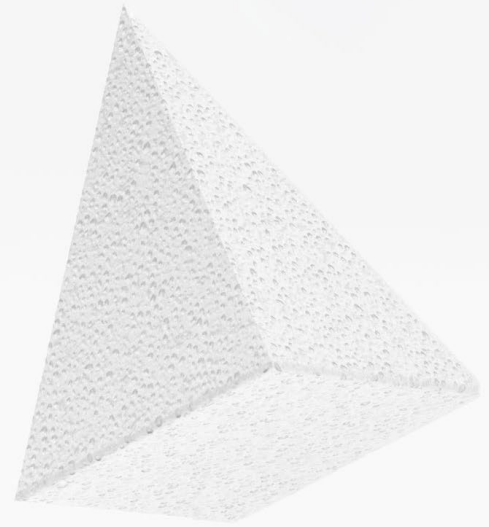


Evolving Challenges, Enduring Principles

Sheena Chestnut Greitens



In her first introduction as the new editor in chief of the *Texas National Security Review*, Sheena Chestnut Greitens considers the importance of getting major questions of national and international security right and highlights the journal's role in supporting that endeavor.

I'm delighted to write this introduction as the new editor in chief of the *Texas National Security Review*. I write this having just returned to the University of Texas at Austin from a conference at the U.S. Army War College, where I am a visiting faculty member working this year on projects related to China and Indo-Pacific security. It's a privilege that reminds me, on a regular basis, of the stakes of getting major questions of national and international security right — questions that are a big part of the reason I am both excited and daunted to take up this new role with the journal.

A few months ago, *TNSR's* board chair, Frank Gavin, wrote an introduction that he titled, "What Exactly Are We Doing?"¹ This issue seems like a good time to revisit that question — both in the broader sense of America's approach to national security after the 2024 election, and in the sense of what the role is for an academic journal like *TNSR* today.

By the time this issue (7.4) of the *Texas National Security Review* appears in print, the November 2024 presidential election will have come and gone, and readers in both the United States and worldwide should have more information about where America is headed in its foreign policy and national security strategy for the next four years. (I say "should," recognizing full well that it can be a foolhardy errand to prognosticate with any degree of confidence in advance of a major, albeit regular, inflection point in American domestic politics and foreign policy.)

The presidential election will be one step toward answering what exactly we are doing here in terms of the United States' national security strategy: Toward what ends, with what means, making what tradeoffs, will America formulate and carry out

its foreign and defense policies? And how will the policymakers craft and execute that strategy given that the landscape of international and global security is evolving and transforming around them?

Some of the most memorable — for me — articles in the early years of the *Texas National Security Review* grappled with America's ability to do grand strategy, both historically and in the present moment.² Several of the pieces in this issue highlight the importance of these questions as well:

- Joshua Byun's careful reading of America's "failed attempt" to pull its troops out of Western Europe during the early Cold War is a sobering analysis of the complex realities of strategy implementation, and a warning — in particular — on the ways in which allied vulnerability to preventive aggression by proximate adversaries can hamstring the execution of grand strategic aims and desires.³
- Charles Ziegler's assessment of the evolving strategic landscape in Central Asia, meanwhile, illustrates the consequences of American retrenchment from the region, which — in conjunction with Moscow's invasion of Ukraine — has left space for Beijing to augment its role as a partner and security provider for Central Asia, even though it, too, faces varying levels of distrust among elites and publics across the region.⁴

To form a grand strategy is one thing; to execute it as designed, and deal with the expected and unexpected consequences, quite another.

America's national security strategy is not made in a void. It is crafted to address what policymakers think the world will be, and then executed in the world as it is — which, all too often, is not the world

1 Frank Gavin, "What Are We Doing Here?" *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2024), <https://tnsr.org/2024/05/what-exactly-are-we-doing/>.

2 For example, Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2018), <https://tnsr.org/2018/11/what-is-grand-strategy-sweeping-a-conceptual-minefield/>; Paul Avey et al, "Disentangling Grand Strategy: International Relations Theory and U.S. Grand Strategy," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2018), <https://tnsr.org/2018/11/disentangling-grand-strategy-international-relations-theory-and-u-s-grand-strategy/>; Hal Brands, "Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 2 (Feb. 2018), <https://tnsr.org/2018/02/choosing-primacy-u-s-strategy-global-order-dawn-post-cold-war-era-2/>; Lawrence Freedman, "The Meaning of Strategy, Part I: The Origins," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 2017), <https://tnsr.org/2017/11/meaning-strategy-part-origin-story/>; Lawrence Freedman, "The Meaning of Strategy, Part II: The Objectives," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 2 (Feb. 2018), <https://tnsr.org/2018/02/meaning-strategy-part-ii-objectives/>.

3 Joshua Byun, "Stuck Onshore: Why the U.S. Failed to Retrench from Europe During the Early Cold War," *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2024), <https://tnsr.org/2024/07/stuck-onshore-why-the-united-states-failed-to-retrench-from-europe-during-the-early-cold-war/>.

4 Charles E. Ziegler, "Filling the Void Left by Great Power Retrenchment: Russia, Central Asia, and the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2024), <https://tnsr.org/2024/08/filling-the-void-left-by-great-power-retrenchment-russia-central-asia-and-the-u-s-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/>.



strategists planned for. Janice Stein's analysis of the factors that led to Israel's strategic surprise on Oct. 7 draws our attention to the way in which domestic political actors' long-term worldviews can lead to unexpected crises and disjunctures that remake regional security politics — offering yet another way in which the grand strategic intent of the United States can be disrupted and distracted.⁵

The Strategist and Roundtable sections of this issue of the *Texas National Security Review* grapples with the unpredictability and uncertainty aspect of “what we are doing here” as well. Our Roundtable discussion of Mara Karlin's book on the legacy of America's post-9/11 wars shows that uncertainty can be not only a predictive but a retroactive challenge, as the ambiguity of wartime outcomes makes it more difficult to agree on lessons learned.⁶ That outcome that, in turn, can create concerning fractures in America's national security apparatus, hampering healthy civil-military relations, skewing force planning decisions, and inhibiting essential discussions about the uses and societal costs of military power.

Christine Abizaid notes that today's national security leaders came of age in a world in which the shock of 9/11 reoriented the entire American strategic enterprise — and that now, a generation of leaders who learned their craft in the era of counter-terrorism are forming and carrying out strategies in which geopolitical competition among great powers, previously the backdrop to a fight against non-state actors and adversaries, has returned to the fore.

Like Abizaid, and many readers of *TNSR*, my own path to working on national security was heavily motivated by 9/11, even though I gravitated quickly to questions of strategy and security in East Asia. Someone in the office where I was interning lost a sister on that day's attack on the World Trade Center, and as someone whose earliest memories of global politics were of an attempted coup in Moscow and the fall of the Berlin Wall, I was baffled as to how 19 men with boxcutters could upend the order of a world I had more or less taken for granted. A year later, a study-abroad trip to Korea provoked further puzzlement over why the Cold War had not ended and communism had not fallen everywhere. Some

of the questions sparked in that period — about the nature of authoritarian power and violence, about how autocratic regimes assure their own security and survival, and about how their efforts shape the contours of world politics — still animate my research today. I know many readers of the *Texas National Security Review* have their own versions of these stories.

The pivot imposed upon the U.S. national security enterprise after 9/11 highlights the complexity of attempting to anticipate the future battlefield enough to adequately prepare for it. Whether it is a major geopolitical hinge such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the multi-dimensional transformations that technological development can have on military effectiveness,⁷ or the changing face of irregular conflict in an era of renewed great power competition,⁸ American policymakers tasked with urgent decisions often do not have the luxury of stepping back to categorize and explain the changes that are taking place in their operating environment as they navigate and adapt to it. One of the purposes of the *Texas National Security Review* is to provide that space. In his article, Jason Healey takes on one piece of that challenge, offering a systematic catalogue of the different ways in which offensive cyber operations can shape the preparation for and execution of armed conflict.⁹

This brings me to the second way of thinking about “what exactly we are doing here”: What, today, is the purpose of a journal like the *Texas National Security Review*? From its founding, *TNSR* has aimed to be highly credible from an interdisciplinary, scholarly perspective — but also relevant and accessible to policymakers and the public. Both aspects are necessary. American national security and global security suffer if policymakers do not have the benefit of the best information that can be produced; by turn, slipshod analysis masquerading as scholarly knowledge can lead to flawed decision-making on the basis of false confidence and mistaken assumptions.

TNSR, therefore, seeks to publish the best historical scholarship on questions that inform the dilemmas of the present, while being attuned to all the potential pitfalls of overly rigid historical analo-

5 Janice Stein, “Bringing Politics Back In: The Neglected Explanation of the October 7th Surprise Attack,” *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2024), <https://tnsr.org/2024/10/bringing-politics-back-in-the-neglected-explanation-of-the-oct-7-surprise-attack/>.

6 Mara Karlin, Joshua Rovner, Michael Holmes, Carrie Lee, and Ryan Grauer, “Book Review Roundtable: Considering the Inheritance of America's Post-9/11 Wars,” *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Fall 2024), <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-considering-the-inheritance-of-americas-post-9-11-wars>.

7 Mark A. Milley and Eric Schmidt, “America Isn't Ready for the Wars of the Future,” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2024), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/ai-america-ready-wars-future-ukraine-israel-mark-milley-eric-schmidt>.

8 Jacob Shapiro and Liam Collins, “Great Power Competition Will Drive Irregular Conflicts,” *War on the Rocks*, April 8, 2024, <https://warontherocks.com/2024/04/great-power-competition-will-drive-irregular-conflicts/>.

9 Jason Healey, “Cyber Effects in Warfare: Categorizing the Where, What, and Why,” *Texas National Security Review* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2024), <https://tnsr.org/2024/08/cyber-effects-in-warfare-categorizing-the-where-what-and-why/>

gizing.¹⁰ We seek to publish social science research that identifies theoretical and empirical regularities in the world, while asking our authors to rigorously interrogate whether and how those patterns apply to the specifics of the present. While the old adage in political science to strip out proper nouns has its place at times in academic scholarship, including my own, the reality is that strategists deal in proper nouns. As a result, *TNSR* does, too.

Relevance and accessibility matter, too. Whatever their academic discipline, we ask our authors to articulate why their work matters for questions of strategy and policy, even as we recognize that the push for policy relevance generates its own methodological and ethical challenges.¹¹ The *Texas National Security Review* is agnostic with respect to method — a good research design and method is one that is appropriate to the question it seeks to answer, and the journal has published a range of methodological approaches in its pages over the course of the past year alone.

We are not, however, *laissez-faire* with respect to style: We ask our authors to write clearly and well for audiences beyond their scholarly lane, so that their insights can be as widely shared as possible. *TNSR* was fully open-access before open-access became a phenomenon in academic publishing, and we're grateful to the University of Texas system for the funding that has made that accessibility possible since our inaugural issue appeared in 2017.

In short, we believe that big questions of war and peace are fundamentally important; that the challenges we face in an uncertain, often unexpected world are increasingly complex; and that bringing rigorous, creative scholarly insight to bear on these problems in an accessible way is essential. As a result, the work of those who write for the *Texas National Security Review* — who make its blend of scholarly rigor, policy relevance, and accessibility — is more needed and urgent than ever.

The national security landscape is evolving, as are the domains of scholarly publishing and media. As they do, so will the *Texas National Security Review*. In the months ahead, we will be working to build on the principles outlined above, to retain the distinctive advantages that have made the journal successful thus far.

We are also exploring new ways of adapting what we do, and how we distribute our work, to better suit the changing landscape of higher education and the evolving intersection of national security scholarship

and policy. We hope you'll continue to read our issues, and to offer us your feedback on these efforts as we do — and we hope that both long-time readers and new ones will submit your best work to appear in the pages of the *Texas National Security Review*. 📖

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Image: Julie A. Keleman¹²

10 Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War* (Harvard University Press, 1992).

11 Cullen Hendrix et al, "The Cult of the Relevant: International Relations Scholars and Policy Engagement Beyond the Ivory Tower," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2023), 1270-1282, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/cult-of-the-relevant-international-relations-scholars-and-policy-engagement-beyond-the-ivory-tower/564FDDB73CE061FFC5307D62439CA5CF>.

12 For the image, see <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3799006/afghanistan-chinook>.