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Introduction: Defining Strategy

Rarely if ever in American history has systematic thinking about foreign affairs been more important than it is today. For in the past decade and a half, two extraordinary shocks from abroad have thoroughly unsettled traditional patterns of American statecraft. First, in the fall of 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union ended the Cold War. Then, in the fall of 2001, coordinated terrorist attacks against the American homeland killed thousands in a single morning.

Taken together, these two shocks radically altered the environment for American foreign policy both at home and abroad. For nearly five decades after World War II the antagonism between Washington and Moscow had structured the world along bipolar lines, setting the parameters of foreign policy for all nation-states. The two superpowers focused on building and defending their alliance systems, while many so-called Third World countries struggled to remain “nonaligned.” Generations of Americans accepted Moscow’s threat to the very existence of their country, if not to humanity itself, as a permanent fact of life. Indeed, the Soviet threat was so overwhelming and so widely recognized in the United States that it automatically performed the most essential function of strategic thinking: to set priorities. Containing Soviet power was accepted as the primary objective, the central organizing principle of foreign policy; debate was mostly about how best to implement it. And in that debate, because the threat was ultimately a military one, military means were always a prominent and often the dominant part of the answer.

All that changed with the demise of the Soviet Union. The end of bipolarity meant a revolution in world politics, although the new distribution of world power was at first obscure. Certainly the United States had no principal adversary once the USSR was gone, but in the early 1990s its lagging economy and persistent federal budget deficits hardly seemed to herald an era of American global preponderance. Indeed, in a manner eerily reminiscent of the 1920s, the salience of economic issues, combined with the apparent lack of an external threat, tended to focus American attention inward. Foreign affairs and defense budgets fell by more than 40 percent from Cold War levels, interest in foreign news rapidly dissipated, and politics was dominated by domestic issues like health care, welfare reform, crime, and abortion.

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Meanwhile, the question of basic priorities in U.S. foreign policy remained unsettled, along with the utility of military power in an environment without apparent military threats. Analysts explained that geopolitics would be replaced by geoeconomics, and pundits argued over what should replace containment as the new primary objective of American statecraft: human rights, assertive multilateralism, commercial promotion, humanitarian intervention, enlargement of market democracy, political retrenchment abroad, or the maintenance of American primacy.¹ The Clinton administration succeeded in righting the fiscal equation and in expanding trading opportunities, and it ended the 1990s presiding over an economic boom that appeared to establish American global power for decades to come. But as it intervened in Somalia, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia, attempted to mediate the Middle East conflict, and pursued cooperative diplomacy with adversary nations like North Korea and China, the administration's foreign policy became a matter of bitter partisan controversy.² President Clinton was never able to establish a widely accepted strategic construct as the new central organizing principle of post-Cold War statecraft, and the United States entered the twenty-first century without any clear idea of the use to which its enormous power ought to be put.

Then came 9/11. When George W. Bush took office, Americans thought only 7 percent of their country's biggest problems were foreign related; after the attacks, they thought 41 percent were.³ Foreign policy was back, and with it a threat that, although less serious than nuclear war with the Soviets, seemed more likely to materialize. The Bush administration quickly launched a war against terrorists of global reach and then expanded it into a global war on terrorism (GWOT) and on rogue states that might support them or directly attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction (WMD).⁴ Spending on military forces and other

¹ Representative samples of these views can be found in Edward N. Luttwak, "From Geopolitics to Geo-economics," *The National Interest* 20 (Summer 1990): 17–24; Jeffrey E. Garten, "Business and Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (May/June 1997): 67–79; Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," (Washington, DC: SAIS/Johns Hopkins University, September 21, 1993); Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security* 22 (Spring 1997): 5–48; Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs: America and the World*, 1990/91 70 (1990–91): 23–33. For an overview of the debate, see Barry Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing U.S. Grand Strategies," Chapter 5 in Robert J. Lieber, *Eagle Adrift* (New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 100–134.

² For an overview of these policy controversies, see Terry L. Deibel, *Clinton and Congress: The Politics of Foreign Policy*, Headline Series No. 321 (New York: Foreign Policy Association, Fall 2000).

³ Marshall M. Bouton and Benjamin I. Page, *Worldviews 2002: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2002), p. 11. The referenced polls were done in 1998 and 2002.

⁴ George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," Washington, DC: White House Press Office, September 20, 2001.

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instruments of foreign policy again began to rise, helping (against the background of Bush tax cuts) to return the federal budget to substantial deficit. The new war differed from the Cold War in being partly hot (in Afghanistan and Iraq), in lacking negotiations or any *modus vivendi* with the adversary, and in aiming at victory rather than coexistence. But like the Cold War threat from Moscow, the terrorist threat was serious enough that other foreign policies began to be shaped around it, conforming to its requirements rather than more diverse interests. Cooperation against terrorism, for example, radically altered U.S. relations with Russia and China, while the United States muted its concerns about human rights and democratization in order to construct new anti-terrorist alliances with Pakistan and across Central Asia.

Despite its current importance, however, it is far too soon to tell whether the objective of defeating global terrorism will endure as the new central organizing principle of American statecraft. The future may well turn out to be an age of counter-terror, but the features of the post-Cold War era are still very much in evidence. Either way, the increased importance of strategic thinking about foreign affairs seems assured. To the extent that combating and protecting against terrorists becomes all-encompassing, the United States will need strategic logic to help it design policies that will frustrate its enemies while protecting its liberties and advancing its interests in an ever more globalized world. To the extent that counterterrorism becomes just one goal among many, on the other hand, foreign affairs strategy will need to show the United States a route through the complexities of the post-Cold War era that policymakers failed to discover in the 1990s. Indeed, the utility of strategic thinking is even more fundamental than this dichotomy would seem to suggest: it is needed to help determine where the terrorist threat *ought* to fit in American statecraft, to guide the decisions that will partly determine what shape the future holds.

Whatever tomorrow brings, then, it is likely that the nation will need citizens and officials who can think strategically about foreign affairs, people who are able to understand strategic concepts and their interrelationships and to apply them systematically to the world statesmen confront. The purpose of this chapter is to define foreign affairs strategy, to discuss its characteristics, and to introduce the approach to strategic logic taken in the rest of the book.

What Is Strategy?

Reduced to its essentials, strategy is *how* something is done; it is a plan for action. The plan need not be put in writing, but it must be kept in mind. Thus, one has a strategy for – a sense of how to go about – buying a car, writing a book, investing one's assets, or serving the nation's interests. More precisely, *strategy is a plan for applying resources to achieve objectives*; it is thus inseparable from, indeed it is, the relationship in

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thought and action between means and ends, resources and objectives, power and purpose, capabilities and intentions in any sphere of human activity.⁵

Considered in this way, the term “strategy” has both a larger and smaller scope. It can be used narrowly to refer to the plans or courses of action that prescribe specific objectives, the instruments needed to pursue them, and the ways those instruments will be applied, leaving consideration of all the factors that lie behind those choices of ends and means to a realm explicitly outside that labeled strategy. Or strategy can be seen more broadly as including the interests and threats that justify objectives, the power and influence that support them, and external factors like the international and domestic context within which the strategic plan must operate. This book begins, as any strategist ought, with the broader view but moves steadily toward the more specific.

Writing about strategy has so long been confined to military subjects that many people naturally think of military matters when they see the word, and many writers use the term without modification when they really mean *military* strategy. Similarly, although it has gained widespread acceptance in the corporate world to designate long-range planning departments, the adjectival form “strategic” is often thought to have military connotations.⁶ The premise of this book, however, is that strategic thinking is far too useful to be limited to military subjects. Therefore, “strategy” and “strategic” most definitely will not mean *military* strategy in the discussion that follows unless that modifier is used.⁷ Still, since the roots of strategic thinking lie in military thought, it makes sense to begin developing a concept of foreign affairs strategy with a look at the way the term has been used in military parlance, along with its recent application to the related yet broader domain of national security affairs.

To the extent that describing foreign affairs strategy is a semantic exercise, precision requires that two somewhat conflicting guidelines be employed. First, terms should be defined rigorously and in ways useful to strategic analysis. Second, however, definitions ought to relate as closely as possible to a word’s usage by scholars, practitioners, and the public. Unfortunately, this second task is highly problematic; the wide range of definitions in common usage and in the literature (illustrated by Appendix A) means that choices among several plausible meanings often have to be

⁵ In *Strategies of Containment*, historian John Lewis Gaddis describes it as “the process by which ends are related to means, intentions to capabilities, objectives to resources.” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. viii.

⁶ During the Cold War, in fact, it was usually applied even more narrowly within the international affairs community to characterize a particular class of weapons with intercontinental capabilities.

⁷ Indeed, although military strategy is a subset of foreign affairs strategy, war fighting is a specialized subject with an extensive literature of its own; hence, this book will not deal with military strategy.

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made. But since it does little good to reinvent words for one's own purposes, what follows sticks as closely to accepted usage as strategic utility allows.

From Military Strategy to National Security Strategy

Military strategy, of course, is about the application of military means to achieve military objectives and, if one adopts Clausewitzian logic, higher political ends. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) define it as “the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by the application of force or the threat of force.”⁸ Three aspects of this definition are worth noting. First, the only means addressed are military ones, “the armed forces of a nation.” Second, military strategy is made subservient to a higher “national policy” that, as will be seen below, should be viewed as reflecting higher-level strategic thought. Third, and interestingly, the definition is not limited to outright warfare but entertains the possibility of achieving national objectives via the threat of force alone, without fighting. Military strategy has commonly been distinguished from tactics, which deals with the optimal order, arrangement, and maneuver of units in or in preparation for combat, and from operational art, which focuses – *between* military strategy and tactics – at the theater or campaign level of war.⁹ Military strategy thus deals with the employment of military force at the highest, broadest, and most general level.

Modern commanders, of course, are well aware that even defeating the enemy on the field of battle – to say nothing of success in terms of the political goals of the nation-state – depends on the effective use of more than military power. The realization that the use of military force in war, if it is to be fully successful, must be a component of a broader strategy encompassing many nonmilitary instruments leads to the notion of “grand strategy,” a concept used with much less consistency among writers than is military strategy.¹⁰

One of the narrower definitions of grand strategy is that of political scientist Robert J. Art, who includes in it the full range of U.S. foreign policy *ends*, both security and nonsecurity in nature, but restricts the *means*

⁸ Department of Defense, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JCS Pub. 1–02 (June 10, 1998), p. 287.

⁹ Definition of tactics also based on JCS Pub. 1–02; definition of operational art from JCS, *Doctrine for Unified and Joint Operations*, Pub 3–0, January 1990.

¹⁰ Paul Kennedy sketches the broadening of strategy from a strictly military definition in “Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition,” Chapter 1 in Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategy in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 1–7. He does not, however, transcend its connection with war and the military to recognize that strategic thinking is applicable to all of foreign relations.

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considered to purely military ones.¹¹ His definition is so narrow that it appears to differ little from the JCS definition of military strategy quoted above, except that it encompasses and itself deals with those national political objectives that the military strategist merely accepts as handed down from higher authority. The opposite and somewhat more common approach to grand strategy in the narrow sense is that of B. H. Liddell Hart, who wrote that “the role of grand strategy – higher strategy – is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations – towards [sic] the attainment of the political objective of the war – the goal defined by fundamental policy.”¹² Here, as in the JCS definition of military strategy, political objectives are seen as outside the realm of grand strategy, having been defined at a higher level of authority; but *all* the means of state power, nonmilitary as well as military, are included within grand strategy. Liddell Hart’s sense of grand strategy is more restrictive than the JCS definition, however, in making the assumption that grand strategy is of use only in time of war.

Today, most writers using the term grand strategy discard this limitation and argue for the application of strategic thinking to peacetime security as well as in planning for or fighting a war. “Strategy is not merely a concept of wartime,” writes historian Edwin Meade Earle, “but is an inherent element of statecraft at all times.”¹³ Such thinking certainly includes the idea that grand strategy should be concerned with the transition from peace to war and with how the conduct of a war will affect the peace to follow. From there it is but a short step to the thought that a really clever grand strategy might avoid war altogether; as the Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu wrote some 2,500 years ago, “to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”¹⁴ Indeed, writers like Earle and John Collins emphasize that a successful grand strategy “alleviates any need for violence,” that it “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.”¹⁵

¹¹ Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 1–2; also “A Defensible Defense: America’s Grand Strategy after the Cold War,” *International Security* 15 (Spring 1991): 6–7. Art defines foreign policy as this book defines foreign affairs strategy, thereby allowing no distinction between policy and strategy (see note 28). David Baldwin specifically objects to defining grand strategy, as Art does, in terms of only one instrument as if that were the preeminent or most important one. David A. Baldwin, “Force, Fungibility, and Influence,” *Security Studies* 8 (Summer 1999): 175.

¹² B. H. Liddell Hart, “The Theory of Strategy,” from *Strategy*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Meridian, 1991), p. 322.

¹³ Edwin Mead Earle, *Makers of Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. viii.

¹⁴ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Samuel B. Griffith, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 77.

¹⁵ “Alleviates” is John M. Collins, *Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1973), p. 15; “so integrates” is Earle, *Makers of Strategy*, p. viii.

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But many writers on grand strategy go even further, putting the connection of strategy with war in second place and arguing that strategic thinking should be applied to the whole field of national security. This was the approach used in John Lewis Gaddis's path-breaking study, *Strategies of Containment*, which examined the strategies used by administrations since Harry Truman's for containing the expansion of the Soviet Union. All the instruments of state power were included, and the analysis focused on how the choice of instruments and the way they were used was derived from the administration's concepts of the national interest, the international system and the threats it posed, and the domestic context, including perceived trends in resources available for defense. In Gaddis's hands, grand strategy thus became nearly synonymous with a much newer term, "national security strategy," defined by a congressional panel as "the art and science of employing and using the political, economic, and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to secure national objectives."¹⁶ Today, in fact, most writers on *grand* strategy use that term in ways that cannot be distinguished from that definition of *national security* strategy. Christopher Layne, for example, writes that

'Grand Strategy'...is the process by which a state matches ends and means in the pursuit of security. In peacetime, grand strategy encompasses the following: defining the state's security interests; identifying the threats to those interests; and allocating military, diplomatic, and economic resources to defend the state's interests.¹⁷

But Gaddis, as fit the era of the Cold War, still employed a relatively narrow concept of security, and his book looked only at strategies directed toward the attainment of a single, all-important goal: containment of Soviet power. Simultaneously with the broadening of the use of strategic thinking described above, however, concepts of security were undergoing their own evolution. Beginning in the 1970s with the rise of global interdependence and the growth of concern about transnational problems like narcotics trafficking, world food shortages, uncontrolled migration, planetary pollution, climate change, and terrorism, the term security was itself broadened to include a variety of areas beyond that of the nation's protection from military attack.¹⁸ This trend was naturally much accelerated by the collapse

¹⁶ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Report of the [Skelton] Panel on Military Education of the One Hundredth Congress of the Committee on Armed Services*, April 21, 1989 (Washington: GPO, 1989), p. 26. The report uses the JCS Pub. 1-02 definition for "national strategy," simply renaming it national security strategy.

¹⁷ Christopher Layne, "Rethinking American Grand Strategy," *World Policy Journal* (Summer 1998): 8.

¹⁸ The classic text, of course, is Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little Brown, 1977).

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of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.¹⁹ The result today is a view of grand or national security strategy that is very broad indeed. As the president of Washington's largest foreign affairs think tank wrote in the late 1980s:

Today more than ever, security is both military and economic, and the two must be interrelated in a grand strategy. Western grand strategy, however, must do even more. It must embrace political and diplomatic, technological, and even cultural and moral factors. It must be a comprehensive way to deal with all the elements of national power, matching ends and means, relating them to commitments and diplomacy, and ensuring that they work in harmony.²⁰

The Many Meanings of Strategy

As the analysis above demonstrates, the evolution of thought on any subject is rarely a neat or tidy affair. Today, the meanings of grand strategy and national security strategy are so fuzzy that each scholar must (and usually does) begin his analysis by defining the terms anew.²¹

This study argues that the term "grand strategy" should be reserved for the use to which Liddell Hart put it, that is, to represent the broadest planning for and the conduct of war; encompassing all the policy instruments, nonmilitary as well as military; tailoring them to meet the political goals of the state; and considering how the conduct of hostilities will affect the peace to follow. This definition of grand strategy is not in accord with its usage in much recent literature, however, because it deliberately excludes the efforts of a nation to maintain security while at peace. Those will be included here in the term "national security strategy," limited to goals that have mainly to do with the protection of the nation's physical security against attack – presumably the most important area of the national interest, but far from the only one with which strategic thinking should deal.²² National security strategy would thus include grand strategy properly defined, with the latter operating within the former when the nation is at war and the two becoming less and less distinguishable to the extent that the war becomes total (see Figure 1.1).²³ Finally, the term "national

¹⁹ See, for example, Jessica Tuchman Mathews, "Redefining Security," *Foreign Affairs* 68 (Spring 1989): 162–177, and Theodore Sorenson, "Rethinking National Security," *Foreign Affairs* 69 (Summer 1990): 1–18.

²⁰ David M. Abshire, *Preventing World War III: A Realistic Grand Strategy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 13.

²¹ See Appendix A for a compilation of such definitions.

²² See the national interest taxonomy developed in Chapter 4.

²³ In World War II, for example, it is hard to imagine any foreign policy matter that was not related to the war, so national security strategy and grand strategy can be said to have been virtually synonymous. In the Persian Gulf War of 1990–91, however, many important national security concerns continued almost without reference to the war (e.g., the fate of nuclear missiles in the disintegrating Soviet Union). Here, then, national security strategy had a life of its own and the grand strategy used in prosecuting the war was only one part of it.



Figure 1.1: A hierarchy of strategies.

strategy,” often used interchangeably with grand or national security strategy, should be reserved for strategic thinking applied to the *whole* range of public policy, domestic as well as international.²⁴

But national security strategy as defined above still leaves a considerable area of foreign affairs outside its scope that needs the clarity and precision of strategic thought. Political scientist Hans Morgenthau prefigured this broader kind of strategy when he wrote:

The conduct of a nation’s foreign affairs by its diplomats is for national power in peace what military strategy and tactics by its military leaders are for national power in war. It is the art of bringing the different elements of national power to bear with maximum effect upon those points in the international situation which concern the national interest most directly.²⁵

Clearly, Morgenthau was going beyond national security strategy to a broader concept that we shall call “foreign affairs strategy.” Instead of stretching the term “national security” far beyond its traditional meaning of protection against military attack, this concept accommodates any goal, security related or not, that serves the nation’s interests in its external relations.²⁶ As to means, it considers military power as merely one policy instrument among many, to be used or not in coordination with the others

²⁴ As noted above, the Skelton Panel defined national security strategy exactly as the JCS define national strategy, obliterating the difference between them.
²⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed., Rev. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 146.
²⁶ Although he defines the term strategy as if he meant military strategy – “as a plan for using military means to achieve political ends” – Richard K. Betts also makes clear that the term can have wider application: “strategies are chains of relationships among means and ends that span several levels of analysis, from the maneuvers of units in specific engagements through larger campaigns, whole wars, grand strategies, and foreign policies. . . . the logic at each level is supposed to govern the one below and serve the one above.” “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security* 25 (Fall 2000): 6.

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as strategy might demand. Foreign affairs strategy might be briefly defined, then, as *an evolving written or mental plan for the coordinated use of all the instruments of state power to pursue objectives that protect and promote the national interest*.²⁷

This definition is only a start; we will need to look much more extensively at the nature of strategic thinking before its meaning can be fully understood. But first there is an important distinction to be made between strategy in all its meanings and “policy.” Policy is best defined as *the statements and actions of government*; it is the *output* of what is often called the “policy process,” which takes place within and among the departments and agencies of the Executive branch of the federal government and between it and the Congress. Strategy, as used here, should be thought of as an *input* to that process, a guiding blueprint whose role is to direct policy, to determine what the government says and does.²⁸

It is extraordinarily rare for a coherent strategy to be produced by a bureaucracy of any sort, rarer still for it to emerge from the contest between the executive and the legislative branches of a democratic government. Strategic thinking is therefore best thought of as a tool used by an individual or a small policy planning staff in its effort to decide what kind of output it *wants* from the policy process.²⁹ In a democratic government, these individuals will then have to contest with others (who may well have different strategic visions) in a seemingly endless struggle to make their preferred

²⁷ This definition is very close to some given for grand strategy, which Paul Kennedy defines as “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.” *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, p. 5.

²⁸ Ignoring this functional distinction between strategy and policy, Robert Art tries to distinguish grand strategy from foreign policy by limiting the former to the military instrument and defining the latter much as I have defined foreign affairs strategy. “Grand strategy . . . differs from foreign policy in one fundamental respect. To define a nation’s foreign policy is to lay out the full range of goals that a state should seek in the world and then determine how all of the instruments of statecraft – political power, military power, economic power, ideological power – should be integrated and employed with one another to achieve those goals. Grand strategy, too, deals with the full range of goals that a state should seek, but it concentrates primarily on how the military instrument should be employed to achieve them. It prescribes how a nation should wield its military instrument to realize its foreign policy goals.” *A Grand Strategy for America*, pp. 1–2.

²⁹ Such staffs exist at several places in the U.S. Executive branch but are often not used for the purpose. The State Department’s Policy Planning Staff has often been a trouble-shooting, fire-fighting and speech-writing arm of the Secretary’s office; the Undersecretary for Policy in the Pentagon is fully engaged in the day-to-day activities of the Department of Defense; and the National Security Council staff at the White House – the most centrally located and potentially powerful strategic entity in Washington – has often been managed by officials who lack either the skills or the access to the President needed for successful strategic efforts.