather than hegemony.[30]

The fundamental problem with structural theories of grand strategy, of course, is that they explain very little. As Aaron Friedberg has noted, "structural considerations provide a useful point from which to begin analysis of international politics rather than a place at which to end it."[31] A great power may seek security or hegemony in countless ways. Faced with a rising challenger, for instance, a state may initiate a preventive war, but it may also cooperate or even retrench.[32] Much depends on how states perceive their international environment and the domestic pressures that condition their response. Considering these domestic dimensions can clarify how states perceive the structure of their external environments, as well as the conditions under which grand strategy may change even as structural circumstances remain the same. Understanding this variation is important, and interesting, for scholars and strategists alike.

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Consequently, most recent work on grand strategy incorporates state-level attributes when explaining its origins. Neoclassical-realist scholarship accepts the importance of broad strategic parameters set by the international system but incorporates domestic-level factors into explanations of states' particular grand-strategic choices.[33] Typically characterized as "intervening variables" that mediate the translation of systemic incentives into state behavior, domestic variables take one of two forms.

The first is domestic politics. Whether a function

28 Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 24, https://doi.org/10.1162/016228800560372.

29 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2. For additional articulations of offensive realism: Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Peter Liberman, "The Spoils of Conquest," *International Security* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 125–53, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539099.

30 Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167–214, https://doi.org/10.2307/2009958; Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 1987); Snyder, *Myths of Empire*; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 1999); Charles L. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994): 50–90, https://doi.org/10.2307/2539079.

31 Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 8.

32 Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, "Graceful Decline? The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 7–44, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/isec_a_00034.

33 Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25054068; Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

of state capacity,[34] party preferences,[35] or sectoral interests,[36] this view of grand strategy is only moderately more dynamic than the structural one. By allowing the possibility of choice from a menu of grand-strategic options,[37] these theories seem to create greater space for agency — but once domestic-political variables are introduced as intervening or interacting forces, grand strategy regains its status as an output. In explaining why American grand strategy transitioned from selective engagement during the Bill Clinton administration to offensive war in the George W. Bush administration, for example, Peter Trubowitz does not credit distinct presidential designs. Instead, he argues, the difference lay in domestic politics: Although both Clinton and Bush were president at times of few geopolitical constraints, Clinton's Democratic Party profited politically from investing in social services (butter over guns) while Bush's Republican Party benefited from defense spending (guns over butter).[38] Grand strategy emerged from the crucible of domestic and international pressures rather than leadership by the president or other senior policymakers.

A second type of neoclassical-realist theory emphasizes the intervening variable of strategic culture, a subject of increasing attention among scholars of grand strategy. Some studies treat strategic culture as an essentially fixed mediator between international constraints and grand-strategic outcomes. Evaluating the American case, for example, Christopher Layne points to "Open Door economic and ideological expansion" in explaining why the United States has continuously pursued a grand strategy of "extraregional hegemony" since World War II, and Patrick Porter attributes the continuity of American post-Cold War grand strategy to a primacist monoculture among Washington's foreign policy establishment.[39] These are essentially theories of continuity; they provide little traction in explaining the conditions for change.[40]

A more dynamic approach to the American case introduces multiple strategic cultures and examines how they compete with each other for influence over grand strategy — whether the rival poles of Woodrow Wilson's idealism and Theodore Roosevelt's realpolitik, Enlightenment rationalism and Christian theology, or classical liberalism and the "limited liability" foreign policy tradition, as characterized by Henry Kissinger, Walter McDougall, and Colin Dueck, respectively.[41] This genre of argument intriguingly highlights the rhyme and repetition that so frequently characterize grand-strategy debates in the United States.[42] Moreover, it acknowledges the fundamental importance of international conditions without succumbing to determinism: The United States' historical repertoire provides multiple narratives for leaders or strategists to draw upon while also holding out the possibility of influential new formulations. Nevertheless, as Sara Plana argues, strategic cultural theories of grand strategy remain underdeveloped and often unfalsifiable. More work is needed to identify the conditions required for change between strategic subcultures,[43] as well as the mechanisms by which culture translates into grand-strategic outcomes.[44]

Finally, historians — and only rarely political scientists — attribute the origins of grand strategy

34 Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*.

35 Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy*.

36 Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 2007).

37 I borrowed this metaphor from Gideon Rose: Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 147.

38 Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy*, 97–105, 120–28.

39 Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 2007); Patrick Porter, "Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment," *International Security* 42, no. 4 (2018): 9–46, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00311.

40 Porter traces the "habit of primacy" to the final years of World War II and argues that a primacy grand strategy was "interrupted only occasionally" since then. Porter, "Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment," 9. Layne traces "strategic internationalism" to "at least 1940." Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, 7.

41 Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (Simon & Schuster, 1994), chap. 2; Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*. Walter Russell Mead goes beyond Kissinger's dichotomy to propose four American traditions of grand strategy: Wilsonian, Hamiltonian, Jacksonian, and Jeffersonian. Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001). John Gaddis also identifies continuities in American grand-strategic culture, though in less taxonomic terms: John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

42 Christopher Hemmer, *American Pendulum: Recurring Debates in U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 2015); Stephen Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

43 Although Legro frames his argument in terms of ideas about international society rather than strategic culture, his work is a model for future study in this area: Legro, *Rethinking the World*.

44 Sara Plana, "Making Sense of Grand Strategy," paper presented at the 2018 International Studies Association annual convention, 12–14.

to the designs of individuals.[45] Such works vary in the relative weight they attribute to structure or agency. Some scholars take international structure as the starting point, which then filters through leaders' perspectives and preferences. This view is characteristic of Hal Brands' work, which explores the interaction between international dynamics and the worldviews of American presidents and their advisers in the post-World War II period.[46] Others focus more intently on the grand-strategic interventions of individuals. These scholars acknowledge international constraints but contend that strategists can see through structural forces in crafting their grand designs. John Gaddis' discussion of George Kennan's development of containment exemplifies this view, as does his recent work celebrating the grand-strategic triumphs of leaders such as Elizabeth I and Abraham Lincoln. Similarly, Charles Edel portrays John Quincy Adams as an architect of American grand strategy in the early decades of the republic.[47]

What insights does the "grand strategy as variable" research agenda offer to scholars and policymakers? For scholars, this research amounts to less than the sum of its parts. These studies tend to develop their own approach to operationalizing and measuring grand strategy.[48] While some studies conceive of grand strategy as a state's approach to international order or the balance of power, others operationalize grand strategy at the level of specific foreign policy choices.[49] This ad hoc treatment makes it difficult to competitively test rival theories against each other and, in turn, accumulate knowledge about where grand strategy comes from and why it changes. For policymakers, this sub-literature provides alternate lenses through which to assess the origins of other states' grand strategies, as well as the conditions under which allies and adversaries may pursue different tacks in the future. It also foregrounds the structural constraints that grand strategists face at the international and domestic levels, emphasizing the importance of designing grand strategies that account realistically for such limitations, rather than wishing them away. The balance of evidence indicates that it is these constraints — more so than the blue-sky creativity of virtuosic policy intellectuals — that determine a nation's grand-strategic course, though individuals do occasionally distinguish themselves by designing grand strategies that intelligently navigate this bounded pathway.

## Agenda 2: Grand Strategy as Process

A second research agenda treats grand strategy as a process rather than a subject. This perspective conceives of grand strategy primarily in terms of its mode of formulation and only secondarily — in some cases, not at all — in the substance of the strategy itself. By focusing on decision-making processes, these works reject structural determinism and embrace the possibility that choices made by individuals and organizations can alter a state's grand-strategic course. One group sees grand strategy as a "common sense" method of decision-making and looks to history for universal principles applicable to a wide range of pursuits. Another sub-literature equates strategic planning with grand strategy, focusing primarily on the United States.

The broadest conception of grand strategy as process entails the generalization of grand strategy as a generic method of leadership and decision-making.[50] This school of thought echoes the tradition of 19th-century theorists who sought to develop universal principles of military

45 Among political scientists who study leaders, only Dan Byman and Ken Pollack attribute grand-strategic choice to individuals. Others usefully develop the causal mechanisms linking leaders' preferences and attributes with state behavior but focus on more narrowly construed dimensions of foreign policy. Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring 2001): 107–46; Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 2011); Jessica L.P. Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 2014); Michael C. Horowitz, Allan C. Stam, and Cali M. Ellis, *Why Leaders Fight* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

46 Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?*; 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).

47 John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin, 2018); Charles N. Edel, *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* (Cambrdige, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

48 For elaborations on this problem, see: Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich, "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay"; Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy'"; Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought.*

49 I call these the first- and second-order dimensions of grand strategy. See: Rebecca Lissner, "Rethinking Grand Strategic Change," paper presented at the 2018 International Studies Association annual convention.

50 Stephen Wertheim, "Grand Strategy: An American Power Politics," in *Rethinking Grand Strategy*, ed. Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight-Nichols, and Andrew Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

strategy.[51] By studying great commanders, these writers distilled genius into teachable guidelines, transforming strategy from an art to a science. Today, this tradition is most closely associated with Yale's Grand Strategy program. Gaddis, a don of the Yale program, encapsulates this approach:

> Grand strategy is the calculated relationship of means to large ends. It's about how one uses whatever one has to get to wherever it is one wants to go. Our knowledge of it derives chiefly from the realm of war and statecraft. ... But grand strategy need not apply only to war and statecraft: it's potentially applicable to any endeavor in which means must be deployed in the pursuit of important ends.[52]

Careful study of grand strategy can thus yield principles relevant to a wide range of pursuits; this approach amounts to "teaching common sense."[53]

By generalizing insights from military and diplomatic history, the common-sense school mirrors the transformation of strategy from a specifically military term into a generic one. But while scholars and strategists can surely extract universal lessons from military and diplomatic history, it does not necessarily follow that it is possible to have a grand strategy of just anything. Rather, to stretch the concept in this manner is to render it indistinguishable from the contemporary concept of strategy. Consider the similarities — in both content and level of abstraction — between advice offered to decision-makers by business strategist Richard Rumelt and by Gaddis, a scholar of grand strategy. Where Gaddis advises against directly opposing an adversary's strengths and "respecting constraints," Rumelt cautions strategists to "define the challenge competitively" and avoid "failure to recognize or take seriously the fact that resources are scarce."[54] Each of these insights is worthy and wise, but following them entails acting strategically, not *grand* strategically. To retain its meaning and avoid the conceptual muddle that plagues its sister concept, grand strategy must remain substantively anchored in the realm of statecraft.

By contrast, another cluster of scholarship and policy analysis conceives of grand strategy in terms of strategic planning. Echoing Dwight Eisenhower's maxim about planning, for this sub-literature, grand *strategizing* is everything. Among military theorists, grand strategy has long-standing associations with planning: Basil Liddell Hart, in his original definition, explains the role of grand strategy as "to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, toward the attainment of the political object of the war."[55] Despite some critics' contention that decision-making assumes a qualitatively different cast under conditions of peace rather than war, the extrapolation of grand strategy to include peacetime strategic planning has become common.[56] Scholars and policy analysts in this camp typically conceive of grand strategy as the method by which a government articulates its national security strategy. Debates about strategic planning in the U.S. government offer a prime example, given the enormity of American global interests and national capabilities, but these dynamics are by no means exclusive to the United States or to great powers generally.[57]

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Often, debates about grand-strategic planning in Washington center on the congressionally mandated national security strategy. Much of the literature on the national security strategy focuses

51 Freedman, "The Meaning of Strategy, Part I: The Origins"; Freedman, "The Meaning of Strategy, Part II: The Objectives."

52 Gaddis, "What Is Grand Strategy?"

53 Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Linda Kulman, *Teaching Common Sense: The Grand Strategy Program at Yale University* (Prospecta Press, 2016).

54 Rumelt cited in: Walter A. McDougall, "Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?" Foreign Policy Research Institute's *Telegram*, April 13, 2010, https://www.fpri.org/article/2010/04/can-the-united-states-do-grand-strategy/; Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, chap. 2.

55 Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 321–22.

56 Timothy Andrews Sayle, "Defining and Teaching Grand Strategy," Foreign Policy Research Institute's *Telegram*, Jan. 15, 2011, https://www.fpri.org/article/2011/01/defining-and-teaching-grand-strategy/.

57 On strategic planning in a cross-national context, see: William I. Hitchcock, Melvyn P. Leffler, and Jeffrey W. Legro, eds., *Shaper Nations: Strategies for a Changing World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

on the utility of mobilizing the American national security apparatus for such strategic-planning exercises.[58] Proponents such as James Goldgeier and Jeremy Suri contend that the national security strategy is vital to the practice of grand strategy:

> Without a clear strategy statement, the next president will find it difficult to align U.S. capabilities behind core national interests. Without a clear strategy statement, the next president will fail to set a foreign policy course for his/her new administration that leverages U.S. resources and allies, escaping the damaging tendency to do a little everywhere and seek to stamp out fires wherever they burn.[59]

Publication of each administration's national security strategy cues a chorus of critics who decry the degradation of the grand-strategy process into an exercise in banality and bureaucratic consensus-building, divorced from the crucial work of implementation.[60] For the most part, however, national security strategy critics believe that strategic planning is a virtuous exercise; their gripe centers on the consistent failure of the national security strategy and related processes to produce anything resembling grand strategy.[61] A process optimized to effectively link ends, ways, and means might, for example: lean into, rather than shy away from, difficult trade-offs; always contain a classified component where priorities are explicitly enumerated; and translate into clear implementation guidance, including budgetary requirements.

Despite wide recognition of these deficiencies, however, there has been little progress toward reform, implicitly revealing a set of political — rather than geostrategic — priorities that drive the planning process.[62] First, the national security strategy, like many strategy documents, is mandated by Congress; every presidential administration is required to produce it. Second, planning advocates ascribe value to the process for its own sake, saying it forces policymakers to think beyond their inboxes and engage strategic questions with their counterparts across the national security bureaucracy, which improves day-to-day decision-making even if it doesn't produce a coherent strategic vision. Third, the national security strategy is a vessel for communicating with audiences at home and abroad. Domestically, the national security strategy can guide interagency decision-making and inform public debate. Internationally, the document signals the broad direction of U.S. foreign policy to allies and adversaries. Constrained by these political imperatives, there is little incentive for policymakers to make hard grand-strategic choices. Indeed, little changes between presidential administrations, even as reams of studies explore means of improving U.S. strategic competence.[63]

Some skeptics contend that U.S. incompetence may actually be salutary: Grand-strategic planning, they argue, yields dangerously constraining and inflexible foreign policy doctrines. Building on Richard Betts's critiques of strategy and doctrine,[64] David Edelstein and Ronald Krebs argue that strategic planning imposes dangerous rigidity on policymaking: "The ritual of crafting strategy encourages participants to spin a narrative that

58 Jordan Tama, "Does Strategic Planning Matter? The Outcomes of U.S. National Security Reviews," *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 4 (2015): 735–66, https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12395.

59 James Goldgeier and Jeremi Suri, "Revitalizing the U.S. National Security Strategy," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2015): 35–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2015.1125828. On the relationship between the *National Security Strategy* and American grand strategy, see also: Hemmer, *American Pendulum*, 3–6.

60 Lissner, "The National Security Strategy Is Not a Strategy"; Richard Fontaine and Shawn Brimley, "Don't Expect Too Much From Obama's National Security Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, Feb. 5, 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/05/dont-expect-too-much-from-obamas-national-security-strategy/; Raphael S. Cohen, "Why Strategies Disappoint—and How to Fix Them," *Lawfare*, March 19, 2017, https://www.lawfareblog.com/why-strategies-disappoint%E2%80%94and-how-fix-them.

61 Cohen, "Why Strategies Disappoint—and How to Fix Them"; Fontaine and Brimley, "Don't Expect Too Much From Obama's National Security Strategy."

62 On the lack of reform, see: Raphael S. Cohen, *Air Force Strategic Planning: Past, Present, and Future* (RAND Corp., 2017), http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1765.html; Joe Gould, "QDR Dead in 2017 Defense Policy Bill," *DefenseNews*, April 25, 2016, http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2016/04/25/qdr-dead-2017-ndaa-thornberry/83517078/.

63 Daniel W. Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia: The Role of Strategic Planning in American Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009); Andrew F. Krepinevich and Barry D. Watts, *Regaining Strategic Competence* (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2009), https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/2009.09.01-Regaining-Strategic-Competence.pdf; Aaron L. Friedberg, "Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning," *Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2007–2008): 47–60, https://doi.org/10.1162/wash.2007.31.1.47; Flournoy and Brimley, "Strategic Planning for US National Security: A Project Solarium for the 21st Century"; McDougall, "Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?"

64 Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 365. See also: Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 5–50, https://doi.org/10.1162/016228800560444.

magnifies the scope of the national interest and exaggerates global threats."[65] Ionut Popescu characterizes grand strategy as a model of national security decision-making whereby governments "formulate and implement a long-term coherent plan to accomplish the nation's highest goals."[66] He contrasts this approach with a superior alternative model of "emergent strategy" that rejects long-term planning in favor of incrementalism, short-term adaptation, and crisis response.[67] James Graham Wilson uses history to make a similar case, characterizing the end of the Cold War as a "triumph of improvisation" rather than grand strategy.[68] Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski herald the "end of grand strategy" because the coherence it requires is at odds with the operational processes of the U.S. military, particularly the Navy.[69]

These critics are undoubtedly correct that grand strategy should not impose undue rigidity on policymaking. Yet, advocates of emergent strategy or case-by-case pragmatism are arguing against a straw man: Proponents of grand-strategic planning do not propose that policymakers engage in an exquisite design process that anticipates every contingency, nor is there historical evidence to support this caricature of grand strategy. Instead, planning documents like the national security strategy tend to be statements of grand-strategic principles while glossing over questions of implementation. Indeed, focusing unduly on plans themselves risks missing the fundamental point of grand strategy: As Brands and Porter have argued, "grand strategy is best understood not as a formal planning process, but as a guiding intellectual framework. ... It is an ecological worldview, formed from a mix of different influences — experience, study, values, ideology — that helps officials make sense of complexity and bring resources and commitments into alignment."[70] In this sense, planning may contribute to that framework — for example by elaborating a set of principles or inculcating a strategic subculture — but grand strategy is not reducible to even a well-executed strategic planning process.

What insights does the "grand strategy as process" research agenda offer to scholars and policymakers? For academics, this sub-literature usefully highlights the temporal dimension of grand strategy: Whereas scholars tend to focus on only the early stages of grand-strategy formulation, they ought to take a broader view that includes implementation — the phase at which strategic designs tend to founder in encounters with resource constraints, bureaucratic resistance, or other barriers.[71] This research agenda is also notable for what it lacks: rigorous studies of the qualities that render grand-strategic planning processes more or less successful.[72] Indeed, from a policymaking perspective, the grand-strategy-as-process research agenda should pick up where the grand-strategy-as-variable agenda left off. It should elucidate the methods by which individuals and organizations can effectively diagnose the international and domestic environments, then develop grand strategies that seize on opportunities and circumvent constraints. Yet the literature lacks this kind of how-to guide for grand-strategic planning beyond the strategic aphorisms put forth by the common-sense school. Finally, the debate over the utility of grand strategizing emphasizes the dangers associated with following rigid doctrines or strategic plans for their own sake. Nevertheless, the recommendation to replace grand strategy with "pragmatism" or "emergent strategy" does not withstand scrutiny. There is no intrinsic reason why grand strategy — in the United States or elsewhere — cannot entail a design process that is long-term in its vision, disciplined in its prioritization, and pragmatically flexible in its implementation. An ad hoc alternative is hardly preferable.

65 David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs, "Delusions of Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 6 (November/December 2015), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-10-20/delusions-grand-strategy.

66 Ionut Popescu, *Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy: How American Presidents Succeed in Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 6.

67 Popescu, *Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy*, 19.

68 James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

69 Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski, *The End of Grand Strategy: US Maritime Operations in the 21st Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

70 Hal Brands and Patrick Porter, "Why Grand Strategy Still Matters in a World of Chaos," *National Interest*, Dec. 10, 2015, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-grand-strategy-still-matters-world-chaos-14568.

71 Michael J. Green offers a good example of an evolutionary perspective on grand strategy. See his *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

72 Risa Brooks' work provides a model for future scholarship. See: *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

## Agenda 3: Grand Strategy as Blueprint

The final strand of the grand-strategy literature is grand strategy as blueprint.[73] The works in this category provide recommendations that seek to guide the future course of a given state's foreign policy. Whereas the grand-strategy-as-variable research agenda is descriptive and the grand-strategy-as-process agenda is both descriptive and prescriptive, this agenda is entirely prescriptive. Like the process literature, discussions of grand strategy as blueprint assume that grand strategy is a tool, rather than an automatic output, and therefore can be manipulated by agents who enact intentional designs.

As with strategic planning, debates about grand-strategic blueprints are ongoing around the world.[74] This article uses the United States as an example because U.S. grand strategy is the primary concern of American scholars of international relations and, given the predominant U.S. role in the world, it is also the most consequential. The heart of current scholarly debate is between advocates of a restrained grand strategy, often described as "retrenchment" or "offshore balancing,"[75] and proponents of variants of liberal internationalism, referred to as "deep engagement," "liberal hegemony," and "primacy."[76]

Liberal internationalism is, in the words of Stephen Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William Wohlforth, the devil we know. Its three core tenets have guided U.S. grand strategy since World War II:

> Managing the external environment to reduce near- and long-term threats to U.S. national security; promoting a liberal economic order to expand the global economy and maximize domestic prosperity; and creating, sustaining, and revising the global institutional order to secure necessary interstate cooperation on terms favorable to U.S. interests.[77]

Proponents of this grand strategy point to the past seven decades as evidence of its remarkable success; the peace and prosperity it has offered represent a departure from the "economic mercantilism, political conflict, and repeated war" that characterized much of world history.[78] Even in the post-Cold War context, advocates defend its record: As Brands writes, "for all its travails, American strategy has played a central role in making the post-Cold War international system more stable, more liberal, and more favorable to U.S. interests and ideals than it would otherwise have been — and certainly in bringing about a more benign international environment than many expert observers expected when the post-Cold War period began."[79]

Advocates of retrenchment disagree with this characterization of liberal internationalism's record of success, as well as the costs and risks ascribed

73 Although blueprints may emerge from a strategic planning process, the two are generally addressed separately in international relations literature, as those who attend to planning think that such a process should be open-ended whereas those who advocate a particular doctrine believe the "right answer" is already evident.

74 Hitchcock, Leffler, and Legro, eds., *Shaper Nations*.

75 Scholars on both sides of this debate agree that this is the core dimension of disagreement: Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment," *International Security* 37, no. 3 (2013): 10, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41804173; Barry R. Posen, "A New U.S. Grand Strategy," *Boston Review*, July 1, 2014, http://bostonreview.net/us/barry-r-posen-restraint-grand-strategy-united-states. As examples of the case for retrenchment, see: Posen, *Restraint*; Barry R. Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January/February 2013), http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138466/barry-r-posen/pull-back; Barry R. Posen, "The Case for Restraint," *American Interest* 3, no. 2 (2007): 7–32, https://www.the-american-interest.com/2007/11/01/the-case-for-restraint/; Stephen M. Walt, "Taming American Power," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (September/October 2005): 105–20, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2005-09-01/taming-american-power; John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 4 (July/August 2016): 70, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing; Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 5–48, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.21.4.5; Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*; Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 86–124, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.22.1.86; Christopher A. Preble, *The Power Problem: How American Military Dominance Makes Us Less Safe, Less Prosperous, and Less Free* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 2011).

76 Brooks and Wohlforth provide a particularly nuanced parsing of these distinctions: Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For additional examples of the variants of liberal hegemony, see: Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America"; Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Lean Forward: In Defense of American Engagement," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January/February 2013), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2012-11-30/lean-forward; Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Cornell University Press, 2003); Robert J. Lieber, *Power and Willpower in the American Future: Why the United States Is Not Destined to Decline* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Robert J. Lieber, *Retreat and Its Consequences: American Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Eliot A. Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power and the Necessity of Military Force* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

77 Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America," 11.

78 Fareed Zakaria, "Trump Is Changing the International Order," *CNN*, Jan. 27, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/27/us/trump-changing-the-international-order-zakaria/index.html.

79 Hal Brands, "The Pretty Successful Superpower," *American Interest* 12, no. 3 (November 2016), http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/11/14/the-pretty-successful-superpower/.

to it. In his book-length treatise making the case for offshore balancing, Layne takes aim at the core liberal internationalist assumption that national security requires the United States to police a world order amenable to American values, institutions, and economic penetration.[80] As Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt argue, "By pursuing a strategy of 'offshore balancing,' Washington would forgo ambitious efforts to remake other societies and concentrate on what really matters: preserving U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere and countering potential hegemons in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf."[81] But even in forestalling the rise of a Eurasian hegemon, the first line of defense would be regional powers, and the United States would intervene only if absolutely necessary. Offshore balancers differ in their approaches toward nuclear proliferation and counter-terrorism, but overall they agree that the rewards of pulling back from global engagement would outweigh the risks. The resulting savings, based on the military strategy and force structure outlined in Barry Posen's *Restraint*, would enable the United States to cut its defense budget to 2.5 percent of gross domestic product from the current level, 3.62 percent of GDP.[82]

Beyond the grand debate between restraint and deep engagement, there are important divergences within each camp. Even among those who laud the U.S. strategic successes of the past 70 years, there is disagreement about the best way forward for U.S. leadership of a liberal international order under increasing stress from both global power shifts and the growing salience of transnational challenges. Brands and Eric Edelman advocate a major defense recapitalization to sustain U.S. military primacy, credibly maintain American commitments overseas even when challenged by increasingly capable great-power adversaries, and, in so doing, uphold the existing international order.[83] In contrast, Bruce Jentleson argues that while the United States is not in terminal decline, changes in the global landscape ineluctably diminish American influence abroad. He proposes a strategy of "recalibration," which rejects both retrenchment and calls for the United States to reclaim global primacy in favor of a subtler and more selective application of American power in service of clearly defined interests.[84] Paul Stares advocates a strategy of "preventive engagement" to manage global threats without resorting to costly uses of military force.[85]

Others examine U.S. interests in the context of transnational security challenges, advocating constraints on American power in service of a truly global, rather than U.S.-dominated, order. Richard Haass calls for progress toward a "world order 2.0" in which states move beyond the Westphalian system and accept "sovereign obligations" for managing the globalized consequences of domestic policies.[86] Thomas Weiss goes further, contending that transnational problems require more muscular global governance, centered on empowered (and reformed) international organizations.[87] Anne-Marie Slaughter advocates a networked grand strategy that complements state-to-state interaction with a "web of commercial, educational, cultural, and human relations."[88]

What insights does the grand-strategy-as-blueprint agenda hold for scholars and policymakers? Unlike the other two, this research agenda presupposes that grand strategies can be intentionally designed and provides preconceived prescriptions for such interventions. Yet, the blueprint debates remain oddly divorced from parallel discussions about the origins of grand strategy. This disconnect is particularly stark among realist scholars who engage in the study of grand strategy as variable in addition to blueprint. Mearsheimer, for example, predicts in his academic work that states will act as power maximizers, strive for hegemony, and preclude the rise of other hegemons; these are not choices but, rather, the inevitable consequence of an anarchic international system.[89] When he turns to

80 Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, 30.

81 Mearsheimer and Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy."

82 Posen, *Restraint*.

83 Hal Brands and Eric Edelman, "Avoiding a Strategy of Bluff: The Crisis of American Military Primacy," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017, http://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/Strategic_Solvency_FINAL.pdf.

84 Bruce W. Jentleson, "Strategic Recalibration: Framework for a 21st-Century National Security Strategy," *Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2014): 115–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2014.893178.

85 Paul B. Stares, *Preventive Engagement: How America Can Avoid War, Stay Strong, and Keep the Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

86 Richard Haass, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (London: Penguin Press, 2017).

87 Thomas G. Weiss, *Governing the World? Addressing 'Problems Without Passports'* (New York: Paradigm Publishers, 2014).

88 Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Chessboard and the Web: Strategies of Connection in a Networked World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 19.

89 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, chap. 2.

prescription, however, Mearsheimer recommends that the United States restrain its own quest for power by retrenching from its forward positions around the globe and seeking hegemony only in the Western Hemisphere.[90] Yet the proposition that the United States is pursuing an inefficient or even dangerous grand strategy of liberal hegemony would seem to contradict the core neorealist assumption that states respond rationally and consistently to their international environments. Meanwhile, the suggestion that the United States should pursue more limited grand-strategic aims is at odds with the prediction that states seek to maximize their power. The juxtaposition of these arguments suggests a logical double bind: Either Mearsheimer's recommendations are superior to the current course of American grand strategy, which calls into question his explanatory theory, or his theory of grand strategy is accurate, which calls into question the wisdom of his recommendations.

For policymakers, such distinctions may seem arcane and pedantic, but they matter a great deal: Those advocating prescriptions derived from structural realism have the loudest academic voices in debates about American grand strategy, as well as the prospects for U.S.-China competition, and partial alignment with Trump's heterodox international outlook may amplify their influence over policy.[91] More broadly, any grand-strategic prescriptions ought to be transparent about their assumptions, and when those assumptions prove faulty the attendant recommendations should be updated or discounted accordingly. When grand-strategic blueprints are well crafted, however, they can challenge conventional wisdom, refine extant doctrines, and provide a lodestar for policy.

## Opportunities for Future Research

Three separate research agendas thus characterize the grand-strategy literature, with the variable, process, and blueprint camps each centering on different questions: Where does grand strategy come from? What are the procedural characteristics of grand strategy's formulation and execution? And what should a particular state's grand strategy be?

By reorganizing what is nominally a single literature into three component research agendas, the preceding sections should help scholars adjudicate disagreements endemic in existing work and identify their main interlocutors in future work. Recognition of these dividing lines ought to facilitate the clash of ideas, particularly in debates over processes and blueprints. For the grand-strategy-as-variable school to advance through competitive theory testing, however, differentiation from the process and blueprint camps is only a first step. Further conceptual clarification remains necessary through a more disciplined approach to definition, operationalization, and measurement.

Despite the value of acknowledging these divisions, it would be a mistake to reify them or ignore their intersections. A single academic work may speak to more than one research agenda, and many thinkers have contributed to more than one of the three camps. Scholars should therefore remain attuned to opportunities for synthesis and integration, especially where assumptions linking explanatory and normative approaches to grand strategy are implicitly or explicitly interdependent. In particular, there are three promising avenues for future research into the determinants of effectiveness, the domestic politics of grand strategy, and grand strategy beyond the United States.

### The Determinants of Grand Strategic Effectiveness

Despite the vast literature on grand strategy, scholars know remarkably little about the determinants of effectiveness. Does grand strategy truly influence the practice of statecraft and, if so, under what conditions is it successful? As Williamson Murray notes, "Those who have developed *successful* grand strategies in the past have been much the exception."[92] Moreover, for

90 Mearsheimer and Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy."

91 On the influence of structural realists on the grand-strategy debate inside and outside the ivory tower, see: Hal Brands, "The Real Gap: Why Scholars and Policymakers Disagree," *American Interest* 13, no. 1 (2017), https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/06/05/why-scholars-and-policymakers-disagree/; Hal Brands and Peter Feaver, "Saving Realism from the So-Called Realists," *Commentary*, Aug. 14, 2017, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/saving-realism-called-realists/. On the debate over alignment between realist restrainers and the Trump administration, see: Stephen M. Walt, "The Foreign-Policy Establishment Reeks of Desperation," *Foreign Policy*, Nov. 5, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/05/the-foreign-policy-establishment-reeks-of-desperation/; Hal Brands, "Intellectuals Who Hate the 'Blob' Have a Lot in Common With Trump," *Bloomberg Opinion*, Oct. 31, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-10-31/intellectuals-who-hate-the-blob-have-a-lot-in-common-with-trump.

92 Williamson Murray, "Thoughts on Grand Strategy," in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War*, ed. Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3–4. Emphasis added. Krasner makes a similar point: Stephen D. Krasner, "An Orienting Principle for Foreign Policy," *Policy Review*, no. 163 (October/November 2010): 3, https://www.hoover.org/research/orienting-principle-foreign-policy.

DESPITE THE VAST LITERATURE ON GRAND STRATEGY, SCHOLARS KNOW REMARKABLY LITTLE ABOUT THE DETERMINANTS OF EFFECTIVENESS.

grand strategy to matter, it must be distinct from predetermined forms of advantage and perhaps even overcome material deficits.[93] There is no more policy-consequential question for scholars than the ingredients of these rare strategic triumphs.

Historians and, to a lesser extent, political scientists, have identified and analyzed cases of grand-strategic success: both wartime success, such as the Allies' grand strategy during World War II,[94] and long-term imperial-hegemonic endurance, like that of the British and Roman Empires.[95] But at the theoretical level, existing work provides little insight into the general determinants of grand-strategic effectiveness. To account for success, scholars generally point to the careful balance of means and ends.[96] This approach is problematic, however, because it conflates definitional and causal claims.[97] If grand strategy is defined as statecraft that astutely balances means and ends, and if well-balanced grand strategy is necessarily successful, then there is no space to study variation in grand-strategic effectiveness. The debate becomes about the presence or absence of grand strategy rather than the efficacy of a given grand strategy. To be useful as a variable, grand strategy cannot be a normatively laden term.

Future work can fill this gap by examining grand strategy as an independent, rather than dependent, variable. Of what effects is grand strategy the cause? Those interested in theorizing grand strategy can begin by searching for hypotheses in the process literature, which implicitly or explicitly describes the criteria for successful strategic planning but rarely evaluates these criteria rigorously or comparatively across cases.[98] Risa Brooks' scholarship on the influence of civil-military cooperation on the effectiveness of strategic planning and Popescu's evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of grand strategy and emergent strategy provide models for much-needed future work in this area.[99]

### The Domestic Politics of Grand Strategy

The shock of Trump's election in November 2016 spotlighted the perennial uncertainty surrounding the domestic politics of grand strategy. Regarding Trump specifically, a significant proportion of American voters proved willing to elect a presidential candidate who brazenly rejected core elements of the post-World War II elite foreign policy consensus on trade, alliances, and other issues. But while Trump's election creates the temptation to pronounce the death of American global leadership, there is evidence that popular support for internationalism persists — raising the possibility that some voters supported Trump despite, not because of, his heterodox foreign policy positions.[100] Scholars can help clarify whether Trump's election is a harbinger of structural shifts in the domestic politics of foreign policy — or an aberration.

Toward that end, future studies could revisit two long-standing debates in the literature on public opinion and American grand strategy. First is the power of what Theodore Roosevelt famously called the "bully pulpit." All presidents advocate their preferred foreign policies, whether Harry Truman's aid to Greece and Turkey, Ronald Reagan's support for Nicaraguan contras, Clinton's pursuit of NATO enlargement, George W. Bush's march to war in Iraq, or Barack Obama's lobbying for the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. Yet, the varying successes of these efforts demonstrate the limits of presidential powers of persuasion. What, then, determines why some efforts succeed while others fail? In contemporary terms, why has public opinion grown more favorable toward long-standing American alliances and the Iran nuclear deal since

93 Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" 18.

94 On British grand strategy, see, for example: Michael Howard, "British Grand Strategy in World War I," in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Paul Kennedy; Eliot A. Cohen, "Churchill and Coalition Strategy in World War II," in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Paul Kennedy. On U.S. and Allied grand strategy, see footnote 44.

95 The literature on each is vast. On the Roman Empire, for example: Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). For an alternate view: Kimberly Kagan, "Redefining Roman Grand Strategy," *Journal of Military History* 70, no. 2 (2006): 333–62, https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2006.0104. On the British Empire, for example: Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*; Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy"; Charles P. Kindleberger, "International Public Goods without International Government," *American Economic Review* 76, no. 1 (1986): 1–13; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Penguin, 2017).

96 For example: Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, 24–25.

97 Silove makes a similar point in "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" 35–37.

98 On the value of an explicitly comparative approach: Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich, "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay," 28.

99 Brooks, *Shaping Strategy*; Popescu, *Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy*; Ionut C. Popescu, "Grand Strategy vs. Emergent Strategy in the Conduct of Foreign Policy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 3 (2018): 438–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2017.1288109.

100 Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (Brookings Institution Press, 2018), chap. 4; Friedman Lissner and Rapp-Hooper, "The Day after Trump: American Strategy for a New International Order."

Trump's election, even as he has denigrated them from the White House?[101]

A potential answer lies in the politics of persuasion. Stacie Goddard and Krebs contend that the process of public legitimation constrains the range of available grand-strategy choices.[102] Krebs investigates these boundaries of legitimacy in his book-length study of narrative and the making of U.S. national security. National security narratives catch on, he argues, during times of crisis, when presidents tell stories that help their citizens impose order on seemingly chaotic circumstances. Krebs' analysis of ripe narrative moments and the importance of presidential authority is helpful, but the core contribution lies in his focus on the mechanics of storytelling as contrasted with argumentation — a dimension of politics that rarely captures the attention of scholars of international relations but that warrants consideration, particularly among those confounded by the political failures of their grand-strategic prescriptions.[103]

Second, scholars can continue to investigate polarization's influence on the domestic politics of grand strategy. Whereas public opinion studies in the early Cold War showed limited correlation between domestic and foreign policy views, greater partisan consistency began to emerge around the time of the Vietnam War.[104] Since then, partisan polarization has grown and sharpened with the rise of across-the-aisle antipathy, also known as "affective polarization."[105] Future research could investigate how widening polarization might alter the domestic dynamics of grand strategy.[106] One avenue for investigation entails the interaction between policy expertise and partisan polarization — in particular, whether elites retain the ability to persuade the public to accept their preferred grand strategy. Rather than a wholesale death of expertise, recent research indicates that — especially on controversial issues — citizens remain attentive to experts, but only those who share their partisan affiliation.[107] This finding would suggest that as long as a bipartisan elite consensus on grand strategy endures, the public is likely to follow. In light of many Republicans' resistance to central elements of the Trump administration's national security agenda, however, additional scholarship should explore citizens' response to elite dissent within political parties on matters of foreign policy or grand strategy. Researchers can also turn their attention to polarization's consequences for grand strategy. Kenneth Schultz contends that polarization will introduce greater volatility in American foreign policy and diminish the effectiveness of Washington's diplomatic signaling, opening the door to myriad opportunities for additional theoretical elaboration and empirical testing.[108]

### Grand Strategy Beyond the United States

Finally, the grand-strategy literature suffers needlessly from American parochialism. As a case study, U.S. grand strategy is undoubtedly crucial: The United States' rise to global power, its response to victory in two world wars, and its emergence as a unipolar hegemon with unprecedented power are unique moments of world-historic significance. Nonetheless, as a matter of theory, policy, and history, all three veins of the grand-strategy research agenda would benefit from a wider aperture. The grand-strategy-as-variable camp should expand to include more non-Western cases and to more ambitiously aspire to generalizability across time periods

101 Chicago Council on Global Affairs, "America Engaged," Oct. 2, 2018, https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/america-engaged.

102 For the introduction to a special issue of *Security Studies* devoted to this topic: Stacie E. Goddard and Ronald R. Krebs, "Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy," *Security Studies* 24, no. 1 (2015): 11, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2014.1001198.

103 Ronald R. Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, 2015).

104 Ole R. Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus," *International Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (December 1992): 457–58, https://doi.org/10.2307/2600734.

105 Carroll Doherty, "7 Things to Know About Polarization in America," Pew Research Center's *FactTank* blog, June 12, 2014, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/12/7-things-to-know-about-polarization-in-america/; Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2012): 405–31, https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038; Lilliana Mason, "'I Disrespectfully Agree': The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1 (January 2015): 128–45, https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12089; Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven Webster, "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections in the 21st Century," *Electoral Studies* 41 (March 2016): 12–22, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2015.11.001.

106 Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "The Day After Trump," working paper, December 2018.

107 Alexandra Guisinger and Elizabeth N. Saunders, "Mapping the Boundaries of Elite Cues: How Elites Shape Mass Opinion Across International Issues," *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2017): 425–41, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx022; Daniel W. Drezner, *The Ideas Industry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

108 Kenneth A. Schultz, "Perils of Polarization for U.S. Foreign Policy," *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2017): 7–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1406705.

and national contexts. Even explanatory theories specific to non-U.S. cases could help illuminate the grand-strategic courses, choices, and cultures of allies and adversaries alike.[109] By looking beyond the United States, the grand-strategy-as-process camp could shed light on strategic planning in comparative perspective and especially on the vital question of whether autocratic regimes are more capable of effective grand strategy than democracies. Finally, grand-strategy debates are likely to proliferate and amplify as power continues to diffuse over the coming decades. Scholars of international relations have much to contribute to blueprint debates beyond the United States, especially among allies and partners, and prescriptions for the future of American grand strategy would benefit from richer understanding of other states' visions for their own power.

## Conclusion: The Necessity of Grand Strategy

The literature of grand-strategic studies is vast and frequently disjointed — yet, for all its flaws, grand strategy remains an attractive object of scholarly attention. Academic programs focused on grand strategy are flourishing: Yale's program celebrated its 15th year in October 2016,[110] and similar institutions continue to proliferate.[111] Meanwhile, a sense of acute geopolitical flux and uncertainty about the future character of international politics has renewed the "Kennan Sweepstakes" for the post-post-Cold War era. Experts are keen to offer their grand-strategic analysis in popular and academic publications, present blueprints for grand strategy, and advise governments on the formulation and execution of grand strategy.

These trends may indicate that continued study of grand strategy is inevitable — but it is also beneficial for several reasons. First, grand strategy as a field of study is inherently relevant to policy.[112] By illuminating the origins of state behavior, theories of grand strategy help policymakers understand the drivers of allies' and adversaries' foreign policies, as well as the conditions for change in their own countries' grand strategies. Meanwhile, studying grand strategy requires academics to engage with policymakers, who provide insight into real-world processes of grand-strategy development and implementation. Rather than alienate these practitioners with inscrutable research methods, all three grand-strategy research agendas invite engagement by practitioners. At a time when international relations continues to fight off the cult of the irrelevant, the study of grand strategy provides a useful corrective against the field's growing obsession with mid-range theory and hypothesis testing.[113]

Second, grand strategy is inherently interdisciplinary. The rich grand-strategy literatures in history and political science invite dialogue

109 There are, of course, some notable contributions on China, for example: Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 2000), https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1121.html; Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford University Press, Studies in Asian Security, 2005); M. Taylor Fravel, "Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China's Changes in Military Strategy," *International Security* 42, no. 3 (Winter 2017–2018): 37–83, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00304; Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). On Japan, see: Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 2008); Michael J. Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Adam P. Liff, "Japan's Defense Policy: Abe the Evolutionary," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 79–99, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2015.1064711.

110 Ziba Kashef, "Grand Strategy Program Celebrates 15 Years of Promoting Global Leadership," *YaleNews*, Oct. 18, 2016, http://news.yale.edu/2016/10/18/grand-strategy-program-celebrates-15-years-promoting-global-leadership.

111 E.g., King's College London Centre for Grand Strategy, "About" page, n.d., http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/warstudies/research/groups/cgs/about.aspx; "Introducing the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs," Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, n.d., https://kissinger.sais-jhu.edu/.

112 Feaver also makes the case for grand strategy's utility in bridging theory and practice: Peter Feaver, "What Is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It?" *Foreign Policy*, April 8, 2009, https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/04/08/what-is-grand-strategy-and-why-do-we-need-it/.

113 Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1993); Stephen M. Walt, "Rigor or Rigor Mortis? Rational Choice and Security Studies," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 5–48; Lawrence M. Mead, "Scholasticism in Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (June 2010): 453–64, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710001192; Francis J. Gavin, "Politics, History and the Ivory Tower–Policy Gap in the Nuclear Proliferation Debate," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 573–600, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2012.715736; Francis J. Gavin and James B. Steinberg, "Mind the Gap: Why Policymakers and Scholars Ignore Each Other, and What Should Be Done About It," *Carnegie Reporter* 6, no. 4 (Spring 2012): 10–17, https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/2a/cf/2acf4a7a-9709-49e3-8458-37800a5654af/ccny_creporter_2012_vol6no4.pdf; Daniel Byman and Matthew Kroenig, "Reaching Beyond the Ivory Tower: A How To Manual," *Security Studies* 25, no. 2 (2016): 289–319, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2016.1171969; Paul C. Avey and Michael C. Desch, "What Do Policymakers Want From Us? Results of a Survey of Current and Former Senior National Security Decision Makers," *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2014): 227–46, https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12111; Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Scholars on the Sidelines," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2009, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/12/AR2009041202260.html; Nicholas Kristof, "Professors, We Need You!" *New York Times*, Feb. 15, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/opinion/sunday/kristof-professors-we-need-you.html. For a different view, see: Byman and Kroenig, "Reaching Beyond the Ivory Tower: A How To Manual," 304.

between two fields that share many interests but are too often estranged by methodological differences. Studying grand strategy encourages social scientists to mine historians' work for case studies and encourages historians to engage social scientists' theories. As Brands and Porter argue, the historical record contains much variation that political scientists can leverage: "History offers instructive examples of effective grand strategic behavior, where states have effectively brought power and commitments into balance, either by expanding means (resources, alliances, opinion) to meet ends, or refocused depleted resources to strengthen its core security interests."[114] Grand strategy also invites dialogue with the literatures of psychology, organizational studies, and business administration — connections that have yet to be fully explored and exploited.[115]

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Similarly, a focus on grand strategy can help policymakers think in a more interdisciplinary — which is to say, interagency — manner. Breaking down entrenched barriers between diplomatic, military, informational, and economic activities will be necessary as the United States grapples with the intensification of competition and aggression below traditional conflict thresholds. From island-building in the South China Sea and economic coercion, to election interference and proxy warfare in Ukraine, China and Russia have already shown the capability and willingness to challenge American interests in the "gray zone." Despite the growing prevalence of such measures short of war, however, the United States is ill prepared to respond.[116] As the National Defense Strategy Commission wrote, "Because gray-zone challenges combine military and paramilitary measures with economic statecraft, political warfare, information operations, and other tools, they often occur in the 'seams' between DOD and other U.S. departments and agencies, making them all the more difficult to address."[117] As a policymaking framework, grand strategy can help overcome this challenge by integrating — first conceptually and then practically — the work of government agencies responsible for the United States' myriad tools of national power.

Third, grand strategy as a field illustrates the value of methodological diversity in international relations. Qualitative methods, especially process tracing, are suited to the study of grand strategy.[118] Unpacking the complexity of grand strategies and the factors that drive their continuity or change requires in-depth historical knowledge and attention to micro-processes that are difficult to capture with quantitative data or to test using an experiment. As such, the study of grand strategy helps to demonstrate the importance of pluralistic approaches to causal inference, with preference for the method best suited to the subject.

Of course, grand strategy also has its flaws. As a corollary to its bias toward qualitative methods, studies of grand strategy are not amenable to cutting-edge quantitative methodologies and may never be taken seriously by political scientists outside of international relations who rely on methodological sophistication as a proxy for scholarly value. More charitably, the overdetermined nature of many grand-strategic choices may legitimately erode scholars' ability to draw high-confidence causal inferences. Beyond methodological issues, grand strategy is laden with significant political baggage. The predominance of right-leaning funders in seeding programs for its study, the recent interest of the Koch foundation, and grand strategy's long-standing association with Henry Kissinger can create the appearance of a political agenda that

114 Brands and Porter, "Why Grand Strategy Still Matters in a World of Chaos."

115 Popescu begins to bridge the gap between corporate and state strategy by drawing on relevant business literature: Popescu, "Grand Strategy vs. Emergent Strategy in the Conduct of Foreign Policy."

116 Thomas Wright, *All Measures Short of War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

117 Eric Edelman and Gary Roughead, *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2018), 9, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/providing-for-the-common-defense.pdf.

118 Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, 10–11; Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

intellectuals on the left find objectionable.[119] Finally, grand strategy should not be projected onto governmental decision-making where it does not exist, and critics are correct to warn against overselling grand strategy's potential for elegant implementation or its transformative effects.[120] Even so, while scholars of grand strategy should be cognizant of this context, these objections do not justify rejecting wholesale either the study or practice of grand strategy.

Indeed, scholarly engagement with grand strategy is gravely necessary. Foreign policy elites broadly agree that the tenets that have guided American grand strategy since the end of the Cold War, and in many ways since the end of World War II, are under great strain and may no longer be tenable. Trump's presidency seems both to ratify concerns about adverse trends and to raise the possibility that his leadership will accelerate them. For the first time in decades, it is plausible that the U.S. theory of national security that has guided a liberal-hegemony strategy since the dawn of the Cold War may be reevaluated. From this perspective, previous "revolutions" in American foreign policy, which entailed adjustments to subordinate grand-strategic assumptions, seem small by comparison.[121] Whether or not such seismic changes ultimately materialize, the time is ripe for serious study of grand strategy. To fully seize this opportunity, those of us who study grand strategy must place the field on stronger conceptual ground. This article represents an initial step toward strengthening that foundation.

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119 For example: Wertheim, "Grand Strategy: An American Power Politics"; Thomas Meaney and Stephen Wertheim, "Grand Flattery: The Yale Grand Strategy Seminar," *Nation*, May 28, 2012, https://www.thenation.com/article/grand-flattery-yale-grand-strategy-seminar/.

120 Reich and Dombrowski, *The End of Grand Strategy*, x–8; Popescu, *Emergent Strategy and Grand Strategy*, chap. 1; Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 203–6.

121 Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2005).