1 Introduction

Why This Book on Grand Strategy?

There are several factors that influenced the decision to write this book on grand strategy. The first is the distinction that exists today with an earlier era in American foreign policy. From the late 1940s to the early 1990s, the U.S. grand strategy of containment was marked by a high degree of coherence that helped guide the conduct of foreign policy.[1] Several generations of American policy makers knew the fundamental purpose of the nation's foreign policy for dealing with the United States' central challenges and, more precisely, understood what had to be done to deal with them. The second factor, which features a dramatic contrast with the situation at present, is the corrosive effect on American foreign policy from the period of strategic incoherence that has prevailed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the concomitant end of the Cold War. In the two decades since the early 1990s, it has been largely unclear what principles and purposes should guide the decisions of American policy makers as they deal with challenges to the nation.

With the end of the Cold War and the gradual collapse of the grand strategy of containment, the foreign policy establishment failed completely in its efforts to define a widely accepted and compelling successor grand strategy, much less broad concepts, to help the American people and their policy makers answer some of the fundamental questions about what choices to make in foreign policy. What is the condition in the world that we seek to achieve, what does the world look like that we want to help build and shape for future generations, at home and abroad, and what resources can we and should we devote to conducting American foreign policy to achieve these ends? Inherent in these larger questions is the matter of what our core interests are, what the most critical threats to the nation are, how we prioritize and counter them, and who our friends and allies are in our efforts to meet these challenges. In fundamental terms, grand strategy provides answers to all these and many other questions.

Despite operating without a coherent grand strategy, the United States has, since the early 1990s, found itself involved in numerous wars and humanitarian interventions, yet it has done so for reasons, while entirely plausible at the moment, that should be based explicitly on a clearly articulated strategy. However, one senses that American policy makers and the public have been operating on strategic autopilot as they make choices about where to intervene (Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, to name a few) and where not to intervene (Rwanda and Syria being two prominent examples). To complicate matters, American society is deeply polarized in terms of *what* the nation

should do in its foreign policy. To a considerable extent, the nation and its leaders have lacked a basic consensus on grand strategy. Debates about grand strategy, war, and diplomacy reflect considerable confusion about the broad purposes that animate American foreign policy. This confusion is remarkable, and deeply distressing, when we consider the contrast with the broad consensus in the United States about the nation's grand strategy that existed in the decades following the end of World War II.

The third factor derives from these forces. The deep and persistent confusion and discord in the United States about the answers to the most basic questions about foreign policy is a source of weakness. In the end, there is no better way to resolve these questions than to begin at the beginning, which means to analyze what the United States ought to do in foreign policy, and this has its foundation in studying the intersection between grand strategy and the challenges that the United States faces in international politics. It is only then that the American people and their policy makers can reestablish some degree of order and coherence in the nation's foreign policy. This brings us to the purpose of this book, which is to conduct a high-level and systemic examination of the nature, meaning, and evolution of grand strategy; to use that framework to examine the broad patterns in American grand strategy; and then to examine where the United States is and is likely to find itself in its conduct of foreign policy.

What This Book Proposes to Do

This book explores several central questions about grand strategy that are critical to the scholarship on strategy and security and to the decisions of policy makers who confront practical decisions about what principles ought to guide the nation's foreign policy. The book is organized into three parts. Part I, Chapters 3 through 6, begins with a chapter on the conceptual foundations of grand strategy. It seeks to provide greater analytic clarity about the definition of grand strategy, describes its nature and utility for the state, and develops an analytical framework to help scholars and policy makers evaluate grand strategy – or what so often passes as such. The next two chapters examine the first two (out of four) historical eras in the evolution of grand strategy. Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of the ancient era of grand strategy as well as a more detailed discussion of the philosophical, military, and economic foundations of how states develop and conduct grand strategy in the modern era. Chapter 5 advances this logic by using several case studies to examine the success and failure of grand strategies – from the reign of Spain's Philip II to the fall of the Ottoman Empire – and thus to illustrate the practice of grand strategy in the modern era. Chapter 6 develops arguments about grand strategy along similar lines. This chapter examines the influence of the revolutionary and nuclear eras on grand strategy and also uses several case studies from those eras to make the applicable principles of grand strategy transparent.

Having established the analytic foundations of grand strategy in Part I, Part II of the book provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of grand strategy in the context of the conduct of American foreign policy, with case studies drawn from presidential administrations from George Washington to Barack Obama. What emerges from this study are patterns and themes that have animated the grand strategies of various states for millennia, which help draw particular attention to the principles and arguments that have shaped American grand strategy since the republic's inception.

Finally, Part III examines critical lessons learned about the conduct of grand strategy: the challenges for modern scholars and policy makers responsible for answering some of the most basic questions about how the United States should organize its foreign policy to deal with opportunities, aspirations, threats, and challenges to its interests and values. This book concludes with recommendations for articulating and implementing a grand strategy to help guide the decisions of the United States in the conduct of foreign policy in the early twenty-first century.

The narrative on grand strategy that unfolds in this book exists as two clearly separate elements or distinct tracks. The first focuses on the vast history going back millennia that encompasses the evolution of what we know as grand strategy, and the second examines the forces that have defined how the United States has defined its grand strategies in the past and present to help guide how modern policy makers make decisions about dealing with future challenges to the nation. The last chapter builds conceptual bridges between these case studies (which are drawn from several regions of the world), examines why these historical eras are crucial to understanding grand strategy, and outlines how they help inform the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.

A central argument in this book is to outline why, if the state's foreign policy is to be both successful and effective, it must derive from a coherent grand strategy. With its collection of case studies across several historical eras, this book will help inform how scholars and policy makers alike think about grand strategy as the nation moves forward to redefine grand strategy in the aftermath of the World War II and Cold War eras. The main purposes of this study are to show how grand strategy can be successfully articulated and implemented, and more generally how to move forward as nations seek to renew or redefine their grand strategy as a guide to the conduct of foreign policy. Essentially, the central purpose of this book is to look at grand strategy as a way to more broadly inform policy makers and scholars who are responsible for the formulation and implementation of American grand strategy. The audience for this study is scholars and policy makers as well as others who have a broad interest in the historical forces, trends, and ideas that influence how states formulate and implement grand strategy.

Why This Book Is Different

So many scholars and policy makers have examined the facets, contours, and principles of grand strategy that the subject is by no means new.[2] What is remarkable, however, is how unresolved the matter of grand strategy is in terms of providing an architecture for guiding the conduct of American foreign policy. For several reasons, this book about grand strategy differs from its predecessors.

To begin with, many studies of grand strategy focus on a discrete historical era, examining the nature of grand strategy as practiced by specific states in particular epochs. Others focus on the development of grand strategy in the twentieth century since World War II and the articulation of containment.[3] However, this study also discusses the historical foundations of grand strategy by examining the evolution of ideas that govern what we mean by grand strategy starting as far back as the governments in ancient Greece and China and encompassing both modern and contemporary approaches to grand strategy. Although the historical dimension is critical to developing the analytic foundations of grand strategy, it is critical for modern scholarship to explore how grand strategy has evolved across various historical eras. That is precisely how this study proceeds.

One reason for the failure to deal properly with grand strategy has been debates about the interrelationship between, and the failure to properly distinguish among, strategy, grand strategy, and foreign policy. To establish some definitional order, the term *foreign policy* as it is used in this study embraces all of the actions – guided by political, military, and economic objectives – undertaken by a nation in its relationships with other states. Some clarity about "strategy" is likewise in order. In practical terms, *strategy* for this study is the "science and art of using all the forces of a nation to execute the approved plans as effectively as possible during peace or war" as well as the "science and art of military command as applied to the overall planning and conduct of large-scale combat operations."[4] In recent centuries, the term *strategy* described the political, economic, and military means that policy makers use to accomplish the state's broad objectives.[5] In effect, strategy tells us *what* policies to pursue, whereas foreign policy is about the *how* to do so. Missing is the broad question of *why* the state pursues such policies using particular strategies, which is the precise function of grand strategy.

A central argument in this study is that grand strategy encompasses much more than war or military strategy, because it extends to all efforts undertaken by states to marshal their political, economic, and social resources to achieve a common goal. In practice, grand strategy incorporates all facets of state power, including notably domestic and economic policy, because these influence how the nation conducts its foreign policy. What this study seeks to develop is a deeper analytic basis for better understanding the theory and practice of grand strategy.

In its practical application, grand strategy is not and never has been simply about war or the conduct of war – in fact, war often represents a failure of grand strategy. Grand strategy goes far beyond war or the preparations for it, because it embraces all the actions and policies pursued by the state as it conducts foreign and domestic economic policies in both the short and long term. It also governs decisions about the state's priorities and capabilities. In theory and practice, grand strategy establishes and then balances the state's priorities in terms of the general framework within which the state accomplishes its foreign policy goals.

This Book's Core Arguments

This work develops a series of arguments that are central to understanding what grand strategy is, its promises and pitfalls, and the ways in which it helps policy makers make decisions about the political, economic, and military issues that confront the state as it conducts foreign policy.[6]

First, the evolution of grand strategy during the past several thousand years has been marked by significant and substantive trends in the history of strategy, warfare, and states. With these developments, the nature of grand strategy before the eighteenth century differs significantly from that existing since then. A critical factor in the evolution of grand strategy was the formation of the modern state and its impact on industrial warfare, as discussed in Chapter 4. This study examines the critical theorists and strategists whose ideas have contributed to the articulation and implementation of grand strategy since the times of ancient Greece and China, the formation of the modern state in the seventeenth century, the critical ideas and political philosophies that have influenced the evolution of grand strategy, and how changes in the conduct and technology of war throughout the centuries have shaped its foundations.

Second, grand strategy should and does, by its very nature, evolve and shift as the state's interests and the forces shaping the international system likewise change. Furthermore, when states undergo periods of change, particularly those that are dramatic, it is likely that their grand strategy similarly will (or should) change. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of containment as the central organizing principle that guided the conduct of American foreign policy, the predictable outcome should be for the nation's grand strategy to undergo a period of renewal and redefinition.[7] Should a state not experience such a period of renewal of its grand strategy that puts it on a more prosperous and sustainable trajectory, it may enter a period in which its power and influence experience drift and decline.

Third, a state without an agreed-upon and coherent grand strategy will, as a matter of definition, suffer the penalties that follow from having a confused and chaotic foreign policy. The purpose of grand strategy is to define for policy makers the general goals that they want to achieve for the state and its role in the international system. In this sense, grand strategy provides a framework for outlining what kind of world the state seeks to build. What we arguably are witnessing in the case of the United States is the confusion that results when the state's grand strategy is in a period of flux. To remedy this failure, this study presents a clearer analytic basis for grand strategy as a way to smooth the transition to the emergence of principles that will help govern American foreign policy in the future. We also must consider the argument of whether states, particularly democracies, need an adversary to help stimulate how scholars and policy makers articulate and implement their grand strategy. Looking at the United States and its European allies in the aftermath of World War II is instructive, because it raises the question of whether they would have articulated such a coherent grand strategy without the pressure imposed and the focal point of attention provided by the Soviet Union. Later, the study considers the consequences that result from facing an adversary that is not a coherent and sovereign entity (as is the case with the current U.S. struggle with violent Islamic extremism).

Fourth, for those who follow the evolution of grand strategy and wonder about the forces that shape it, a central point is that grand strategy is defined by intense and often episodic debates among scholars and policy makers. Such debates, however, are likely to be more contentious in periods when the state is engaged in a redefinition and renewal of its grand strategy. Such is the case at this writing and likely will remain this way for the foreseeable future as individuals and communities struggle to answer pressing questions about foreign policy, notably what policies the state should pursue and why it should do so.

Lastly, the debate about grand strategy is not a surrogate for the argument that the United States is in decline or that the principles governing its grand strategy are similarly a prescription for managing America's decline.[8] To the contrary, this study advances the argument that the United States puts at risk the substantial economic and security advantages it now possesses if it fails to develop principles and precepts that build a coherent grand strategy while simultaneously providing some balance among its foreign and domestic priorities. The failure to advance such a grand strategy itself directly contributes to broad confusion about the role of the United States in world affairs as well as its domestic priorities.

Over time, states without a coherent grand strategy suffer from having a confused foreign policy, which contributes to shifting, confused, and discordant policies. American foreign policy since the end of the Cold War has suffered from a failure to

articulate a coherent grand strategy, which is not a remnant of containment, and if this problem is not addressed, the United States will squander the ability to use its global power and influence to build a peaceful, prosperous, and stable twenty-first century. The effort to articulate a new grand strategy after the end of a major war or conflict is marked by a period of renewal and redefinition that, if successful, will generate a new set of long-term priorities to guide foreign policy and provide continuity in the midst of leadership changes. We can look at history to see different examples of states that were able to manage this period of renewal and redefinition successfully, just as others allowed themselves to drift into foreign policy incoherence and irrelevance.

This book is an effort to build the foundations of a process to renew and redefine grand strategy in a way that moves the discussion closer to constructive debates. Perhaps this process will help the United States and other nations forge a consensus on what their long-term international priorities should be and how to achieve them.

2 Contemporary Classics in American Grand Strategy

There are four disciplinary approaches to the study of American grand strategy. Each approach has a valuable contribution to make because each offers a different perspective on the key determinants of American grand strategy and then recommends certain policies on the basis of this analysis. The first approach is the study of grand strategy through the lens of American history. This historical approach is led by such academics as John Lewis Gaddis, Paul Kennedy, Walter Russell Mead, and Williamson Murray.[1] It could also be dubbed the Yale school of American grand strategy, since two of the professors (Gaddis and Kennedy) are in Yale's history department. They see the approach as developing not in accordance with some general social scientific theory, but evolving as part of the unique political, cultural, and social conditions that exist in each state.

In the second approach, social scientists study American grand strategy through the lens of theory. They use more deductive than inductive reasoning, which means that American grand strategy is best explained in terms of general theories rather than specific historical and evolutionary developments. Social scientists downplay, if not totally ignore, the exceptional nature of the United States as a government and treat it more or less like other states, each of which is rationally pursuing its own self-interest. Social scientists tend to treat states as equivalent and operating in an international system that is primarily characterized by the distribution of military and economic power. Although this represents an important level of analysis, it is not a complete framework for analyzing the evolution of grand strategy.

The third approach is the product of the practitioners – the policy makers who implement American grand strategy and find their role to go beyond simply articulating it. Their approach has the advantage of being deeply knowledgeable about the limits of implementation. Kissinger, for instance, has excellent insights into the role of domestic political traditions and institutions in shaping and constraining the options available to the nation's grand strategy. The drawback of the resulting works is that they tend to have a temporary relevance to the larger debate about American grand strategy because they are practically oriented to the more immediate concerns of the day. The practitioners often develop critical appraisals of the current administration's implementation of grand strategy rather than contextual analyses of the evolution of American grand strategy as a whole.

Finally, there are the military strategists. These are predominantly scholars who see grand strategy as primarily about, and through the lens of, military strategy. Their arguments are in the minority but nonetheless are very much worth noting, because they make a critical contribution to the debate about grand strategy. The military strategists'

ideas link back to the early age of the evolution of grand strategy, the ancient to the modern, when the most important instrument of national power was, by and large, the military. As we will see later in this chapter, Robert Art defines *grand strategy* in terms of military capabilities and is one of the more influential thinkers about this approach to grand strategy.

This book is designed to draw from all four approaches. It takes from the historical approach the importance of understanding United States foreign policy as the product of unique historical experiences and conditions. It draws from the social scientists the conclusion that power remains a fundamentally important element of grand strategy. And it takes from the practitioners the need to be sensitive to domestic political and institutional factors as well as the willingness to engage with the policy-making community. Finally, the military strategic approach exerts significant influence in the sense that arguments about grand strategy often concern the proper deployment and use of military power globally.

Whereas all four approaches play an important role, the historical approach is still the most influential in terms of method. There is no substitute for examining history in detail, because although it does not necessarily repeat itself, it certainly rhymes, as Mark Twain put it.[2] Because patterns emerge, submerge, and reemerge, the purpose of this study is to reveal those patterns as they have slowly unfolded over many centuries of history and across continents. It is only by stepping back to see the broad sweep of historical evolution that we can understand what brings us to this point in the present and how best to position the United States for the future. This approach also is consistent with one of the purposes of the book, which is to help bridge the gap between how the scholarly and policy-making communities understand the evolution of grand strategy and its consequences for security.

The following review of the contemporary classics of grand strategy proceeds in three parts for each author. The first question is, How does this author approach and analyze American grand strategy? The second question is, Based on this approach and analysis, what are the author's recommendations for American grand strategy in the early twenty-first century? The third part provides a brief summary of how this book is similar to as well as different from these valuable and prior contributions to the study of grand strategy.

The Historians

Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* is one of the most renowned studies of grand strategy. In it, Kennedy surveys 500 years of world history and tracks the patterns of interaction between economics and strategy in the rise and fall of modern empires, specifically the Ottoman, Dutch, Habsburg, Spanish, Napoleonic, and British Empires. His main finding is that each empire fell because of what he coins "imperial overstretch" (p. 515), which occurred not because of hubris or hyper-ambition, but because of a natural tendency of the Great Powers to face increasing numbers of security threats at the time when their share of the world economy is declining.[3] This "leads to the downward spiral of slower growth, heavier taxes, deepening domestic splits over spending priorities, and a weakening capacity to bear the burdens of defense."[4]

This downward spiral, however, though seemingly inescapable, does not exist as a historical necessity. His economic-historical approach leads to the recommendation that the United States should prioritize two principles if it is to prevent decline: first, it should

keep its defense budget modest and manageable, and second, it should not overcommit itself in providing global security. In short, he recommends generally that the United States should strike a balance between its security ends and economic means.

The strength of Kennedy's approach is that it understands grand strategy within the context of the economic and political comparison of empires across centuries.[5] It benefits from a richly detailed analysis of broad economic indicators that portend long-term decline. The challenge with this approach lies in its application to the United States, since it is not a formal empire as are the subjects of the case studies he considers. The most similar case to the United States likely is that of the British Empire, but there remain significant differences. Thus, applying the lessons learned from Kennedy's book to American grand strategy in the early twenty-first century is problematic. For instance, unlike the cases of the Ottoman, Dutch, and Napoleonic Empires, the U.S. government does not have formal imperial frontiers to defend, and it has much more flexibility in its deployments of garrisons and basing.

Second, U.S. spending on defense has historically been much lower than that of most European empires. Kennedy shows that defense spending at the level of approximately 10 percent has historically been "excessive" and has led to imperial decline.[6] Yet, defense expenditures since the 1950s in the United States have declined from a high of around 10 percent to a post-9/11 average of under 5 percent of GDP.[7] The levels of defense spending that Kennedy cites as signaling unsustainability have not been seen in the United States since the 1950s and likely will not be seen anytime in the near future.[8] Kennedy, moreover, relies almost exclusively on more traditional indicators of domestic economic power: GDP growth rates, trade balance, and defense spending. One aim of this book is to understand the domestic sources of American national debt in several dimensions, including spending for infrastructure, innovation, and education, among other priorities.

John Lewis Gaddis is the preeminent American historian of the Cold War and therefore is broadly a crucial scholar of American grand strategy. His ideas, as with the arguments here, take the view that American grand strategy cannot be understood or analyzed apart from its deep traditions.[9] American grand strategy does not grow out of a single presidential administration, nor can it be implemented over such a short time horizon. By its very nature, grand strategy spans multiple presidencies and is deeply embedded in the diplomatic and military traditions of the United States. Thus, he argues that the grand strategy of one particular presidency – that of George W. Bush – has deeper roots than many assume.[10] Its reliance on primacy, preemption, and unilateralism, Gaddis argues, are not new, radical departures. They are based on old traditions of expansionism and preemption dating at least as far back as the Monroe Doctrine, when it established U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere.[11]

What does Gaddis recommend American grand strategy should be in the early twenty-first century? Because he finds that George W. Bush's grand strategy as articulated in his 2002 National Security Strategy has deep historical roots in the American experience, he essentially advocates the Bush Doctrine as a grand strategy for the present. Nor is his defense without merit. He, for instance, demonstrates that George W. Bush actually *articulated* a grand strategy, in contrast to Clinton and George H. W. Bush, who left American grand strategy largely unstated and vague.[12]

Gaddis is right in his approach, but his conclusions leave considerable room for debate. While grand strategy does arise from deep historical roots in the American experience, his argument seems to exclude the possibility of evolution. The American

tradition in grand strategy – as this book seeks to establish – is not static, but has evolved and will continue to evolve in response to the ever-changing political, economic, and security context of the times. His argument that Washington, Monroe, McKinley, and others were unilateralist uses a term from the twentieth century to understand the forces shaping grand strategy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These presidents were not thinking in terms of unilateralism versus multilateralism, but rather in terms of the basic survival of the Republic against threats both internal and external. The goal for the first phase of American grand strategy was not to act unilaterally for the purposes of altering the international system. By contrast, the essence of American grand strategy was always to stay sufficiently apart from, but to grow strong enough to fend off, European intervention.

This book differs from Gaddis's argument in two key respects. First, while Gaddis does not contrast the American tradition in grand strategy with Europe's, this book explores that relationship. True, America has responded to surprise attacks such as the burning of Washington, DC, in 1814, the Native American incursions on the frontier, and Pearl Harbor. But the central point is that the nation used these surprise attacks to stimulate a more activist foreign policy. Unlike the European experience, the evolution of American grand strategy as examined in this book does not have a bias toward transforming the international system in favor of establishing American hegemony.[13]

The second major counterargument that Gaddis could address is the explanation of the role of the slow and reluctant assertion of American hegemony in the early twentieth century. Unlike most European states, the U.S. government did not seek global hegemony, but reluctantly accepted it only after World War II eroded the power of all other Western candidates, especially Great Britain, and only after the threat of the Soviet Union required a superpower to counterbalance it. In short, a critical point from Gaddis's work is the distinction between a unilateralism of necessity and a unilateralism of choice. European grand strategy, especially on the Continent, has traditionally been a function of the latter, while American grand strategy has tended toward the former.

Walter Russell Mead offers an alternative and more comparative historical analysis of American grand strategy, because he includes the European experience.[14] He forcefully argues that American grand strategy cannot be understood apart from the American historical experience. Attempting to understand it in terms of what he calls the "Continental realism" of Europe's modern history is misguided. Continental realism rests on a set of assumptions that are not applicable to America. It assumes, for instance, that the balance of power in the system is the all-important calculation in grand strategy. It further assumes that the state – indeed, sometimes led by a small cadre of elite experts – constitutes the sole articulator and guiding implementer of grand strategy. In addition, the Continent has a long history of hegemonic bids for system transformation, since the time of Napoleon and culminating with Stalin. The United States, by contrast, does not share these assumptions or this experience in its foreign policy.[15] The arguments developed in this book align with this key point, which is that American grand strategy has its own unique traditions that derive from its exceptional history in the conduct of foreign policy.

However, the arguments here take a different view of the grand strategic traditions in American history. Mead describes four traditions: the Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, and Wilsonian. The Hamiltonian tradition is about building a strong alliance