H-**Diplo** ROUNDTABLE XXI-35

A Teaching Roundtable

Teaching Grand Strategy

Contents

Introduction by Robert Ralston, Texas A&M University

Can the United States remain 'top dog' in the international system? Why is the United States fighting 'endless wars' in Afghanistan and Iraq? What role do nuclear weapons play in how the United States deals with other countries? Should the United States maintain a large footprint around the world? The study of grand strategy encourages students to think big, to think historically, and to think alongside policymakers. Along the way, students are asked to confront other big questions: What is in the national interest? What threats are most important and pressing to the nation? What is our nation's role in the world? What *should* our nation's role be?

To teach grand strategy, then, is to be comfortable with complexity and ambiguity rather than simple answers. There are many challenges confronting teachers of grand strategy as they attempt to guide students through definitional complexities and ambiguities, as they ask students to think historically, to empathize with—or at least think alongside—policymakers, and as they attempt to broaden students' thinking about core questions facing the nation while encouraging creativity and practicality. The contributors to this teaching roundtable offer reflections on their experiences teaching grand strategy and techniques others might consider in their own teaching of grand strategy.

The contributors to this teaching roundtable come from a diverse range of institutions. They have taught grand strategy to undergraduates and graduate students, and to different student populations, from students at the Army War College to graduate students at the Fletcher School at Tufts University, undergraduate political science students at the University of Oklahoma to students in the "Studies in Grand Strategy" course taught at Yale University. Importantly, they come from different disciplinary backgrounds and different stages of their academic careers.

While the contributors bring to this roundtable different experiences and perspectives, several key themes emerge from the collective discussion. Specifically, the contributors to this teaching roundtable emphasize at least three themes common in their experience of teaching grand strategy: the challenge of defining 'grand strategy,' the importance of deep engagement with history, and the pedagogical value of asking students to 'practice' grand strategy. While the contributors narrow-in on key issues in their experiences teaching grand strategy, they sometimes differ in the weight they put on defining grand strategy and in the pedagogical practices they use to teach grand strategy.

First, the contributors to this roundtable all note that defining and understanding what we mean by 'grand strategy' is a challenge. Yet the contributors to this roundtable differ in the value they place on defining grand strategy in their courses. For example, at the Army War College, Jacqueline E. Whitt's core course—War, Policy, and National Security (WPNS)—spends, according to Whitt, a lot of course time on developing a working vocabulary and on definitions. Whitt argues that defining and conceptualizing grand strategy is not mere word play: "The process of seminar discussion focused on definitions helps students move toward a convergence on useful concepts that they can employ in a practical way as they re-locate from the schoolhouse back to the field (or the planner's cubicle in the Pentagon)." For Whitt, "Words and ideas have utility and meaning in the real world." While Whitt emphasizes the importance of focusing discussion early on in the course on definitions, Michael Brenes takes a different approach. Brenes argues that "to teach grand strategy is not to disassemble and interrogate its multiple meanings with an effort to synthesize an ultimate definition." Instead, Brenes maintains, the conceptual purpose of grand strategy is "to offer students a capacious, historical framework to better understand the world's problems." In short, the contributors to this roundtable all note the challenges inherent in defining grand strategy. For some, defining grand strategy is important to get students on the same page, particularly as they exit the classroom and enter the 'real world' of policy. For others, students should 'arrive' at an understanding of grand strategy by engaging deeply with history and applying lessons from history to present circumstances.

Second, the contributors to this roundtable collectively note that grand strategy in the classroom requires a deep engagement with history. Thomas P. Cavanna, whose graduate course reviews *twenty five centuries* of grand strategy, notes several benefits of taking a broad historical view of grand strategy, including that a broad historical view allows students to grapple with "the filiation between grand strategy and some of the most fundamental principles of strategy writ large," for example, in the case of the Peloponnesian War or British-French competition. Brenes encourages students to understand grand

strategy as "a set of tools that allow students to construct a methodological bridge between the past and present," something which allows students to think alongside policymakers while also illustrating the value of the study of history in a period in which history as a major is in decline. With respect to historical cases, Cavanna rightly notes the U.S.-centrism of the field and attempts to offer diverse case studies. After all, Cavanna argues, grand strategy constitutes both an iterative and interactional process. This requires thinking not only about how leaders beyond the U.S. have understood and implemented their grand strategies over time, but also how the grand strategies of other states play a role in the formulation and practice of U.S. grand strategy.

Third, the contributors to this roundtable point to the pedagogical value of having students move from understanding what we mean by 'grand strategy' to doing the work of grand strategy through historical examples or classroom simulations. Jennifer Spindel shows the utility of incorporating fiction (Jeffrey Lewis's *The 2020 Commission Report on North Korean Nuclear Attacks against the United States*)[1] and class simulations as part of teaching grand strategy to undergraduates with the intended goal to "help students recalibrate their reference point for analyzing grand strategic decisions so that they can ask different questions." Spindel's students unpack key events in the novel, debating what goals the U.S. should have in the wake of the fictional attack, are asked to debate and defend their grand strategic recommendations and the steps necessary to get there, and come away with an appreciation of context and contingency as well as an appreciation for grappling with unknowns. Meanwhile, in Whitt's course, students are asked to engage with historical and contemporary cases and use primary source documents in order to encourage students to grapple with the "complexity of the relationships between policy, strategy, and interests." The goal of this historically-informed work in the classroom is to provide students the tools required to 'do' grand strategy in practice. The contributors to this roundtable offer in their essays reflections and tips on how to get students actively involved in order to hone their skills and bring grand strategy from its lofty, abstract, heights, to a space that provides them tools of the trade in order to excel in their careers after the class.

There are few definitive answers when teaching grand strategy. The answer, as Whitt puts it, is always "it depends." Likewise, Spindel contends that students should "come away with more questions than answers" as well as an "appreciation for the difficulty of making and carrying out grand strategy." Cavanna notes that grand strategy offers students an opportunity to think big picture, to engage with scholarly material that is interdisciplinary, and a dose of humility. Perhaps that is why, as Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, and Simon Reich note, "grand strategy always seems to be fashionable,"[2] and why it will continue to be of interest to students interested in wrestling with big-picture, deeply historical, and complex questions.

Participants:

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Michael Brenes is Associate Director of the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy and Lecturer in History at Yale University. His first book, *For Might and Right: The Cold War and the Remaking of American Democracy*, is forthcoming this year from University of Massachusetts Press. He is currently working on a dual biography of Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey.

Thomas Cavanna is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy (Center for Strategic Studies). He holds a French "Agrégation" in History, and an MA and Ph.D. from Sciences Po. He was also a Fox Fellow at

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[1] Jeffrey Lewis, *The 2020 Commission Report on the North Korean Nuclear Attacks Against the United States: A Speculative Novel* (New York: Mariner Books, 2018).

[2] Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, and Simon Reich "Is Grand Strategy a Research Program? A Review Essay," *Security Studies* 28:1 (2019): 58-86, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2018.1508631.

Yale University and a Lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania. Cavanna is currently writing a book on China's rise and U.S. Grand Strategy and recently published an article on this topic in the *Texas National Security Review* 2:3 (July 2019).

Jennifer Spindel is Assistant Professor of international security at the University of Oklahoma. Beginning in Fall 2020, she will be an Assistant Professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire. Her dissertation, about the signaling value of conventional arms transfers, won the 2019 Waltz Award for best dissertation from the international security section of APSA. Her work has appeared in *Security Studies*, the *Journal of Global Security Studies*, and in *The Monkey Cage* and *War on the Rocks*. She is an alumna of Bridging the Gap's New Era Workshop, and received her undergraduate degree from Colgate University.

Jacqueline E. Whitt is Associate Professor of Strategy at the United States Army War College. She is the author of *Bringing God to Men: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War* (UNC 2014) and the Editor in Chief of WAR ROOM, the online journal of the US Army War College. Her research interests include strategic theory and the social and cultural history of the US Army.

Essay by Michael Brenes, Yale University

Teaching Grand Strategy

"What is *grand strategy*?" This is the perennial question I am asked when I tell people—family members, partygoers, casual inquisitors—what I do, the program I am affiliated with, and what I teach. It is an honest question. 'Grand strategy' is not commonplace outside the vernacular of scholars who study it—and even when it is studied by those scholars, the term remains inherently nebulous, mysterious even. To some, it rings of the Machiavellian at best, imperialist at worst.

But when I do try to explain '*grand strategy*,' it then—often—leads to some interesting follow up questions. Will China be the next superpower? Is Russia trying to interfere with the presidential election again? Who do you think is going to get the Democratic nomination? My answers are always incomplete, and I worry that the more I try to qualify grand strategy through my explanations, it evades meaning for the questioner. On occasion, I try to leave the person conversant with an understanding of grand strategy to the point that it will yield no further questions about it, and we can talk about another topic: family, the weather, or something (anything) else.

If this is the question of most people, I presume this is also the question in the minds of many students: What is 'grand strategy'?

There are many definitions, or explanations, of grand strategy; all of them are satisfactory to a degree. B.H Hart's reference to grand strategy ("war policy") is antiquated yet pithy. John Gaddis's definition is more perspicacious and straightforward ("the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities"). Rebecca Lissner suggests that there are three research modes that presuppose one's definition of grand strategy: "variable, process, and blueprint." [1]

Each of these authors' perspectives on grand strategy has utility. But is there a utility in belaboring definitions of grand strategy? I don't think so. To teach grand strategy is to not to disassemble and interrogate its multiple meanings with an effort to synthesize an ultimate definition—as if we can then understand 'it.' For grand strategy should not be taught as a 'thing.' (I'm not convinced it can be objectified in a universal sense.) This exercise invariably risks fumbling around in the disciplinary dark, which in the end, evades the responsibility of teaching grand strategy broadly.

Yes, students must grapple with the question, "What is Grand Strategy?" But the etching of definitional boundaries belies the conceptual purpose of grand strategy in the first place: to offer students a capacious, historical framework with which to better understand the world's problems. This is how grand strategy can be taught and made accessible to students. Teaching grand strategy can thus be an entryway into teaching the value of history, the critical inquiry of the past at a time when the discipline of History is in rapid decline. [2]

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[1] B. H. Hart, *Strategy: The Classic Book on Military Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991), 353; John Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 21; Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *Texas National Security Review* 2:1 (November 2018): 53-73. See also, Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" *Security Studies* (2018): 27-57.

[2] On the decline of history, see Eric Alterman, "The Decline of Historical Thinking," *New Yorker*, 4 February 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-decline-of-historical-thinking; Benjamin M. Schmidt, The History BA Since the Great Recession," *Perspectives on History*, 26 November 2018, https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/december-2018/the-history-ba-since-the-great-recession-the-2018-aha-majors-report.

While avoiding a positivist approach to grand strategy—defining what 'it' is—I do think it is important to convey what it is not. Grand strategy does not mean a singular focus on wars and war-making; it does not operate only in the realm of foreign policy—it does not dictate a study of generals alone (at least it shouldn't). For years, grand strategy has been impugned as anachronistic, as a "voguish concept" that only "makes sense abstractly but falters in application."[3] But now is the era when grand strategy is escaping those perceptions. As Beverly Gage, the Director of Yale's Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy, has emphasized, issues related to social change, grassroots organizing, and domestic politics also belong under the auspices of grand strategy—which has only made grand strategy more appealing and dynamic.[4]

The evolution of grand strategy beyond the academy also has resounding salience for our students. References to strategy are ubiquitous and bi- if not trans-partisan. The socialist magazine *Jacobin* regularly publishes and brands articles on the future of the American left under the topic of "strategy," while conservative-leaning commentators bemoan the lack of strategy in Donald Trump's administration, claiming that its absence deters a systematic, and pragmatic, approach to foreign policy decision-making.[5] Discussions of strategy in the public sphere, as an idiom that transcends left/right binaries, also gives educators an opportunity to teach grand strategy to a range of students, regardless of their political affiliations or academic backgrounds.

This occurs in the "Studies in Grand Strategy" course taught at Yale, but also in the courses I teach independent of the Grand Strategy program. Indeed, teaching grand strategy is ultimately an experiment that can be brought into any class. One does not need to offer a course in grand strategy to teach it. To think otherwise is a mistake—it reifies connotations of grand strategy as elitist and antediluvian.

Grand strategy is most efficacious when seen as a set of tools that allow students to construct a methodological bridge between the past and the present. My first experiment with teaching grand strategy in this fashion, and in a 'non-strategy' course, was a seminar I taught in Fall 2019 called "Lessons of the Past." The course was cross-listed History and Global Affairs, with an eye toward developing an interdisciplinary exchange between the two groups of students. It was premised on the normative conclusion that policymakers can rely upon examples from history to make better decisions on foreign policy. I assigned two books written upon this assertion, published thirty years apart: *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* by Ernest May and Richard Neustadt, and *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft*, an edited volume by Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri.[6] After an introductory session, I organized the course around the history of twentieth-century U.S. foreign relations, from World War I to the present, focusing on the popular analogies and lessons that emerged

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[3] For critiques of grand strategy as a discipline and concept, see Thomas Meaney and Stephen Wertheim, "Grand Flattery: The Yale Grand Strategy Seminar," *The Nation*, 28 May 2012, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/grand-flattery-yale-grand-strategy-seminar/; Richard K. Betts, "The Grandiosity of Grand Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly* 42:4 (Winter 2020), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1663061.

[4] Beverly Gage, "'Strategy' May Be More Useful to Pawns Than Kings," *New York Times*, 3 September 2018; Adelaide Feibel, "Grand Strategy Sees Record Interest," *Yale Daily News*, 5 December 2017, https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2017/12/05/grand-strategy-sees-record-interest/.

[5] Michael Schwartz and Kevin Young, "A Winning Strategy for the Left," *Jacobin*, 18 May 2015, https://jacobinmag.com/2015/05/social-movements-fight-for-15-occupy-civil-rights; Eric Blanc and Puya Gerami, "The Left Needs a Statewide Strategy," *Jacobin*, 28 July 2019, https://jacobinmag.com/2019/07/statewide-strategy-socialists-dsa; Elizabeth Cobbs and Kimberly C. Field, "Why Did the U.S. Kill Sulemani?," *New York Times*, 7 January 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/07/opinion/soleimani-killed-us.html; Colin Kahl and Hal Brands, "Trump's Grand Strategic Trainwreck," *Foreign Policy*, 31 January 2017, https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/31/trumps-grand-strategic-train-wreck/.

[6] Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Freedom Press, 1986); Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri, editors, *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016).

from this history: the Weimar analogy in the wake of World War I, the tenacious durability of 'Munich' after World War II, then Vietnam and its correlating 'syndrome,' which shaped American interventions in the 1980s, the first Gulf War, and 'endless wars' in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Through this structure, we set out to explore the merits of historical analogies. Were there 'lessons of the past,' and if so, can policymakers learn the 'right ones' (or better ones)? Class discussions revolved around a series of ancillary questions: When have policymakers used history well—when has the use of history enhanced the decision-making process? Why have policymakers used historical analogies so poorly? Did policymakers succeed or fail because they misunderstood or distorted history? Do foreign policymakers keep repeating the same mistakes because, or despite of, their knowledge of history? Is there an institutional mindset among them—the 'blob'—that is impenetrable, which forces historical analogies to be the reflexive means to justify policies without introspection? Depending on the answer to these questions, if there were 'lessons of the past,' should policymakers still use them?[7]

I expected that trying to answer these questions would accomplish two things at once: first, compel students to empathize with policymakers—get inside their heads, or at least try to—while judging their blind spots, logical fallacies, biases, and hubris; and second, come to terms with the role of strategy (or lack thereof) in shaping their decisions—where did historical analogies fit into their long-term visions for American foreign policy? Along the way, I hoped they would be skeptical of the course's premise and critical of foreign policy decision makers, while still trying to appreciate the constraints and difficulties they confronted. I thought this could be done by assigning works of history alongside short opinion pieces authored by both proponents and critics of American foreign policy, of liberal world order.[8]

By the end of the course, I hoped the students would reject, or at least question, the value of historical analogies. This they had no problem doing. Analogies are reductive, they concurred, and for this reason, they are often deprived of meaning as useful devices from which to make decisions—but nevertheless policymakers still use analogies, and therefore they continue to require scrutiny. Students also obtained a sense of the short-sightedness of many policymakers—their tendency to make decisions in the here and now, with little time and attention to reflect upon the origins and repercussions of their actions—and their proclivity to use history in a heuristic manner. They also discerned historical patterns, that policymakers kept repeating the same mistakes using the same analogies, hoping they would lead to different outcomes. Many of them grappled with the fact that policymaking occurs in a small, elite space, yet has broad ramifications for all Americans—and yet many Americans seem to be cut out from, or oblivious to, the foreign-policy making process.

From here emerged a conversation that is essential to grand strategy: a discussion of means and ends. Why do historical analogies continue to operate as a long-term justification for short-term ends? This led students to wrestle with the mistakes of the past that animate our present. Students did so while tackling weighty subjects: the need to further democratize foreign policy, to decentralize foreign- policy making outside of an elite network; for policymakers to think lucidly and carefully about 'using' history—or maybe not use history at all, since they could not use it well. These conversations were interspersed with an important discussion of counterfactuals, the possibilities that proved not to be options, the historical 'might-have-

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[7] The written assignments reinforced these themes. Students were required to consult archival collections and research documents authored by policymakers to determine the role of history and historical analogies in their decisions. They had two major writing assignments; both required the use of primary documents.

[8] In addition to the two books mentioned earlier, the syllabus included Daniel Bessner, *Democracy in Exile: Hans Spier and the Rise of the Defense Intellectual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Mary Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Oona Hathaway and Scott Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How A Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017); Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: MacMillan, 2018). I also assigned recent op-eds by Robert Kagan, Stephen Wertheim, Samuel Moyn, Mira Rapp-Hooper and Rebecca Friedman Lissner, and Tom Schatman.

beens'—if not for the personal agency or structural intervention of individuals and organizations that prevented those outcomes. Failure, we agreed, was just as important as success. Contingencies matter.

Throughout the class, I avoided being explicit about my pedagogical aims, and that I was trying to teach grand strategy in some form. I was concerned that an overt analysis of grand strategy would only complicate matters, that it would be an impediment to fruitful discussions. At times, that backfired. A few of my student evaluations wished I had been more conspicuous with my intentions, about where my questions were headed. (That's fair criticism, and I have learned from that, as we learn so much from our students.) But I wanted students to rely on the methods of a historian in thinking about strategy, rather than use strategy to think about history—which would only replicate the analytical errors made by policymakers we studied in the course. Moreover, had I taught grand strategy in a more deliberate approach, rather than using a hybrid, clandestine approach, I'm not sure that this would have led to the conversations I wanted to have in the course.

This is to say that I certainly made mistakes. (Perhaps one could claim that I wasn't teaching grand strategy but strategic thought—or maybe just history.) Moreover, I make no claim that my experience teaching grand strategy in this way can be typical, or that it can be replicated outright—for instance, having ready access to archival collections (which was required in the course), and a library staff with time to use them in a classroom, is a privilege for many institutions. I only offer what I learned: that it is better to avoid a particularistic definition of grand strategy, and to teach the humanistic, intangible factors that animate our conversations around strategy. Teach the various components of grand strategy, and let the students come up with the 'whole' meaning of it.

So I will conclude with this thought: however one teaches it, students must 'arrive' at grand strategy; they must make sense of what is useful to them, and discard the extraneous, unwieldy parts of grand strategy that provide no guidance to the exigent answers they seek. They should not dwell on definitions. For the ultimate value of grand strategy is the epistemological and pedagogical opportunities it presents to make the historical actionable—for students to derive insights from history, analyze their relevance to present problems, and to arrive at a thoughtful, and if fortunate, programmatic response to deal with those problems, even as they acknowledge the pitfalls of pursuing such a project. This is what I have tried—and will continue to try—to impart to students.

Essay by Thomas P. Cavanna, Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy

Teaching grand strategy is a daunting but incredibly exciting intellectual experience due to the breadth of knowledge that it requires to mobilize. First, grand strategies are about the long-term, call for an interregional (if not global) scope of analysis, rely on multiple instruments of power (as well as the way these instruments work in synergy with one another), and constantly evolve as great powers face new developments and compete with each other. Second, major debates exist about the very definition of grand strategy, its degree of [ir]relevance, its causes, and the ways in which the concept should be studied. Third, because of these conceptual and theoretical tensions, the field is splintered in multiple disciplinary and methodological clusters that tend to talk past each other.

At the Fletcher School, I teach a course entitled "Grand Strategies from the Ancient Greek City-States to America's 21st Century Hegemony." This course is designed for graduate students, but my approach would remain the same if I were to teach it to undergraduates. I strive to provide my students with a comprehensive macro-level understanding of the topic. Therefore, straddling history, theory, and policy, the course spans the last 25 centuries, covers the main debates of the literature, explores cases across different regions of the world, and de-constructs the concept of grand strategy from multiple angles.

Two key reasons explain that macro-level philosophy. First, I think that aiming for the 'big picture' was a coherent way to reflect the 'grand' characteristics of grand strategy. Second, I believe that this approach helps students integrate the essence of the concept while remaining flexible regarding how it can be applied. Indeed, one of the key benefits of grand strategy is its heuristic dimension, i.e. the fact that, regardless of concrete policies, the intellectual process of "grand strategizing" itself can prove extremely valuable to understand a complex and fast-changing world.[1] From that perspective, the course is designed to help students learn how to synthesize complex trends and develop a higher vantage point. However, even as it promotes this intellectual ideal, the course reckons with the uncertainties and hazards of statecraft, the role of chance, and the inherent limitations of the human mind, including the eternal temptation of hubris.

My course aims to achieve three principal objectives. The first one is to understand the concept of grand strategy, the main factors that influence grand strategies, the latter's fields of application, and the myriad ways in which scholars have approached those questions over time. The second goal is to explore concrete grand strategies that have been conceptualized and implemented (with various degrees of success) by national leaders over history, and to identify continuities and discrepancies between those case-studies and the abovementioned scholarly debates. The third ambition of the course is to drill down on America's grand strategy because the field remains U.S.-centric[2] and because, given its global influence, the United States offers the quintessential example of how to apply the concept of grand strategy to the real world. The following sections of this essay discuss those objectives one by one.

I.. Concept of Grand Strategy and Theoretical Debates

One of the main objectives of my course is to help students understand how contentious and slippery the concept of 'grand strategy' can be, and how that reality has splintered the literature in various clusters (across history and political science) that do not always talk to each other. The course engages those debates all along and encourages students to develop their own views on the definition, dynamics, and degree of utility of grand strategy.

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[1] Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 7-8.

[2] Thierry Balzacq, Peter Dombrowski, Simon Reich (eds.), *Comparative Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019),

The first class meeting of the semester stresses the importance and complexity of those questions. We discuss how the concept of grand strategy gradually emerged from the subfield of military strategy (and the enduring conflation between the two). I present key scholarly definitions, emphasizing both areas of consensus and divergence. I then introduce other seminal debates: what are the means and ends of grand strategy? Can all states do grand strategy? Is grand strategy necessarily a deliberate process? What kind of sources should one consult to identify a state's grand strategy? Third, we explore the benefits of having a grand strategy, such as setting priorities, articulating ends and means, facilitating accountability, and sending coherent signals to one's allies, enemies, and administration.[3] Then, we investigate the many reasons for skepticism vis-a-vis the concept of grand strategy, including the sheer difficulty of the task, the ambiguities of and risks involved in strategic planning,[4] and the fact that strategy itself might be an "illusion" given the many uncontrollable parameters that can explain national leaders' successes and failures.[5] Finally, the class meeting covers recent attempts at streamlining the literature, including typologies that approach grand strategy as "grand plans," "grand principles," and "grand behaviors,"[6] or as "variable," "process," and "blueprint."[7]

Throughout the rest of the semester, I constantly encourage my students to go back and forth between our concrete case-studies, the ideal qualities of a grand strategy (to be used as a grid of evaluation), and the fractures that characterize the field (and impact the majority of our readings). Most importantly, I assign a mid-term essay that tackles those questions further. I give my students recent seminal articles and I ask them to confront the arguments offered in those works, to come up with their own definition of grand strategy and their own understanding of its utility, and to illustrate their thoughts with case-studies already covered at that point.

Following class meetings that investigated various grand strategies from Ancient Greece to the Cold War and the War on Terror, the middle of the semester seems like an appropriate time to return to a more theoretical discussion. The first such session addresses the debates on the causes of grand strategy, discussing factors such as security,[8] geography,[9] liberal values,[10]

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[3] Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich, eds., *Comparative Grand Strategy*; Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 4-5.

[4] David Edelstein and Ronald Krebs, "Delusions of Grand Strategy: The Problem with Washington's Planning Obsession," *Foreign Affairs* 94:6 (2015): 109-116, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-10-20/delusions-grand-strategy.

[5] Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* 25:2 (2000): 5-50, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/016228800560444?mobileUi=0&.

[6] Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three meanings of Grand Strategy," *Security Studies* 27:1 (2018): 27-57, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073.

[7] Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *Texas National Security Review* 2:1 (Nov. 2018): 52-73, https://tnsr.org/2018/11/what-is-grand-strategy-sweeping-a-conceptual-minefield/.

[8] Posen, *Restraint*; John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

[9] Luis Simon, *Geopolitical Change, Grand Strategy, and European Security: The EU-NATO Conundrum in Perspective* (Houndmills and New York: Routledge, 2013).

[10] Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry (eds.), *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 103-126.

domestic politics,[11] elites,[12] bureaucracies,[13] and individual leadership.[14] The second session emphasizes the key domains of application of grand strategies, including the military,[15] geoeconomics,[16] alliances,[17] nuclear weapons, and nonproliferation.[18] Taken together, these class meetings help us think more deeply about the mechanisms and processes that underpin (or derail) the conceptualization and implementation of grand strategy, and to grasp the difficulty of harnessing various instruments of power together for the sake of achieving higher ends.

II. Grand Strategies in Practice

Another major objective of the course is to review concrete grand strategies that were conceived and applied by various great powers and middle powers over time. Those case-studies aim to give more historical texture to our whole discussion, resonating with the abovementioned conceptual and theoretical debates.

This historical review covers 25 centuries. Indeed, although the concept of grand strategy only formally emerged in the early twentieth century, there are several reasons to go back further in time. First, the intellectual process of grand strategizing (articulating ends and means, thinking about the long-term, etc.) has deep roots. Second, case-studies such as the Peloponnesian War or the British-French competition in the modern era provide opportunities to grapple with the filiation between grand strategy and some of the most fundamental principles of strategy writ large. However, this coverage also helps students understand why the latter gradually became insufficient as the international arena became more complex and as states expanded and diversified their resources, prerogatives, and instruments of power. With that being said, historical

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[11] Thomas J. Christensen, *Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Strategy of Innocence or Provocation? The Roosevelt Administration's Road to World War II," in Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobbell (eds.), *The Challenge of Grand Strategy* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1-36.

[12] Stephen M. Walt, "Introduction," *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2018); Patrick Porter, "Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed? Power, Habit and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment," *International Security* 42:4 (Spring 2018): 9-46, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/isec_a_00311.

[13] Aaron L. Friedberg, "Strengthening Strategic Planning," in ed. Dan Drezner, *Avoiding Trivia: The Role of Strategic Planning in American Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 84-96.

[14] Joseph S. Nye, "Transformational leadership and U.S. Grand strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 85:4 (July-August 2006): 139-148; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2006-07-01/transformational-leadership-and-us-grand-strategy.

[15] Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security* 28:1 (Summer 2003): 5-46, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/016228803322427965?journalCode=isec.

[16] Robert D. Blackwill, Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).

[17] Michael Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances," *International Security* 39:4 (spring 2015): 7-48.

[18] Francis J. Gavin, "Strategies of Inhibition: U.S. Grand Strategy, the Nuclear Revolution, and Nonproliferation," *International Security* 40:1 (2015): 9-46, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/ISEC_a_00205; Robert J. Art, "Nuclear Weapons and Grand Strategy," *America's Grand Strategy and World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 139-175.

elements pertaining to the ancient and modern eras are covered only briefly. To maximize policy relevance, the course largely focuses on the post-World War II era, with a special emphasis on the twenty-first century.

Offering diverse case-studies also seemed important to me. First, I wanted to familiarize my students with the multi-faceted nature of the field since the way scholars discuss grand strategy can vary considerably from one country to another. Second, to an extent, I wanted to escape any U.S.-centric perspective. Third, inserting a wide array of examples helps me discuss the 'encounters' between the respective grand strategies of those various states. Doing so is useful to reflect two fundamental points: by definition, grand strategy constitutes an "iterative" process (as leaders integrate feedback to improve) and an interactional process (as leaders establish their vision and make adjustments partly based on their understanding of other powers' intentions and capabilities).[19] From that perspective, we pay particular attention to the extent to and the ways in which China, Russia, and Iran's respective grand strategies have responded to U.S. hegemony in the last few decades.

III. U.S. grand strategy: Evolution and Main Schools of Thought

The last key objective of the course is to give the students a solid understanding of the evolution of U.S. grand strategy and the current debates about where to take it next. Although I previously explained why a diversity of case-studies is crucial in some respects, America remains the cornerstone of this course for three inter-connected reasons. First, from a practical standpoint, many leading sources on grand strategy revolve around the United States. Second, given the sheer power that it has amassed since the late nineteenth century and the global ambitions that it has developed in the post-World War II era, the U.S. offers unmatched opportunities to think about grand strategy as a long-term endeavor spanning multiple regions and requiring synergies between different instruments of power. Third, due to the above, many other states developed their grand strategies at least partly in response to America's hegemony (whether they opted for alliance or rivalry).

The course provides insights into the historical evolution of U.S. grand strategy since 1789 while acknowledging the arguments that Washington did not have a grand strategy until 1945—if at all. It probes the early decades of the Republic, the assertion of its continental power, and its rising projection of influence overseas at the turn of the twentieth century. It also stresses the continuities and discontinuities observed across various administrations in the post-World War II era and the relative disorientation of U.S. grand strategy following the end of the Cold War.[20] Most importantly, it extensively discusses the presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack H. Obama, and Donald J. Trump.

At the same time, the course reflects upon the main schools of thought on U.S. grand strategy. It investigates the dominant paradigms of primacy and deep engagement[21] as well as leading alternatives such as restraint,[22] offshore balancing,[23] and

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[19] Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 13-14.

[20] John L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy*; William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[21] Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[22] Posen, *Restraint;* A. Trevor Hall and Benjamin H. Friedman (eds.), *U.S. Grand Strategy in the 21st Century: The Case for Restraint* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018).

[23] John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 95:4 (2016): 70-83, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing; Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

selective engagement.[24] It discusses how each of these schools has emerged in recent decades and explores their respective assumptions, arguments, clashes, affinities, and internal coherence.

In turn, this discussion paves the way for several class meetings that study America's grand strategy in the key regions of Eurasia: Europe, the Middle East, and (South)East Asia. This regional approach seems relevant for several reasons. First, it offers an occasion to ponder the geopolitical roots of U.S. grand strategy. Second, it provides the students with a more fine-grained universe of facts and trends in order to compare the respective merits of the abovementioned schools of thought. Third, it provides a window into the recent revival of great power competition and the current challenges to America's hegemony. Fourth, it makes the junction between history and recent policy developments.

One class meeting investigates how the U.S. has entrenched its influence in Europe since 1945 to protect and dominate its allies and to tame the Soviet Union and Russia, with a particular interest for the expansion of NATO and for the post-2014 Ukraine crisis. Another class meeting delves into America's incremental entanglement in the Middle East after the late 1970s, its relationship with regional powers (especially Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel), and the renewed debates about U.S. local force posture. Finally, we dedicate a session to the Obama Administration's 'pivot' to Asia, the Trump Administration's Indo-Pacific strategy, and its response to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Conclusion

We live in a highly complex and fast-changing world where everything is inter-connected. But we are also constantly bombarded with immense amounts of contradictory information feeds by the media, national leaders, and experts, let alone academics belonging to various traditions and sub-disciplines. In that context, a course on grand strategy (including all of the reasons why the concept might inspire healthy skepticism) can help students develop a better sense of the "big picture," an inter-disciplinary outlook that reconciles historical rigor, theoretical insights, and policy relevance, and a deeper sense of the need for humility vis-à-vis all matters pertaining to statecraft. It was with those factors in mind that I conceptualized this course. In the future, I plan to divide it in several courses that will elaborate on its historical, conceptual, and geostrategic axes.

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[24] Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Essay by Jennifer Spindel, University of Oklahoma

What is grand strategy? That is a question that has long stumped scholars, who must grapple with what Rebecca Lissner called "a conceptual minefield."[1] She notes that, despite the importance of grand strategy, the field is "disjointed, conceptually inconsistent, and difficult to navigate." Among the ideas we teach in the classroom, few are as deceptively complicated as grand strategy. I teach classes on U.S. foreign policy, national security policy, and technology and war—each of which grapples with grand strategy in different ways. My main goal in teaching grand strategy is not to give students a definitive answer about what it is or how it should be done. Rather, I want my students to understand context and contingency, uncertainty and unknowns. I want them to come away with more questions than answers, but with an appreciation for the difficulty of making and carrying out a grand strategy. By using simulations and group activities, my students learn that decisions—even ones as important as a states' grand strategic framework—requires understanding others, both friends and foes, which means they need to know about this history and goals of other actors in world politics. In what follows, I describe one such exercise I developed to help teach students about grand strategy. I conclude by discussing the key skills I hope students take away from these exercises.

Students in my national security policy class were often baffled by the decisions policymakers made. Even after we discussed theories of bureaucratic politics, public opinion, and political psychology, the most common question I heard from students was "But, why?" With the benefit of hindsight, they had trouble understanding why certain decisions were made. They have grown up living with the U.S wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, these two wars thus ranked high on their list of puzzling decisions. To that end, having my class read Jill Hazelton's discussion of grand strategy was very useful.[2] It provides a discussion of the soaring political goals of the U.S. in both of those wars, and connects them to another decision that confused my students: the U.S. war in Vietnam.

Pairing the Lissner and Hazelton articles gives students a sense of the scope of grand strategy and the difficulty of matching means to ends. To try to make this difficulty more real, I developed a two-day exercise to try to put my students in the shoes of policymakers. The exercise is based on Jeffrey Lewis's book *The 2020 Commission Report on the North Korean Nuclear Attacks against the United States*.[3] I can't recommend this book enough—it's extremely well-researched, clearly written, and all-too-plausible. My students were simultaneously unsettled and entertained by the book, and since the end of the course I have received a number of emails from them saying that real-world events seem to be mirroring events in the book.

The 2020 Commission Report (hereafter, *Report*) is a fictional novel written from the perspective of 2024, reflecting on the events that led North Korea to launch nuclear missiles at the United States in 2020. I had students read the book in full before we began a two-day activity with it as our main focus. Before I describe the activity, I first explain the learning goals for the exercise.

The overarching goal of this exercise is to help students recalibrate their reference point for analyzing grand strategic decisions so that they can ask different questions. For example, instead of asking what should have been done, they should ask what was known at the time, and whether the decision was reasonable given that information. What framework was the policymaker using to understand the world? Instead of asking what is the best grand strategy, ask best for whom? for what? for when? This switch in reference point encourages them to avoid sweeping evaluations and a stark division between 'good'

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[1] Rebecca Friedman Lissner, "What is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield." *Texas National Security Review* 2:1 (2018), DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/868.

[2] Jill Hazelton, "Big Goals and Small Adversaries: Why Grand Strategy Matters," *Duck of Minerva*, 4 December 2018, https://duckofminerva.com/2018/12/big-goals-and-small-adversaries-why-grand-strategy-matters.html.

[3] Jeffrey Lewis, *The 2020 Commission Report on the North Korean Nuclear Attacks Against the United States: A Speculative Novel* (New York: Mariner Books, 2018).

and 'bad,' and pushes them to think about the various goals that states have and the many ways they can try to achieve those goals. Now on to the exercise.

The activity has three parts, and students work in small groups before merging with other small groups, concluding with a whole-class discussion and debrief. Part One focuses on understanding the events that led North Korea to launch nuclear weapons at the United States. I drew on the style of simulations and activities I learned by participating in Bridging the Gap's New Era workshops.[4] Students are reminded that the preface to the book states "the crisis that brought us in to conflict with North Korea was many years in the making."[5] In small groups, they are directed to think about and write down what they think are the major driving forces that make it more or less likely for there to be a nuclear exchange with North Korea. I then make this more concrete by asking them to imagine specific newspaper headlines that would make them think we were headed to the world of the *Report*. They are asked to identify important players and their view of the world (e.g., conflictual, cooperative, uncertain, etc.). Part One ends by asking them to think about the one thing they think would decrease the likelihood of a nuclear exchange. I ask this question early on so that we can return to it at the end of the simulation and see how their thinking has changed over the course of the exercise.

After the groups have completed Part One, I assign them each to analyze a key moment or process in the *Report*. For example, early on in the novel, a North Korean air defense team shoots down a South Korean flight. One of the groups is tasked to analyze South Korea's response to this event. Other groups have more diffuse process, such as analyzing the role of social media throughout the events in *Report*. Each group has a different set of questions to address, forcing them to put themselves into the shoes of decision-makers at the time. They are asked what their key goals are, how they might achieve them, and what they want to avoid. I paired the groups, and ask them to share their findings, and identify points of convergence. They are then asked to reflect on their policy recommendation in Part One.

Completing Parts One and Two took up the entirety of the first day. Throughout the exercise, I circulated among groups to help answer questions—usually by posing questions in return—and was available to provide additional information. One of the groups, for example, wanted information on North Korea's nuclear arsenal and its missile ranges. Another group wanted to know where U.S. naval fleets were commonly deployed. I provided this information to the entire class, under the assumption that decision-makers would be able to receive similar information based on satellite imagery and intelligence analysis.

The first day of the exercise, then, has students performing close readings of key events and thinking about the decisions that were made by the characters in the *Report*, and whether or not they would have made different decisions. On Day Two, again in small groups, students get to start the process of forming a new grand strategy from the ashes. They debate what sorts of goals the U.S. should have in the wake of the attacks, and how it should try to achieve them. Since I emphasize throughout the course that grand strategy takes into account the actions of other states, the students are also asked to speculate about what Russia and China might be doing in the immediate aftermath of the nuclear strikes in 2020, and in 2024, the year from which the *Report* is written. I was surprised by the effectiveness of this part of the exercise: my students found themselves reenacting key debates in U.S. grand strategy. Some groups were isolationist, arguing that the U.S. needed to focus inward and on repairing the damage. Others insisted that it needed to engage globally, to ensure that there would be no further nuclear use and to try to restore the nuclear taboo. This allowed me to flip the tables on them, and continually ask "But, why?"

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[4] Naazneen H. Barma, Brent Durbin, Eric Lorber, Rachel E. Whitlark, "Imagine a World in Which": Using Scenarios in Political Science," *International Studies Perspectives* 17:2 (May 2016): 117-135. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekv005.

[5] Jeffrey Lewis, *The 2020 Commission Report on the North Korean Nuclear Attacks Against the United States: A Speculative Novel* (New York: Mariner Books, 2018): vii.

Bringing the small groups back together toward the end of Day Two allows for further debate and discussion. When their peers question why they recommended isolationism versus engagement, students find themselves in the position of explaining their broad goals and the steps they want to take to get there. They are, in effect, planning and attempting to execute grand strategy. The stakes, of course, are not the same. But I hope that the skills they learn from this exercise help them understand the complexity of grand strategy.

First, my students came away with a greater appreciation of context and contingency. One slightly different decision could have changed the outcome in the novel. By having to explain themselves within small groups and then to the entire class, students gain experience explaining what they thought and how they made decisions. The process of having to defend those decisions showed them that strategically thinking people can interpret the same event quite differently.

This reinforced a second outcome, which was grappling with uncertainty and unknowns. What makes the *Report* a wonderful teaching tool is that it doesn't answer all of the questions, especially those about the aftermath of a world in which nuclear weapons were used. Figuring out what could be done, what they thought the U.S. should do, and what other states might be doing was very difficult for my students, and revealed different assumptions about other actors in the international system. Though they wanted to know which groups were 'right,' they slowly came around to the idea that there was no right answer. As their reference points began to change, they began framing their plans in terms of 'best course of action for X,' or 'most likely outcome if Y.' They began explaining their decisions by stating their assumptions and frameworks; some explained that they were realists, and thought the security dilemma would reign supreme. Others said they believed in the power of norms and ideas, and thus crafted their responses to reinforce norms about preventing future nuclear use.

Finally, a note on creating similar exercises. The success of this exercise depended on my students buying and reading the book. Thankfully, *The 2020 Commission Report* is inexpensive and is available in both physical and electronic formats. This accessibility and price increased the likelihood that students would buy and read the book. Though it took a significant time investment to create the exercise, it paid off because students were fully engaged and invested during the exercise, and carried that through our remaining discussions about grand strategy. My advice to those seeking to create something similar is to find source material that is accessible but that students are unlikely to have encountered before. This combination means that students will be able to read and understand, but will not be lured into complacency by a sense of familiarity. Having students grapple with a hypothetical, but plausible, future use of nuclear weapons was particularly useful for teaching grand strategy, because it made students question many assumptions about how they think the world works and how the U.S. (and other states) could or should act.

In teaching grand strategy, I see our role as helping students understand the processes and frameworks that explain what decisions were made and when. My goal is less to provide a list of right answers or best practices, and instead help students experience the difficulties of formulating strategies—and defending them—in a more controlled and safe classroom environment. In reflections they had to write following the event, students said they did not even realize some of the assumptions they were making until they had to verbalize them. My hope is that this exercise prepares my students to be more informed consumers of political knowledge and news and helps them engage with and contribute to debates about grand strategy.

Essay by Jacqueline E. Whitt, U.S. Army War College

Teaching Grand Strategy When The Answer is Always "It Depends"[1]

At the U.S. Army War College, where I teach, we often say that the standard answer for any question is 'it depends.' Some say it in jest, but usually, the truth is that complex questions demand complex answers—nuance and detail matter. When it comes to grand strategy, 'it depends' is an apt starting point. Grand strategy is a critical concept for academics, strategists, and policymakers, yet, as Rebecca Lissner has argued "despite its importance, the proliferation of academic and policy-analytical work on grand strategy has left the field disjointed, conceptually inconsistent, and difficult to navigate."[2] This confusion presents challenges and opportunities for teaching grand strategy in an academic setting to students who, upon graduation, will operate in a policy or operational environment.

Students at the U.S. Army War College are enrolled in a ten-month cohort-based program; most students will earn a Master's in Strategic Studies degree, and graduates earn important military education credentials as well.[3] Teaching about (American) grand strategy falls primarily to faculty members in the Department of National Security and Strategy who teach a collectively developed course called War, Policy, and National Security (WPNS).[4] The course is interdisciplinary and mixes theoretical and conceptual approaches with real-world cases (historical and contemporary), exercises, and practice in analyzing, evaluating, and formulating strategy. While the institutional context shapes our approach, many of the questions, techniques, and readings we use would be easily modified for other contexts, including undergraduate education and graduate programs in security studies and related interdisciplinary fields.

Our approach to teaching grand strategy is twofold. First, we shower students with questions and offer them a host of definitions, ideas, cases, and ways of approaching the problem. What is grand strategy? Is grand strategy a useful concept? Must a grand strategy be articulated? How do we identify and evaluate grand strategy? How has the United States imagined and enacted grand strategy in the past? Does the United States have a grand strategy right now? Second, we ask students to

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[1] This essay reflects the personal views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the policy of the Department of Defense, the US Army, or the US Army War College. Thank you to my colleagues Tami Davis Biddle, Frank Jones, Ronald Granieri, and Celestino Perez who all teach this course and who graciously reviewed and offered helpful thoughts on the essay. While the course is collectively developed, each of us has our own approach to the question at hand, so this essay reflects a combination of our collective approach and my personal approach with my seminar.

[2] Rebecca Lissner, "What is Grand Strategy?: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *Texas National Security Review* 2:1 (November 2018). Lissner is far from alone in this assessment of the field. See also Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Paul D. Miller, "On Strategy, Grand and Mundane," *Orbis* 60:2 (Spring 2016); and Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[3] The institutional context here matters because it shapes how we approach teaching grand strategy. The students at the Army War College (and at the nation's other war colleges: the Air War College, the Naval War College, the Marine Corps War College, the National War College, and the Eisenhower School of National Security and Resources Strategy), are an interesting lot: most are military officers at the rank of lieutenant colonel or colonel and include both Active Duty and Reserve Component officers; international fellows represent the militaries of U.S. allies and partners from around the world; each school also hosts a smaller number of senior civilians from across the interagency national security community.

[4] The department's faculty is composed of both academics and practitioners with a wide range of expertise: there are civilian academics, active duty military officers, career civil servants, intelligence analysts, and foreign service officers. Collectively, the department boasts expertise in military and diplomatic history, political science and international relations, and area studies.

practice (in a classroom environment) the work of strategists—that is to examine specific historical, contemporary, or future problems; apply theories, tools, and concepts; formulate strategy to respond to the problem; and defend their proposals.

The questions and problems are sufficiently complex to induce a sort of intellectual crisis right at the beginning of the year, but this is what it means operate in an environment with few authoritative and consensus answers. 'Welcome to the strategic level of warfare,' we tell them. Because of these complexities, most importantly, 'grand strategy' isn't something we teach in a discrete lesson or even a series of lessons. It is an idea that we revisit, sometimes explicitly but just as often implicitly, in WPNS.

The problem of definitions

We spend a lot of time in WPNS on definitions and developing a working vocabulary. What is war? What is strategy? What is coercion and how does it work? What is power? What is victory? What is the nature of the international system? What are national interests? At first, these discussions can seem frustratingly abstract and philosophical. Students sometimes grate at the attention to 'semantics.' Everyone has their own definitions, and consensus is elusive. People use different words to talk about the same thing, and the same word to mean different things. Always, it seems, 'it depends.'

But this foundational intellectual work is critical, as it highlights the extent to which language shapes our thinking and vice versa.[5] Tami Davis Biddle has argued that developing a common vocabulary for theoretical and practical discussions is critical for effective communication between civilian policymakers and military practitioners.[6] This relentless questioning is purposeful: the process of seminar discussion focused on definitions helps students move toward a convergence on useful concepts that they can employ in a practical way as they re-locate from the schoolhouse back to the field (or the planner's cubicle in the Pentagon). Words and ideas have utility and meaning in the real world.

If the root of 'grand strategy' is 'strategy,' then that is where the definitional work must begin. And while we spend some time sorting through the myriad definitions that exist for 'strategy,' the faculty also recognizes the utility in having a common definition and starting point. Thus in the course, 'strategy' is defined "a calculated relationship between ends, ways, and means—informed by an assessment of risk." The course materials continue: "Strategy is a dynamic process...the 'ends-ways-means' construct for understanding strategy...is a starting place—a way to gain initial traction with a concept ('strategy') that is inherently complex."[7]

What used to be called 'strategy' (the art of the general) we now call tactics. The 'operational' level of war links tactics to strategy. Strategy exists at different levels—from theater strategy, to military strategy, to national strategy, to grand strategy.[8]

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[5] Jacqueline Whitt, "Wrong and Useful: Models and Metaphors for Strategy," WAR ROOM (11 August 2017), https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/wrong-useful-models-metaphors-strategy/.

[6] Biddle makes this point most specifically regarding coercion theory, which is a major line of inquiry for scholars of international relations and suffuses the language of military doctrine and military officers, but different meanings and uses impede communication and understanding. See Tami Davis Biddle, "Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners," *Texas National Security Review* 3:2 (Spring 2020).

[7] US Army War College, AY 20WPNS Course Directive, Lesson 1, p. 13. Notably, the USAWC definition of strategy differs significantly from the definition in the *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* and found in publications such as Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations. That definition is as follows: "A prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives."

[8] For doctrinal definitions of the levels of warfare and levels of strategy see "Joint Publication 1: Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States," (25 March 2013, updated 12 July 2017), I-7 to I-9, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp1_ch1.pdf. On some of the definitional and conceptual slipperiness

And, of course, corporations, universities, non-organizations, and even individuals have co-opted the militarized language of strategy.[9]

The complexity increases as the adjectives become ever larger, and 'grand' strategy is the most elusive, conceptually, of them all. As a result, definitions of grand strategy abound. In our course materials we highlight a few to illustrate these diverse approaches:

> Basil Liddell Hart: "Whereas strategy is only concerned with the problem of winning military victory, grand strategy must take the longer view—for its problem is the winning of the peace."[10]
>
> Edward M. Earle: "The highest type of strategy—sometimes called grand strategy—so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to war is rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory."[11]
>
> Walter McDougall: "My definition of sound grand strategy [is] an equation of ends and means so sturdy that it triumphs despite serial setbacks at the level of strategy, operations, and campaigns."[12]
>
> Tami Davis Biddle: "grand strategy" identifies and articulates a given political actor's security objectives at a particular point in time and describes how they will be achieved using a combination of instruments of power—including military, diplomatic, and economic instruments."[13]

While there are differences, common threads emerge: grand strategy involves a state's resources beyond its military; grand strategy endures and takes a 'long' view (although how long remains unspecified); and grand strategy operates in service of national-level objectives. These ideas ground our discussions about grand strategy. Additionally, Nina Silove's conclusions about how the phrase 'grand strategy' is used by scholars are instructive. She identifies three categories of meanings and usages: "First, scholars use grand strategy to refer to a deliberate, detailed plan devised by individuals. 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."[14] These conceptual buckets can help students and faculty identify and disambiguate what someone means when they use the phrase.

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related to defining and employing the levels of war, see Thomas Bruscino, "The Leavenworth Heresy?" *WAR ROOM* (23 January 2020), https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/the-leavenworth-heresy/.

[9] Cori Dauber, "Language, Military: Informal Speech," *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 381.

[10] Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy* 2d rev. ed. (Toronto: Meridian, 1991), 362.

[11] Edward M. Earle, "Introduction," in *Makers of Modern Strategy* (1943), viii.

[12] Walter A. McDougall, "Can the United States Do Grand Strategy?" *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (13 April 2010), https://www.fpri.org/article/2010/04/can-the-united-states-do-grand-strategy/.

[13] Tami Davis Biddle, "Strategy and Grand Strategy: What Students and Practitioners Need to Know" (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press, 2015), 5.

[14] Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of "Grand Strategy," *Security Studies* 27:1 (2018), 29.

In addition to the varied definitions of 'grand strategy,' a host of other words and phrases swirl in the arena, often creating definitional feedback loops: policy, foreign policy, national security, statecraft, instruments of power, national interest. All of these are worth spending time defining and sorting—although most of that work is outside of the scope of this essay. The relationship between policy and strategy, however, bears directly on the topic of teaching grand strategy.[15] We offer the following clarification between policy and strategy in the course syllabus: "Policy may be defined as guidance that articulates national interests in the context of the strategic environment. National policy provides the focus for strategy formulation. Strategy at the highest level of decision-making is often referred to as grand strategy, which may be defined as the use of all instruments of national power in peace and war to support a strategic vision of America's role in the world that will best achieve national objectives."[16]

Thus, if the operational level of warfare links tactics and strategy, we might imagine that grand strategy exists at the intersection of strategy and policy. If policy is authoritative guidance from the Executive—in the United States, for example, the President as Commander-in-Chief, the Secretary of State, or the Secretary of Defense—then strategy is about enacting policy. Policy may be vague or specific, broad or narrow, but strategy must be sufficiently detailed for real people to do the work of applying concrete ends using various ways to achieve stated ends--that is, aligning ends-ways-and-means.[17] Grand strategy, depending on how the term is used, can hew more closely to 'policy' (Silove's "grand principles") or 'strategy' (Silove's "grand plans"), or it may link the two (Silove's "grand behaviors").

The Form and Content of American Grand Strategy

With definitional questions thoroughly explored, if not resolved, we move to examining the form and content of American grand strategy both historically and in the contemporary environment, and to the second part of our andragogical approach where we ask students to practice developing strategy.[18] To frame this part of the course, we use the "Strategy Formulation Framework," Christopher Hemmer's book, *American Pendulum: Recurring Debates in U.S. Grand Strategy*,[19] and a series of historical and contemporary cases to illustrate the complexity and evolution of American grand strategy.

The Strategy Formulation Framework is a graphic depiction (and often the topic of raucous discussion and disagreement and always subject to revision), developed by the faculty of the U.S. Army War College, of how a state might formulate and execute strategy within a strategic environment. The Framework identifies discrete steps for understanding how strategy is developed within a strategic environment and how national-level values, ethics, and vision are translated into policy, which is enacted in strategy. Grand strategy is included alongside "strategic vision," and all of Silove's definitions—grand plans, principles, and behaviors—can be inferred from various parts of the Framework.

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[15] The policy/strategy distinction is one that provokes significant debate among scholars.

[16] United States Army War College, Course Directive, "War, Policy, and National Security," (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College Press, 2020), A-1.

[17] Credit for helping me articulate this idea belongs to Colonel Celestino Perez, a faculty member in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the United States Army War College.

[18] On the idea of "strategy as performance" see Celestino Perez, Jr. "What Military Education Forgets: Strategy is Performance," *War on the Rocks* (7 September 2008), https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/what-military-education-forgets-strategy-is-performance/. Perez argues that we in Professional Military Education ought to do more of this work, demanding that students not only talk about strategy, but also *do* it.

[19] Christopher Hemmer, *American Pendulum: Recurring Debates in U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).
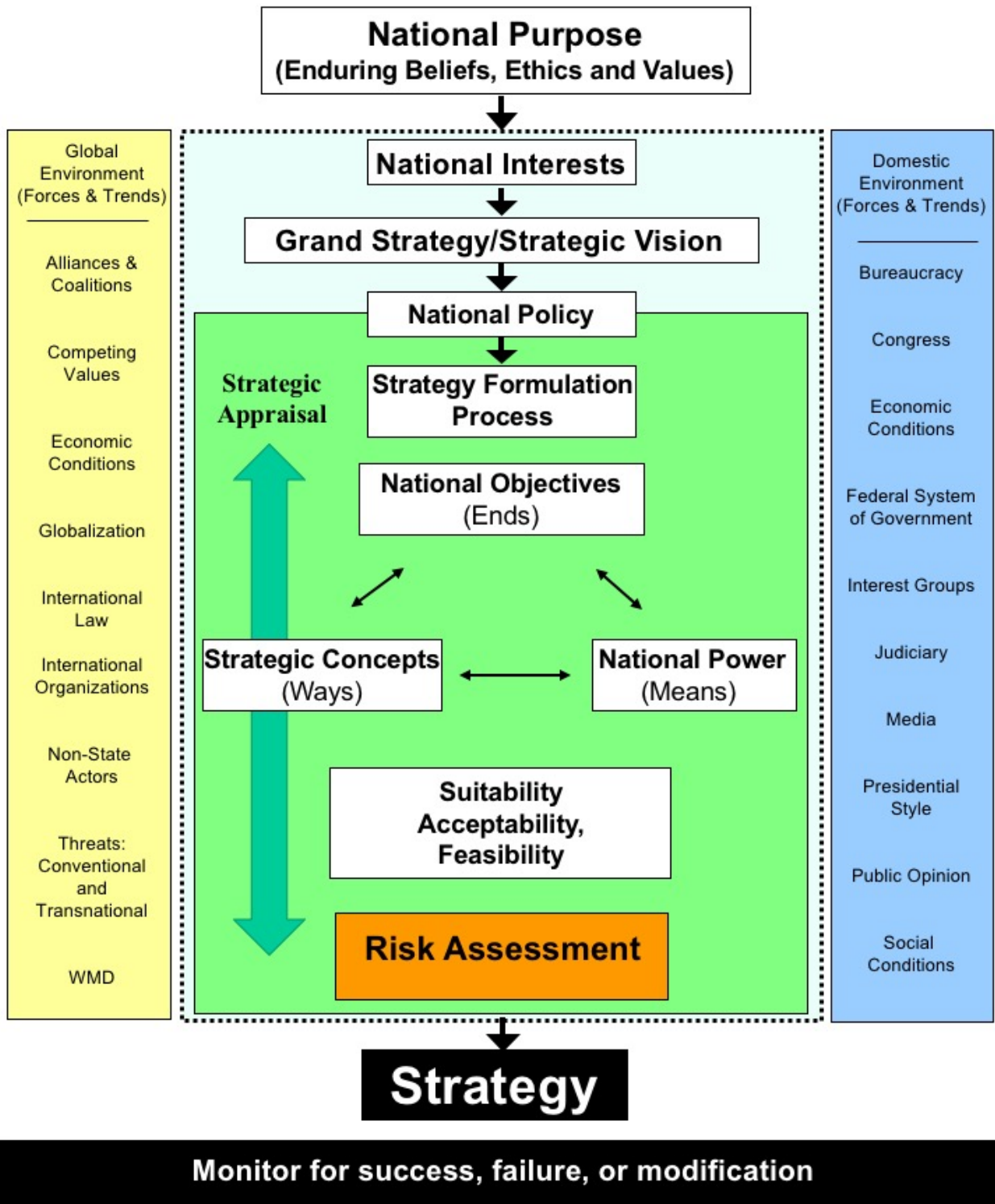
Strategy Formulation Framework

National Purpose
(Enduring Beliefs, Ethics and Values)

National Interests

Grand Strategy/Strategic Vision

National Policy

Strategic Appraisal

Strategy Formulation Process

National Objectives
(Ends)

Strategic Concepts
(Ways)

National Power
(Means)

Suitability Acceptability, Feasibility

Risk Assessment

Global Environment (Forces & Trends)

Alliances & Coalitions

Competing Values

Economic Conditions

Globalization

International Law

International Organizations

Non-State Actors

Threats: Conventional and Transnational

WMD

Domestic Environment (Forces & Trends)

Bureaucracy

Congress

Economic Conditions

Federal System of Government

Interest Groups

Judiciary

Media

Presidential Style

Public Opinion

Social Conditions

Strategy

Monitor for success, failure, or modification

Fig. 1 US Army War College Strategy Formulation Framework

Understanding grand strategy as 'grand plans' focuses attention on the bottom half of the graphic, where (national) ends, ways, and means are illustrated as existing in a mutually-influential relationship and are supported at the bottom of the illustration by risk assessment and the analysis of whether a strategy is suitable, acceptable, and feasible.

Understanding grand strategy as 'grand principles,' on the other hand, focuses attention to the top half of the Framework. This top-level process begins with identifying and understanding a 'national purpose,' which is defined as a nation's enduring values and beliefs, and from which 'national interests' can be derived. These are grand principles, to be sure. While the Framework presents these terms in a hierarchical, linear relationship and as fixed concepts, the relevant lesson in WPNS focuses on the contested and contextual nature of these ideas. The lesson guidance challenges students to "explore the rhetorical, cultural, and political power of these considerations for national strategic leaders as well as the ways the domestic environment and the articulation of national interest and national purpose change over time."[20]

If we look for the third use of grand strategy—that is, grand behaviors—we find ourselves primarily in the left and right hand columns that represent the strategic environment, with both international and domestic inputs. Here, states interact in a system and act according to the constraints of the environment and in relation to other actors in the system. State behaviors are also shaped by their unique domestic political, economic, social, and cultural contexts. Understanding that states' behaviors evolve and are enacted in a particular strategic environment is crucial.

The Strategy Formulation Framework offers a generic tool for understanding how policy, grand strategy, and strategy are formulated. To examine the substance of American grand strategy over time, Chris Hemmer, in *American Pendulum*, offers an excellent framework. Hemmer frames American grand strategy as involving a set of enduring questions that have been asked, but which have rarely been answered in the same way, across administrations or historical periods. He identifies four recurring debates in American history over the direction of grand strategy for the United States: balancing unilateralism and multilateralism; the role of values and interests in US foreign policy; defining the US strategic perimeter; and discerning whether time is on America's side.

Hemmer's questions enable students to analyze both historical and contemporary cases and to identify change and continuity over time. This ability to see both continuity and change in grand strategy is critically important—and it has been especially important since 2016 with the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency because of the intense commentary and often heated rhetoric about the United States shifting its grand-strategic orientation. This is a reasonable question--and one that might be asked any time a new president takes office—and Hemmer's four questions provide a clear framework for analysis and comparison.

Finally, in WPNS, we examine historical and contemporary cases and primary source documents to hone students' analysis using various definitions, tools, frameworks, and models that have been introduced earlier in the course. As in many classes about national security policy and strategy, the Cold War and the associated strategies of containment offer a rich case study for evaluating American grand strategy and related concepts. In addition to reading Hemmer's chapter on Containment, students also do a deep dive into George Kennan's writing, NSC-68 and Paul Nietze's reflections on the early years of the Cold War.[21]

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[20] USAWC WPNS AY20 Directive, Lesson 20, page 100.

[21] Paul Nitze, "The Grand Strategy of NSC-68," in NSC-68: Forging the Strategy of Containment, ed. S. Nelson Drew (Washington, D.C.: NDU Press, 1994), 7-16; The Executive Secretary, "NSC-68: A Report to the National Security Council," *Naval War College Review* 27:6 (May-June 1975): 51-108; John Lewis Gaddis and Paul Nitze, "NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat Reconsidered," *International Security* 4:4 (Spring 1980): 164-176; Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "Sounding the Tocsin: NSC 68 and the Soviet Threat,"

A historical exercise set in February 1965 about the Johnson administration's decision to escalate American military involvement in Vietnam helps students wrestle with the relationship between grand strategy and military strategy in a particular strategic environment. They must contend with a complex strategic environment (i.e., the Cold War between the United States and the Communist bloc), a known but evolving grand strategy (i.e., containment), clear policy guidance from the president (i.e., maintain an independent, non-communist South Vietnam) to craft a recommendation on military strategy. This exercise drives home the complexity of the relationships between policy, strategy, and interests.

By using the Cold War case, we are able to ask further probing questions. Is the articulation of a grand strategy such as containment the norm or an anomaly within American history? One need look only to the proliferation of the phrase "the Kennan sweepstakes" to understand the deep and enduring desire of post-Cold-War strategists to articulate and execute a grand strategy as "elegant" as that offered by Kennan in the 1940s.[22] In a seminar about contemporary American grand strategy, students might tackle a question about what a 'return to great power competition' would mean for American strategy toward Russia or China. Could 'containment' offer an apt analogy? Why or why not?

As WPNS moves chronologically away from the Cold War toward the contemporary world, many of the analytical tasks remain the same: What is the strategic environment? What is the United States trying to achieve? What means does the United States have at its disposal, etc.? Students, having read NSC-68 and other foundational strategic documents, are primed to ask these questions. Comparing formal national security documents, such as national security strategies from the 1980s to the present, asks students to engage in close textual reading to discover continuities and discontinuities, and also to think about the reasons for change.[23]

Often, the animating ideas for American grand strategy (and therefore designated as core national interests) are summarized as being related to the security of the United States, its citizens and its allies; economic prosperity; a stable international order; and the promotion of national values. In the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, for example, four pillars were identified: 1) "protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life;" 2) "promote American prosperity;" 3) "preserve peace through strength;" and 4) "advance American influence."[24] There have been robust public discussions about the extent to which these pillars are compatible with or challenge previous conceptions of vital US interests. In any formulation, though, strategists must ask what, exactly, these ideas mean and how should inform national security policy and strategy.

The course ends with a lesson on the future of grand strategy, where we ask students to "Be prepared to articulate your own grand strategy for the United States and explain why you believe it is best suited to advancing US interests in the strategic environment that may be undergoing a significant transformation."[25] It ends the course with the precise combination of academic study and practice that we desire.

International Security 4:2 (Fall 1979): 116-58. See also, John Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), particularly chapters two through four.

[22] See, for example, Bruce D. Berkowitz, "Handicapping the George Kennan Sweepstakes," Review Essay, *Orbis* 42:3 (Summer 1998): 465-473 and Heather Hurlburt, Emma Ashford, and A. Trevor Thrall, "The Kennan Sweepstakes," Power Problems Live! The Cato Institute, https://www.cato.org/multimedia/power-problems/power-problems-live-kennan-sweepstakes.

[23] Historical NSS documents are available in various places online, for example at http://nssarchive.us/.

[24] Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (December 2017) https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf.

[25] USAWC WPNS AY20 Directive, Lesson 33, p. 158.

This is the key work that our students must undertake—in the classroom and in the real world.

Moving from "It Depends" to the Real World

Graduates of the U.S. Army War College will take on a variety of roles when they leave Carlisle Barracks. They will serve as staff officers and advisors to service and joint commands, as commanders, as senior civil servants and Foreign Service officers, and as senior leaders of allied and partner nations. Since they will almost all be operating in the 'real' world of policy and strategy, our imperative at the War College is to arm them with the intellectual tools, analytical skills, and vocabulary required to take a seat at the proverbial table. They must be conversant in concepts such as grand strategy because policymakers and senior civilian officials, journalists and pundits, scholars and politicians, use these concepts. They must be able to translate policy into strategy, and further into operational and tactical plans as required.

Focusing first on matters of definition, analysis, and interpretation related to strategy, policy, and grand strategy enables the War College to cultivate critical thinking and communication skills, while the emphasis on the form and substance of American grand strategy encourages primary source analysis, evaluation of continuity and change over time, and the articulation of grand strategy for the United States as it enters the third decade of the twenty-first century. The blend of abstract, conceptual work and the attention to practical tools and frameworks applied to specific cases makes 'it depends' a more satisfying answer.