GRAND STRATEGY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy

This book explores fundamental questions about grand strategy, as it has evolved across generations and countries. It provides an overview of the ancient era of grand strategy and a detailed discussion of its philosophical, military, and economic foundations in the modern era. The author investigates these aspects through the lens of four approaches – those of historians, social scientists, practitioners, and military strategists. The main goal is to provide contemporary policy makers and scholars with an historic and analytic framework through which to evaluate and conduct grand strategy. By providing greater analytical clarity about grand strategy and describing its nature and utility for the state, the book presents a comprehensive theory and practice of grand strategy in order to articulate the United States’ past, present, and future purpose and position on the world stage.

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Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice

THE NEED FOR AN EFFECTIVE AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

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To my wife, Dianne
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This book explores fundamental questions about grand strategy, as it has evolved across generations and countries. It provides an overview of the ancient era of grand strategy and a detailed discussion of its philosophical, military, and economic foundations in the modern era. This study investigates these aspects through the lens of four approaches – those of historians, social scientists, practitioners, and military strategists. The main goal of this book is to provide contemporary policy makers and scholars with a rigorous historic and analytic framework for evaluating and conducting grand strategy. By providing greater analytical clarity about grand strategy and describing its nature and utility for policy makers, the book presents a comprehensive analysis of the theory and practice of grand strategy. It articulates how many states, including the United States, define their past, present, and future purposes in the conduct of foreign policy.

For times of great strategic change, this work explores in a precise manner the concept known as grand strategy that the state seeks to formulate and implement. Even while scholars and policy makers debate grand strategy, we ambiguously use the term to describe both a general approach to policy as well as more specific policies that states may pursue in peacetime or war. What is missing from the debate, however, is a detailed analytic and historical examination of grand strategy, from ancient to modern times, as a useful guide for action or as a meaningful way to analyze the successes and failures of past policy. Fundamentally, grand strategy describes how the nation sees its role in the world and the broad objectives that govern its actions.

As the United States and other states struggle with the principles governing foreign policy, we enter the precise realm of grand strategy. With wars winding down in Iraq and Afghanistan, an insurgency spreading across Syria and Iraq, Russia’s annexation of parts of Ukraine, Iran’s efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, and the rise of China in Asia and Japan’s role as a counterweight to China, now is the time to consider the strategy that governs what policies states pursue. Indeed, grand strategy is the center of gravity for policy makers and scholars who contemplate what ought to be done in foreign policy. From the time during the Cold War when the United States and its allies knew precisely what they ought to do – when they were guided by the grand strategy of containment – to the present, we find that states struggle most when they lack clarity about their grand strategy.

I have written this book because scholars and policy makers have failed to develop a grand strategy that guides their actions and communicates that strategy to allies and adversaries. If neither the state nor its allies and adversaries understand a state’s grand
strategy, we have a prescription for miscalculation, crisis, and war. In fact, the debates about whether and how to exit from Iraq and Afghanistan, and how to “pivot” the nation’s attention toward Asia, were complicated by confusion about America’s grand strategy. Nor is this a purely American problem, because many states in the West remain confused about the principles that should govern their foreign policy.

The more deeply I study the problem, the more obvious it becomes to me that we need to think carefully and analytically about the meaning and role of grand strategy. Although grand strategy identifies the broad purpose of foreign policy, this is not to say that a consensus will necessarily emerge. Certainly that is the preferred case, but modern societies, including the United States, are consumed by debates in deeply divided publics concerning what policies the state ought to pursue. We also see in numerous opinion polls that American society has waning enthusiasm for global involvement. Ultimately, the missing ingredient is a systematic framework – which is another way of saying grand strategy – that helps the public and policy makers articulate the broad principles governing the state’s policies.

With these thoughts in mind, this book analyzes grand strategy, beginning with ancient societies and concluding with modern states, to illuminate its meaning and practice. By exploring grand strategy in theory and practice, it helps scholars and policy makers more effectively formulate principles guiding their political, economic, and military policies. This study, which builds on the existing scholarly and policy literature, explores the analytic foundations of grand strategy. It addresses the ancient and modern eras of grand strategy, the forces that shaped grand strategy in empires, and the influence of revolutionary ideologies and nuclear weapons on grand strategy development. The second part of the book explores the forces that shaped the development of American grand strategy by studying the policies of various presidential administrations. This analysis examines the administrations that made particularly critical contributions to grand strategy, beginning with the administration of George Washington and ending with the Bush and Obama administrations. The book concludes with a systemic framework of principles to govern American grand strategy in a world that has moved well beyond the ideas that governed foreign policy at the end of World War II.

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