

***MARK-E0521 Grand Strategy:
Concept, History, Applications***

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**Session 2: Grand Strategy in
Politics and Warfare: An Historical
Approach**

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Nina Silove (2018) Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of “Grand Strategy”

- Grand strategy is a “slippery,” “fuzzy,” and “jumble[d]” concept (Silove, 2018: 28).
- Silove (2018) analyses the intellectual history of the concept of grand strategy and the many definitions proffered by historians, political scientists, and policy analysts, as well as the methods they use—often implicitly—to operationalize the concept.
- Does grand strategy “exist”? Is grand strategy intentional? Do all states (or large organizations, for that matter) have grand strategies, or only great powers? And, to what extent is grand strategy constant or flexible?

Silove (2018) Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of “Grand Strategy”

First, scholars use grand strategy to refer to a deliberate, detailed plan devised by individuals at the top.

Second, they employ it to refer to an organizing principle that is consciously held and used by individuals to guide their decisions.

Third, scholars use the term to refer to a pattern in state behavior. Scholars broadly agree that grand strategy refers to something that is long-term in scope, concerned with the state’s most important priorities, and inclusive of all spheres of statecraft (military, diplomatic, and economic). (Cf. CSR and corporate strategies at the highest level)

As shorthands, the three uses may be thought of, respectively, as “grand plans,” “grand principles,” and “grand behavior.”

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- There is little explicit discussion of methodologies of concept construction in the literature on grand strategy. Most contributions implicitly commit to scientific realism and use grand strategy to refer to a real object or phenomenon, something that exists independently of the mind of the observer. There are possible alternative approaches, for example, grand strategy could be used to refer to a construct in an analytic model that depicts “a reality,” without claiming to depict “the reality”.
- Key definitions: Barry R. Posen: a grand strategy is “a political-military, means-ends chain, a state’s theory about how it can best ‘cause’ security for itself.”
- Paul Kennedy: grand strategy is “concerned with peace as much as (perhaps even more than) with war. It [is] about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries. It [does] not cease at a war’s end, nor commence at its beginning.”

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- Is the theory (in Posen’s definition) a logic that underlies and governs the behavior of the state, and operates independently of individual agency? Or is it an idea that is held consciously in the mind of leaders? Or perhaps the concept does not refer to a real-world object or phenomenon at all, and the theory is in fact an analytic construct that can be applied post hoc to interpret states’ behavior?
- One effect of failing to identify the object or phenomenon to which the concept of grand strategy refers is that some scholars inadvertently subscribe to more than one of the competing possibilities. In such works, grand strategy is used variously to describe plans, organizing principles, and patterns of state behavior.
- In a prominent example of this type, as noted above, Brands stresses the purposiveness of grand strategy but then also argues that leaders may follow the logic of their grand strategies “consciously or unconsciously” and even seems to suggest that grand strategy could be made in “a more iterative or idiosyncratic manner”. ... He asserts that grand strategy is constituted by “a set of ideas” or “key ideas” rather than by—necessarily—a more “formalized, detailed” document.

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In a coauthored article with Patrick Porter, Brands again makes the argument that grand strategy is a “set of core ideas” as distinct from a “detailed roadmap” but then makes as a key recommendation for improving the quality of US grand strategy: “contingency planning [that is, formalized, detailed planning] that can help policy-makers deal with surprises more purposefully and effectively.”

Grand Strategy as a Plan

- Historians, and specifically military historians, have first claim over the concept of grand strategy. Writing in the interwar period, Liddell Hart observed that there was a “higher” level of strategy, which he termed “grand strategy”.
- For the role of grand strategy—higher strategy—is 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—the goal defined by fundamental policy (cf. Von Clausewitz, *On War*).

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Grand Strategy as a Plan

- À la Clausewitz, strategy is the product of deliberate efforts by individuals to use engagements to achieve the object of the war. Policy is an analytic construct that refers to the state’s interests without specifying the source of those interests or how they manifest.
- For Liddell Hart, policy in execution is “practically synonymous” with the Clausewitzian concept of strategy, but it is “grand strategy” because it is “higher strategy” that coordinates “all the resources of the nation.” In other words, grand strategy is more like strategy than policy. It is not an analytic construct that denotes the states’ interests.
- Grand strategy is like a plan devised by commanders to win the war, except it extends beyond the war to prepare for the future peace and includes consideration of the use of all the state’s resources, not just military force.

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Grand Strategy as a Plan

- Grand strategy, in Kennedy’s conceptualization, is a deliberate, purposive plan much like a military strategy. Kennedy does not make this explicit, but it is wholly consistent with his writings.
- The notion that grand strategy is a deliberate, detailed plan formulated by individuals is often caricatured by historians, political scientists, and policy commentators. ... For example, Kevin Narizny describes—and rejects—the classic image connoted by the concept of grand strategy as a plan, which is that of “statesmen, generals, and diplomats huddled around a tabletop map of the world, calculating how best to defend vital ‘national interests’ from a hostile international environment.” Similarly, Brands and Porter describe—and dismiss—a vision of grand strategy as the output of “mandarins cloistered in a room, charting an elaborate, step-by-step program.” Yet, these images are reasonable, if hyperbolic, representations of what military historians originally meant by term. (cf. The US National Security Strategy (NSS) document)

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Grand Strategy as an Organizing Principle

- Scholars and commentators who reject the notion of grand strategy as a grand plan often do so in favor of a second conceptualization of grand strategy as an “organizing” or “overarching” principle or set of principles (wherein a principle is a ‘recipe’ that is much less detailed than a plan).
- For example, according to Colin Dueck, “If we define grand strategy—wrongly—as simply a prefabricated plan, carried out to the letter against all resistance, then clearly no president and probably no world leader has ever had such a strategy, nor ever will. But if we adopt a less stringent definition, we see that all presidents necessarily make choices and decisions in relation to US foreign and national security policy, based at least partially upon their own preexisting assumptions.”
- A grand strategy is “an overarching guide,” “a framework,” “a basic strategic view,” “critical considerations,” “overarching foreign policy doctrines,” or “sets of ideas shared by policy makers.” This concept of grand strategy can be thought of using the shorthand “grand principles.”
- The strategy of containment employed by the United States against the Soviet Union during the Cold War is the archetypal example of this second concept of grand strategy and played an important role in the intellectual history of the study of grand strategy.

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Grand Strategy as an Organizing Principle

- The notion of grand strategy as an organizing principle is found in two types of work on grand strategy. The first is works of history that focus on the ideas of individual leaders. Charles N. Edel, for example, demonstrates that throughout his life-time US President John Quincy Adams held constant two ideas about how to achieve security for the United States: “unity at home and neutrality in foreign affairs.”
- The second type of work that uses the term grand strategy to refer to an organizing principle is the prescriptive literature on grand strategy. Much of this literature concentrates on advocating orienting principles that proponents believe should guide US foreign policy.
- Friedberg explains that that he looks for evidence of a “shared strategic vision” in the efforts by “statesmen, diplomats, military leaders, intelligence chiefs, and finance ministers” in their “attempt[s] to define long-term national objectives, debat[e] the alternative courses of action through which these may be achieved, and [work], often with great difficulty, to coordinate the policies of the various agencies of government.

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Grand Strategy as an Organizing Principle

- Some scholars who use the concept of grand strategy to refer to an organizing principle do not look for direct evidence of statespeople’s ideas and instead adopt the second approach, which is to observe the activities of the individual or the state and infer an organizing principle from those observations. Posen describes this approach in terms of “ferret[ing] out the grand strategy of a state.”
- Gordon Adams and Cindy Williams advocate a similar approach to the study of what they call national security strategy, arguing, “money is policy.”⁹³ By this, they mean: “National security budgets are the most dependable reflection of US national security policy. Seeing things through the lens of the budget [allows one] ... to discern the genuine priorities of national leaders.”
- There is nothing inherently invalid about inferring a conscious organizing principle from observations of behavior. This approach is, however, attended by the problem of equifinality, which is the problem that any one of multiple factors—including ones unimagined by the observer—may have led to the observed actions.

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Grand Strategy as a Pattern of Behavior

- In the third use of the concept of grand strategy, grand strategy refers to a pattern of behavior. The pattern of behavior is not evidence of the existence of a plan or an organizing principle, although in some cases a principle or plan is used as evidence to demonstrate the existence of a pattern of behavior. Nor does grand strategy refer to the label one attaches to name or classify the pattern. The pattern is itself the grand strategy.
- As one example, it is the concept of grand strategy that underlies Edward N. Luttwak’s oft-quoted statement that “all states have a grand strategy, whether they know it or not.”
- Henry Mintzberg’s intended vs. realized strategy (cf. emergent strategy)
 - He posits an alternative concept of strategy, in which strategy is “a pattern, consistency in behavior over time.” To distinguish this conceptualization from the “mythical” notion of business strategy, Mintzberg uses the term “realized strategy.”
- For the sake of clarity in the study of grand strategy, this third concept can be thought of using the shorthand “grand behavior.”

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Grand Strategy as a Pattern of Behavior

Three approaches to the issue of intentionality:

In the first approach, they set aside explicitly the question of whether the pattern of behavior was produced by the operation of a grand principle or plan. According to these scholars, it is irrelevant whether a principle or plan existed.

- For Dueck and Luttwak, patterns emerge as a result of “strategic cultures.” For Narizny, it is the relative strength of coalitions of economic interest groups.”

In the second approach to the issue of intentionality, scholars of grand behavior purport to subscribe to the notion of grand strategy as a plan or principle but adopt methods that effectively operationalize grand strategy as a pattern of behavior.

- Lobell claims that “grand strategy involves long- term planning, over decades and perhaps centuries

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Grand Strategy as a Pattern of Behavior

Three approaches to the issue of intentionality:

In the third approach to intentionality, scholars label a pattern of behavior “grand strategy” but imply that it is necessary to the concept that the pattern be the result of the deliberate or intentional design of individual agents.

- Layne, for example, argues that the United States has demonstrated a consistent pattern of behavior in the post-World War II period, which he labels a grand strategy of “extraregional” or “global” hegemony.
- Unlike Britain, the United States did not become an extraregional hegemon in a fit of absentmindedness Washington deliberately has strived for that hegemony since the early 1940s.

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The Constituent Elements and Necessary Characteristics of the Three Concepts of Grand Strategy

First, as a consequence of their origins in the concept of strategy, they are each constituted by two elements: ends and means.

Second, each concept has three characteristics, which is what makes each of them “grand.” This section explains these “characteristics of grandness.” => Long-term (decades, centuries), holistic (‘all the resources’; the three concepts of grand strategy are, therefore, distinct from the concept of strategy on the basis that they are concerned with all the resources of a state and not solely the employment of force), important (vital, large, ultimate).

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Qualities of Grand Strategy

Coherence, consistency, balance

- If a grand strategy must be coherent to exist, is an incoherent grand strategy a “not-grand strategy”?
- Wilhelmine Germany, according to Brands, is one case of a state with “a flawed grand strategy” and that of the George W. Bush administration is another

The same argument holds for the quality of balance. This is—presumably—the notion that means are efficiently allocated toward ends, derived from the basic Clausewitzian idea of using no more and no less than the amount of force needed to achieve objectives. The use of excessive or inadequate force makes a strategy a bad one, not a not-strategy

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Questions

Is Grand Strategy Intentional?

Does Grand Strategy Exist?

Can Small States Have Grand Strategies?

Does Every State Have a Grand Strategy?

To What Extent Is Grand Strategy Constant or Flexible?

Conceptual Frameworks to Advance the Study of Grand Strategy (cf. your course paper!)