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Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of “Grand Strategy”

Nina Silove

ABSTRACT

The questions of how to define grand strategy and whether it “exists” continue to vex the study of grand strategy, despite the ever-increasing popularity of the term. Scholars broadly agree that grand strategy refers to something that has the characteristics of being long-term in scope, related to the state’s highest priorities, and concerned with all spheres of statecraft (military, diplomatic, and economic). The precise entity or phenomenon that manifests these characteristics is less clear, indicating deficiencies in the methods used by scholars—usually implicitly—to define and operationalize concepts. This article traces the intellectual history and contemporary usage of the concept of grand strategy to identify the phenomenon or object to which the concept refers. This analysis demonstrates that there is no single concept of grand strategy. Instead, there are three, which are labelled “grand plans,” “grand principles,” and “grand behavior,” respectively. Each concept provides a distinct, valuable framework for research and policy prescription.

The popularity of the term “grand strategy” has increased exponentially since the end of the Cold War. Back in the 1980s, one observer noted, scholars would pose questions about foreign policy, not about grand strategy.¹ This observation can be confirmed by a review of university library holdings of items with the term “grand strategy” in their titles. There are many more listings post- than pre-1991, which is the year that Paul Kennedy published the trendsetting edited collection *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*.² This trend is further evident in academic teaching. Yale University began a flagship grand strategy program in 2000. Today, it would be unusual for a security studies program not to have at least one course with grand strategy in its title. In the discipline of international relations, scholars claim to be explaining grand

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¹Charles Hill, “The U.S. Search for Grand Strategy,” *Orbis* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 732.

²Paul M. Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

strategy in studies of an ever-widening range of dependent variables.³ The term has also become a lodestone in policy circles. As one scholar commented sardonically: “Whenever a foreign policy commentator articulates a new grand strategy, an angel gets its wings.”⁴

Despite the increasing popularity of the term, many who use it also express the view that grand strategy is a “slippery,”⁵ “fuzzy,”⁶ and “jumble[d]”⁷ concept. There is substantial, ongoing discussion in the existing literature about how the term should be defined.⁸ Although some definitions are referenced more frequently than others, no one definition has emerged as authoritative. Indeed, the sheer and increasing number of proposed definitions—many of which are cited herein—is indicative of dissensus about the meaning of the term. Further evidence of discord is the persistence of several vexing foundational questions in the literature on the subject, including: Does grand strategy “exist”? Is grand strategy intentional? Do all states have grand strategies, or only great powers? And, to what extent is grand strategy constant or flexible? The method used by most scholars to address these foundational questions is simply to stake a claim one way or another. The result is that the definitional discussion reads like an ever-growing list of conflicting articles

³Steven E. Lobell’s study of grand strategy investigates whether states punish or cooperate with contenders for hegemony. Steven E. Lobell, *The Challenge of Hegemony: Grand Strategy, Trade, and Domestic Politics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 3. Etel Solingen identifies as grand strategy whether ruling coalitions promote economic liberalization or protectionism in Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century’s Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). For Mark R. Brawley, grand strategy refers to whether states balance internally, balance externally, bandwagon, buck pass, or appease. Mark R. Brawley, *Political Economy and Grand Strategy: A Neoclassical Realist View* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), 7–11. Grand strategy is operationalized to refer to whether states expand, contract, or significantly change their overall strategic capabilities or commitments in the work of Colin Dueck, and also in the work of Lobell, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Norrin M. Ripsman. See Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 12; Steven E. Lobell, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Norrin M. Ripsman, “Grand Strategy between the World Wars,” in *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World Wars*, ed. Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 16. In his study of grand strategy, Matthew Evangelista investigates whether states “dramatically change their foreign policies.” Matthew Evangelista, “Internal and External Constraints on Grand Strategy: The Soviet Case,” in *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, ed. Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 154. The existing literature evinces little discussion of whether this broad range of phenomena can in fact be classed as of a single type under the umbrella term of “grand strategy” and whether doing so advances scholarship in international relations.

⁴Daniel W. Drezner, “Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy? Why We Need Doctrines in Uncertain Times,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July/August 2011), 60–61.

⁵Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.

⁶Paul D. Miller, “On Strategy, Grand and Mundane,” *Orbis* 60, no. 2 (Spring 2016), 238.

⁷Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

⁸For extended discussions about the definition of grand strategy, see: Milevski, *Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chap. 4; Miller, “On Strategy, Grand and Mundane”; William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), chap. 3; Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, chap. 1; Peter Layton, “The Idea of Grand Strategy,” *RUSI Journal* 157, no. 4 (August/September 2012): 56–61; Peter Feaver, “What is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It?” *Foreign Policy Shadow Government*, 8 April 2009, http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/04/08/what_is_grand_strategy_and_why_do_we_need_it; John Lewis Gaddis, “What Is Grand Strategy?” (Karl Von De Heyden Distinguished Lecture, Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy, Durham, North Carolina, 26 February 2008), <http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/grandstrategypaper.pdf>; Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 8–16; Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 9–13; Paul M. Kennedy, “Grand Strategies in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition,” in Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, 1–10.

of faith. The rapid growth in the use of the term, the ever-widening variety of purposes to which it is applied, the multiplicity of efforts to define it, and the failure of any one of those efforts to attain common use all give rise to the suspicion that—to borrow from Richard K. Betts—grand strategy is merely a “buzzword.”⁹

This article focuses on a specific question: “What is grand strategy?” The goal is not to explain the sources, content, or effect of grand strategy, but to develop a theory of the concept of grand strategy.¹⁰ This article’s broader purpose is to investigate the methods used by security studies scholars to develop and apply concepts, identify any deficiencies in those methods, and demonstrate an approach that may redress those deficiencies. *Security Studies* has undertaken a substantial, laudable effort to promote research on qualitative methodology.¹¹ This article contributes to that effort by investigating an oft-neglected aspect of methodology that is of crucial importance to qualitative (and, indeed, other) researchers: that of the construction and application of concepts.¹² It 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.

The analysis presented herein reveals that—despite appearances—grand strategy is not a meaningless term. The problem with the concept of grand strategy is that it has evolved to have three distinct meanings. 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.¹³ As shorthands, the three uses may be thought of, respectively, as “grand plans,” “grand principles,” and “grand behavior.” This article

⁹Richard K. Betts, “The Trouble with Strategy: Bridging Policy and Operations,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 29 (Autumn/Winter 2001–2002): 23.

¹⁰On constructing theories of concepts, see Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹¹See *Security Studies* issues 23.4, 24.2, 24.3, and 25.1.

¹²On concept formation in political science, see Giovanni Sartori, “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 64, no. 4 (December 1970): 1033–53; David Collier and James Mahoney, “Conceptual ‘Stretching’ Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis,” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 4 (December 1993): 845–55; David Collier and Steven Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research,” *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (April 1997): 430–51; Goertz, *Social Science Concepts*.

¹³There is at least an additional fourth option for how the term could be used, which is to refer to an idea that is held by individuals unconsciously, perhaps as an assumption. No such use was found in the existing literature on grand strategy per se. For an example of an investigation of the effect of this type of unconscious idea or assumption in the wider literature on foreign policy, see Amy King’s development and application of the concept of “background ideas” (as distinct from “foreground ideas”). Amy King, *China-Japan Relations after World War Two: Empire, Industry and War, 1949–1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 7–9. King derives this concept from John L. Campbell’s concept of “background assumptions,” which he describes as “underlying and sometimes taken-for-granted.” “Foreground” ideas, by contrast, are “explicitly articulated by policy-making elites,” according to Campbell. John L. Campbell, “Institutional Analysis and the Role of Ideas in Political Economy,” *Theory and Society* 27, no. 3 (June 1998): 384. Barry R. Posen comes close to using the concept of grand strategy to refer to a background idea in the case of the United States. He notes, however, that there has been “a quiet consensus among the foreign and security policy elite” about US grand strategy since at least the end of the Cold War and that the grand strategy has been articulated in Pentagon plans and presidential statements, indicating that grand strategy is not, therefore, solely a background idea. Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2003): 19–20.

provides a definition for each of the three concepts of grand strategy. It does not conclude—as might be expected—that one of the three is the only valid use of the term. Rather, it argues that the three concepts each provide a distinct and valuable addition to the corpus of conceptual tools in security studies, and that differentiating them will facilitate investigation into the most fundamental and important questions about grand strategy.

The State of the Concept of Grand Strategy

Concepts are central to the advancement of knowledge according to most leading approaches to philosophy of science. They are the basis for the formulation of theories because theories are “if-then” propositions that consist of concepts.¹⁴ From a Lakatosian perspective, concepts are not only central to research programs, they may be constitutive of them. In the words of Imre Lakatos, “The recognition that the history of science is the history of research programs rather than of theories may ... be seen as a partial vindication of the view that the history of science is the history of conceptual frameworks”¹⁵ The strength of theories or research programs depends on the soundness of the concepts on which they are based.

There is some evidence to indicate that the study of grand strategy is failing to coalesce into one or more recognizable research programs.¹⁶ For example, the international relations literature on the causes of grand strategy does not focus on testing competing explanations of grand strategy per se. Instead, the existing scholarship is oriented toward countering neorealism,¹⁷ even though neorealism is concerned primarily with explaining outcomes at the systemic rather than the unit level—which is the level at which grand strategy as a dependent variable generally operates¹⁸—and there are few studies that

¹⁴James N. Rosenau, “Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy,” in *The Study of World Politics, Vol. 2: Globalization and Governance*, ed. James N. Rosenau (London: Routledge, 2006), 177.

¹⁵Imre Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes,” in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 191, n. 104.

¹⁶Andrew Bennett suggests that research programs can be “puzzle-driven.” According to this suggestion, efforts to explain grand strategy could be said to constitute a research program. Andrew Bennett, “A Lakatosian Reading of Lakatos: What Can We Salvage from the Hard Core?,” in *Progress in International Relations Theory: Assessing the Field*, ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 456. On progressive and degenerative research programs, see Lakatos, “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes.”

¹⁷For examples that explain this focus, see Christopher Layne, “The Influence of Theory on Grand Strategy: The United States and a Rising China,” in *Rethinking Realism in International Relations: Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. Annette Freyberg-Inan, Ewan Harrison, and Patrick James (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 105; Brawley, *Political Economy and Grand Strategy*, 1–3; Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 125; Edward Rhodes, “Constructing Power: Cultural Transformation and Strategic Adjustment in the 1890s,” in *The Politics of Strategic Adjustment: Ideas, Institutions, and Interests*, ed. Peter Trubowitz, Emily O. Goldman, and Edward Joseph Rhodes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 34; Solingen, *Regional Orders*, 6–8; Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, “Beyond Realism: The Study of Grand Strategy,” in Rosecrance and Stein, *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, 12.

¹⁸See the examples listed in footnote 3 above.

propound neorealist explanations of individual states' grand strategies.¹⁹ Similarly, the burgeoning literature on whether the United States has had, can have, or should have a grand strategy in the post-Cold War era leaves unclear the phenomenon, the existence or good of which is in question. Hal Brands's work recently has occupied a central position in that literature, but both his definitional discussion and his operationalization of the term include a number of apparently divergent notions, including that grand strategy is at once necessarily "purposive" and capable of emerging iteratively and "unconsciously."²⁰ Other contributions on the existence, effects, and desirability of US grand strategy exhibit variance in their identification of the subject of their debate, with recent options including "doctrines,"²¹ "strategizing,"²² and "national security strategy documents."²³

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."²⁴ No such use is evident in the existing literature, to the author's knowledge. Despite this commitment, most definitions of grand strategy focus on elaborating a few characteristics of the concept without identifying the core phenomenon or object to which those characteristics refer or give rise. 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,

¹⁹Lobell claims that the "bulk of the literature on grand strategy ignores the influence of domestic politics on international relations, treating the state as a unitary and rational actor," but does not cite any examples. Lobell, *The Challenge of Hegemony*, 3. Similarly, Emily O. Goldman and John Arquila claim that the "dominant portrayal" of states' strategy making is one in which the agents of the state are "attuned above all to the external balance of power," as neorealism assumes. Emily O. Goldman and John Arquila, "Structure, Agency, and Choice: Toward a Theory and Practice of Grand Strategy," in Trubowitz, Goldman, and Rhodes, *The Politics of Strategic Adjustment*, 306. Contrary to these claims, the author's survey of the literature indicates a strong focus on unit-level factors in explaining grand strategy, which is consistent with Daniel Maliniak et al.'s more general empirical finding that "there is no evidence ... that realism and its focus on power relations among states dominate, or since 1980 ever has dominated, the literature [in international relations]." Daniel Maliniak et al., "International Relations in the US Academy," *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (June 2011): abstract. For studies that do test the effects of the international system on grand strategy (or, in the case of Posen, on military doctrine as one element of grand strategy), see Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Benjamin Miller, "Explaining Changes in U.S. Grand Strategy: 9/11, the Rise of Offensive Liberalism, and the War in Iraq," *Security Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 26–65; Michael Mastanduno, "Economics and Security in Statecraft and Scholarship," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (October 1998): 825–54. On applying neorealism to explaining outcomes at the unit level, see Colin Elman, "Horses for Courses: Why Not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?" *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1996): 7–53.

²⁰Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?*, 6, 9.

²¹Colin Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²²David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs, "Delusions of Grand Strategy: The Problem with Washington's Planning Obsession," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 6 (November/December 2015): 109–116.

²³James Goldgeier and Jeremi Suri, "Revitalizing the U.S. National Security Strategy," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 35–55.

²⁴Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 9. Italics in the original. See also Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), chap. 5.

diplomatic, and economic). Few scholars, however, clearly elaborate what that something is or whether or how it is constituted by the characteristics they identify.²⁵

Although it is not adopted explicitly as such, most scholars' approach to constructing the concept of grand strategy can be described as semantic, in which the answer to the question of "what is [the concept]?" is essentially the same as the answer to "what is your definition of [the term]?" This is distinct from an ontological approach, which, as described by Gary Goertz in his seminal work on the subject, "involves a theoretical or empirical analysis of the object or phenomenon referred to by the word."²⁶ According to this approach, "Concepts are theories about ontology: they are theories about the fundamental constituent elements of a phenomenon."²⁷ In a warning that describes well the current state of the concept of grand strategy, Goertz cautions that "all those who focus purely on semantic issues are liable to end up seeing definitions as arbitrary. If the concept is not intimately related to the empirical analysis of a phenomenon then there is nothing to which one can anchor the concept, and everything becomes a matter of who is in charge of the definition."²⁸

Although there are some leading contenders, no one has yet won the battle to be "in charge" of the definition of grand strategy. Of the existing definitions, only two have achieved longevity. They are both early contributions and therefore did not have the effect of preventing the proliferation of definitions. On the contrary, logic suggests that they might have fuelled it. The first is that offered by Barry R. Posen, which states that grand strategy is "a political-military, means-ends chain, a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself."²⁹ The second is Paul Kennedy's, which says that 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."³⁰

Absent from Posen and Kennedy's definitions are clear explanations of what grand strategy actually is. Kennedy provides little explicit guidance about the phenomenon to which the characteristics he describes apply. What, according to Kennedy, operates for decades and is concerned with peacetime? Posen's definition provides a hint with the reference to grand strategy being a "theory," but he does not explain what is a theory in this context. The book in which Posen's definition is offered is about military doctrine, not grand strategy, so it is impossible to derive an indication of what he means by a theory in this context from his

²⁵For important exceptions, see Narizny, *Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, 8–12; Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 9–13.

²⁶Goertz, *Social Science Concepts*, 4.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 5. Note that Goertz uses the term "ontology" "in a straightforward way to designate the core characteristics of a phenomenon and their interrelationships," a practice that is common in international relations and distinct from how the term is used in philosophy.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

²⁹Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 13.

³⁰Kennedy, "Towards a Broader Definition," 4.

operationalization of the term.³¹ Is the theory 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?³²

Kennedy and Posen's definitions are not alone in failing to identify the object or phenomenon to which the concept of grand strategy refers. To provide another of many possible examples, after noting that "no simple, clear definition of grand strategy can ever be fully satisfactory," Williamson Murray writes: "Above all, grand strategy demands an intertwining of political, social, and economic realities with military power as well as a recognition that politics must, in nearly all cases, drive military necessity. It must also rest on a realistic assessment and understanding not only of one's opponents but also of oneself."³³ Murray offers little guidance as to the entity, object, or phenomenon constituted by these "intertwinings," "recognitions," and "understandings."

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."³⁴ According to these latter claims, then, grand strategy also may be a pattern of state behavior that emerges as states make "grand strategic choices"³⁵ even without "a purposive approach" to policy³⁶ or "a realistic plan"³⁷ for allocating resources. Complicating matters further still, Brands wavers on the issue of the degree of detail required for an object to be a grand strategy. He asserts that grand strategy is constituted by "a set of ideas"³⁸ or "key ideas"³⁹ rather than by—necessarily—a more "formalized, detailed" document.⁴⁰ In his employment of the concept, however, Brands suggests that comprehensiveness is important in identifying the existence of a grand

³¹Posen is careful to distinguish military doctrine and grand strategy, with military doctrine being one "component" of grand strategy. Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 33.

³²Posen seems to lean toward this latter option when he states that "the analyst may be guided by [Posen's] conceptualization [of grand strategy] in his [sic] attempt to ferret out the grand strategy of a state." The formulation of this sentence ostensibly privileges the "analyst's conceptualization" but simultaneously implies that the grand strategy of a state has an existence that is independent of the analyst's efforts. *Ibid.*, 13.

³³Williamson Murray, "Thoughts on Grand Strategy," in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War*, ed. Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

³⁴Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 6.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*, 1, 6, 9.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 24.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 6.

strategy,⁴¹ and he argues that grand strategy requires “long-range planning” and the translation of “broad principles into a coherent strategic program.”⁴² 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.”⁴³

Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth reference Brands prominently and thereby purport to subscribe to multiple theories of the concept of grand strategy. Unlike Brands, however, their actual employment of the concept is clear and consistent. Brooks and Wohlforth begin with the notion that grand strategy is “a set of ideas.”⁴⁴ They then claim that grand strategy is more detailed than that when they describe it as a comprehensive “blueprint.”⁴⁵ In their employment of the concept, however, grand strategy is neither a set of ideas nor a plan, but rather a consistent pattern of behavior over time. They write in relation to the United States: “We contend that the fundamental objectives and the array of tools used to pursue them have remained remarkably consistent and thus that *this core [of objectives and tools] is the grand strategy*, properly defined.”⁴⁶ Rather than being the product of a plan or a set of ideas, this pattern of applying tools toward objectives, in their view, emerges as the product of “discrete choices” that accumulate over time.⁴⁷

The failure by scholars to identify clearly the object of the concept of grand strategy explains the ongoing confusion about how to define the term, the dissociated nature of the literature on grand strategy, and the apparent insolubility of rudimentary questions about the existence of grand strategy. It is only when the object or phenomenon to which the term refers is identified that the pathways toward resolving these problems become clearer. The solutions all depend on whether grand strategy is a plan, a principle, or a pattern of behavior.

Grand Strategy as a Plan

Historians, and specifically military historians, have first claim over the concept of grand strategy. Although the term and the idea appear in earlier writings, much of the contemporary scholarship on grand strategy follows Kennedy’s lead in identifying the work of B. H. Liddell Hart as the key progenitor. Writing in the interwar period, Liddell Hart observed that there was a “higher” level of strategy, which he termed “grand strategy” and defined as follows: “While practically synonymous

⁴¹Ibid., 139.

⁴²Ibid., 24.

⁴³Hal Brands and Patrick Porter, “Why Grand Strategy Still Matters in a World of Chaos,” *National Interest*, 10 December 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-grand-strategy-still-matters-world-chaos-14568>.

⁴⁴Brooks and Wohlforth, *America Abroad*, 75.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., 9. Emphasis added.

⁴⁷Ibid., 76.

with the policy which guides the conduct of war, as distinct from the more fundamental policy which should govern its object, the term 'grand strategy' serves to bring out the sense of 'policy in execution.' 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."⁴⁸

Liddell Hart's definition draws upon and must be understood in the context of the work of the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, who defined strategy as "the use of engagements for the object [or purpose] of the war."⁴⁹ Strategy, according to Clausewitz, is produced by individual agents, often referred to as "commanders." In this respect, strategy is distinct from "policy," which determines the "object" of the war. Clausewitz does not specify who or what is the source of policy. As such, he leaves open the questions of agency and intentionality as they relate to policy: "Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states. That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, and vanity of those in power, is neither here nor there. In no sense can the art of war be regarded as the preceptor of policy, and here we can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community."⁵⁰

Policy and strategy therefore represent two distinct types of concepts in Clausewitz's work. 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. What, then, is the relationship between these two concepts and that of grand strategy? Is grand strategy more like strategy or policy? Liddell Hart addresses this point explicitly, albeit in language that is challenging to parse. He maintains the Clausewitzian distinction between policy and strategy, and develops the concept of grand strategy as a broadening of the concept of strategy. "Policy in execution," according to Liddell Hart, is distinct from "fundamental policy." Fundamental policy is akin to the Clausewitzian concept of "policy" and governs "policy in execution." 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."⁵¹ 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.

⁴⁸Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1967), 321–22.

⁴⁹Michael Howard, Peter Paret, and Bernard Brodie, eds., *Carl Von Clausewitz "On War"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 128, 177.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 606–7.

⁵¹Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 321–22.

This intellectual history illuminates Kennedy's definition of grand strategy and reveals the theory implicit in that definition. 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. For example, Kennedy offers a lengthy passage that makes clear that the agents of grand strategy are individual officials, that grand strategy is the product of their purposive action, and that the content of grand strategy is a relatively detailed plan: "It was not enough for statesmen to consider how to win a war, but what the costs (in the largest sense of the word) would be; not enough to order the dispatch of fleets and armies in this or that direction, but to ensure also that they were adequately provided for ...; and not enough, in peacetime, to order a range of weapons systems without careful examination of the impacts of defense spending."⁵² Further emphasizing that grand strategy is the product of the purposive efforts of individuals, Kennedy argues that the production of grand strategy is "an art in the Clausewitzian sense" and relies upon "wisdom and judgement," statements that would make little sense if individual agency were not central to the concept.⁵³ The chapters included in Kennedy's edited collection conform to this conceptualization of grand strategy in this respect by operationalizing grand strategy to mean a strategy devised by leaders.⁵⁴ In this effective or implicit conceptualization, grand strategy is a deliberate plan that "exists" in the same way that a war plan "exists," the latter being an entity the existence of which is far less commonly in doubt.

The notion that grand strategy is a deliberate, detailed plan formulated by individuals is often caricatured by historians, political scientists, and policy commentators who subscribe to one of the two alternative concepts of grand strategy (as an organizing principle or a pattern of behavior), which are outlined below in the subsequent sections of this article. 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."⁵⁵ 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."⁵⁶ Yet, these images are reasonable, if hyperbolic, representations of what military historians originally meant by term. For example, they accord well with the view of H. A. Sargeant and Geoffrey West who, writing in 1941, defined grand strategy similarly to Kennedy as "the answers to the questions: what does this war stem from, and what is it leading

⁵²Kennedy, "Towards a Broader Definition," 4.

⁵³Ibid., 5–6.

⁵⁴Note that the chapters do not wholly encompass Kennedy's definition because they tend to focus on war and not on peacetime.

⁵⁵Narizny, *Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, 8.

⁵⁶Brands and Porter, "Why Grand Strategy Still Matters."

to?" This "higher type of strategy," they argued, emanates "from the war cabinets and their advisers, above all the Prime Minister or President."⁵⁷

An exemplary contemporary expression of this concept of grand strategy is the notion of a US National Security Strategy (NSS) document. A NSS is supposed to be what Kennedy's definition of grand strategy effectively denotes. According to the Congressional Act that mandates presidential administrations to write NSSs, the document "must address U.S. interests, goals, and objectives; the policies, worldwide commitments, and capabilities required to meet those objectives; and the use of elements of national power to achieve those goals."⁵⁸ The widespread view that all NSSs have failed to fulfill this mandate is immaterial for present purposes.⁵⁹ The question of whether grand strategies of this type have ever actually existed is secondary to the question of whether this concept of grand strategy refers to a distinct, identifiable object. To put it simply, we can agree with a relevant degree of consensus that the object of the question "Do unicorns exist?" is a horse-like creature with a single horn on its forehead. Without that consensus, it would be impossible to agree on the answer to the question about unicorns' existence. Even if it were the case that the relevant question for present purposes is whether grand strategies of this type have ever existed in real life, history provides plentiful examples of documents that have at least come close, about which debate could reasonably be had on terms that can be understood commonly. In post-World War II US history, for example, Chargé d'Affaires George Kennan's 1946 "Long Telegram" from Moscow,⁶⁰ the output of President Dwight Eisenhower's Project Solarium exercise,⁶¹ the Harry Truman administration's NSC-68 document,⁶² the "Strategy for Competing with the Soviets" written by Director of the Office of Net Assessment Andrew Marshall and James Roche in 1976,⁶³ and the

⁵⁷H. A. Sargeant and Geoffrey West, *Grand Strategy* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1941), vii.

⁵⁸Catherine Dale, "National Security Strategy: Mandates, Execution to Date, and Issues for Congress," *CRS Report R43174* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 6 August 2013), 3.

⁵⁹For critiques of NSSs, see Adam Quinn, "Obama's National Security Strategy: Predicting US Policy in the Context of Changing Worldviews," *Chatham House Research Paper* (January 2015), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/obamas-national-security-strategy-predicting-us-policy-context-changing-worldviews>; Dale, "National Security Strategy," 3–4; Barry D. Watts, "Barriers to Acting Strategically: Why Strategy is So Difficult," in *Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century: Theory, History, and Practice*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 59; Walter B. Slocombe, "A Crisis of Opportunity: The Clinton Administration and Russia," in *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy after the Berlin Wall and 9/11*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 91; Philip Zelikow, "U.S. Strategic Planning in 2001–02," in Leffler and Legro, *In Uncertain Times*, endnote 60; Richard P. Rumelt, *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters* (New York: Random House, 2011), 33–36. cf. John Lewis Gaddis, "A Grand Strategy of Transformation," *Foreign Policy* 133 (November–December 2002): 50–57; and—in relation to Australian national security strategy documents—Stephan Frühling, "Ghosts of Papers Past: The *Strategic Basis* Papers and Australian National Security Strategy in the Twenty-First Century," *National Security College Occasional Paper* 3 (April 2012), <http://nsc.anu.edu.au/documents/occasional-3-fruhling.pdf>.

⁶⁰George F. Kennan, "The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State," *National Security Archive*, 22 February 1946, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>.

⁶¹Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), chap. 8.

⁶²The Executive Secretary, "A Report to the National Security Council—NSC 68," 12 April 1950, Truman Library, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf.

“Defense Strategy Review” led by Marshall in 2001⁶⁴ are all at least contenders for being considered grand strategies in the sense in which the term was used by military historians.⁶⁵

This concept of grand strategy as a deliberate, detailed plan remains prominent in the post-Cold War literature on grand strategy. Geoffrey Parker provides one case—that of Philip II of Spain—that is illustrative for present purposes, because in this case there is no evidence that the grand strategy was expressed in a single written document. Parker argues, “the absence of a comprehensive masterplan among the papers of Philip and his ministers does not prove the absence of comprehensive ambitions.”⁶⁶ Parker uses a combination of types of sources to demonstrate the existence of a “grand design”⁶⁷ and a “remarkable—and remarkably coordinated—military, naval, diplomatic and economic effort against England,”⁶⁸ including “the king’s holograph policy statements” and “the dispatches of the dozen or so resident ambassadors at the court of Spain.”⁶⁹

Several political scientists have made statements that indicate support for the view that grand strategy is a deliberate, detailed plan. For example, Peter D. Feaver argues: “Grand strategy refers to the collection of *plans and policies* that comprise the state’s *deliberate* effort to harness political, military, diplomatic, and economic tools together to advance that state’s national interest ... It involves purposive action—*what leaders think and want*.”⁷⁰ Stephen M. Walt substitutes the word “plan” for “theory” in Posen’s definition and argues that “a state’s grand strategy is its plan for making itself secure. Grand strategy identifies the objectives that must be achieved to produce security, and describes the political and military actions that are believed to lead to this goal.”⁷¹ Similarly, Stephen D. Krasner suggests that grand strategy is “designed” and details the resources—“diplomatic, bureaucratic, ideational, military, economic”—to be allocated for “*specific policies*.”⁷²

In short, although it may be fashionable to reject the notion that grand strategy refers to the type of detailed plan that statespeople huddled around a map may produce, this concept of grand strategy has a long intellectual tradition and some plausible contenders as real life examples. It also remains well represented in the contemporary literature and, as evidenced by the notion of a NSS, occupies a

⁶³Andrew W. Marshall and James Roche, “Strategy for Competing with the Soviets in the Military Sector of the Continuing Political-Military Competition,” *Department of Defense Memorandum* (1976), <http://goodbadstrategy.com/wp-content/downloads/StrategyforCompetingwithUSSR.pdf>.

⁶⁴On the Defense Strategy Review, see Nina Silove, “The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia,” *International Security* 40, no. 4 (Spring 2016): 54–58.

⁶⁵For an assessment of written strategies in post-World War II US history, see Goldgeier and Suri, “Revitalizing the U.S. National Security Strategy.”

⁶⁶Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 209–10.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 293.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, xvii.

⁷⁰Feaver, “What is Grand Strategy?” Emphasis added.

⁷¹Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Finite Containment: Analyzing U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 14, no. 1 (Summer 1989): 6.

⁷²Note, however, that Krasner considers such designs to be “elusive holy grail[s].” Stephen D. Krasner, “An Orienting Principle for Foreign Policy,” *Policy Review* 163 (October and November 2010): 2. Emphasis added.

prominent position in public policy discourse. As a shorthand, this concept of grand strategy can be thought of as a “grand plan.”

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.⁷³ The difference between a plan and principle turns on only one distinction, which may raise the question of whether these are two different concepts of grand strategy. Level of detail differentiates the two concepts. A plan is more detailed than a principle. To borrow from Henry Kissinger, it is the difference between a “recipe” and a “guiding principle” that gives “direction” to foreign policy.⁷⁴ This difference, single as it may be, is one that many scholars take pains to point out and produces significantly different results when the concepts are operationalized.

It is common for those who subscribe to the notion of grand strategy as an organizing principle to begin their definitional discussion by explaining what grand strategy is not. And what grand strategy is not, for these scholars, is a grand 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.”⁷⁵ (It is necessary to note, solely for present purposes, that Dueck conflates two ideas in this statement: the existence of a plan and the implementation of a plan. A grand plan need not be implemented to exist, just as a war plan can exist regardless of whether it is implemented). Avery Goldstein similarly explains that his “account of China’s emerging grand strategy in the post-Cold War era does not refer to a formal and detailed plan contained in a ‘smoking gun’ document Instead it identifies a rough consensus on China’s basic foreign policy.”⁷⁶ Rather than denoting detailed plans, blueprints, or recipe books, grand strategy for scholars and commentators in this tradition is about

⁷³The term “organizing principle” is used in Lobell, Taliaferro, and Ripsman, “Grand Strategy between the World Wars,” 15; Harry J. Karzianis, “America: A Superpower in Search of a Grand Strategy,” *National Interest*, 16 January 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/america-superpower-search-grand-strategy-14931>; Noah Gordon, “Does America Need an ‘Organizing Principle?’,” *Atlantic*, 14 August 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/does-us-foreign-policy-need-an-organizing-principle/376048/>. “Overarching” can be found in Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice*, 33.

⁷⁴Henry A. Kissinger, “Background Press Briefing by the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976*, vol. 1, 14 August 1970, document 69, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v01/d69>. Brands quotes Kissinger to make this point in Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 67.

⁷⁵Dueck, *Obama Doctrine*, 5.

⁷⁶Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, 17.

“an overarching guide,”⁷⁷ “a framework,”⁷⁸ “a basic strategic view,”⁷⁹ “critical considerations,”⁸⁰ “overarching foreign policy doctrines,”⁸¹ or “sets of ideas shared by policy makers.”⁸² 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. As noted above, prior to the end of the Cold War, grand strategy primarily referred to a grand plan. After the Cold War, scholars and commentators borrowed the term and applied it to the question of what should replace containment in the post-Cold War period. This process came to be known as the “Kennan sweepstakes,” after George F. Kennan, who was the first to apply the term containment to US policy in his Long Telegram.⁸³ Containment as applied during the Cold War, however, was not a grand plan. It did not mandate a specific set of means to be mobilized for particular ends, as evidenced by the multiple variants of ends sought using various means by successive administrations.⁸⁴ Rather, containment was an organizing principle for US foreign policy to which leaders expressly subscribed. The effect of using grand strategy to frame the search for a replacement for containment was to equate the concept of grand strategy with an organizing principle. Kennan implicitly recognized this equation when he criticized the “sweepstakes.” US officials, he argued, should aim to formulate a “thoughtful paragraph or more”—something more detailed, perhaps more like a grand plan—instead of trying to come up with a single-word or short-phrase “bumper sticker.”⁸⁵

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 lifetime 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.”⁸⁶ These ideas did not constitute a detailed blueprint. According to Edel, Adams never formulated such a plan. Moreover, Adams’s views about specific

⁷⁷Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice*, 33.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 32; Brands and Porter, “Why Grand Strategy Still Matters.”

⁷⁹John B. Hattendorf, “Alliance, Encirclement, and Attrition: British Grand Strategy in the War of the Spanish Succession, 1702–1713,” in Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, 11.

⁸⁰Arthur Ferrill, “The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire,” *ibid.*, 74.

⁸¹Edelstein and Krebs, “Delusions of Grand Strategy.”

⁸²Miller, “Explaining Changes in U.S. Grand Strategy,” 29.

⁸³Derek H. Chollet and James M. Goldgeier, *America between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 65.

⁸⁴As demonstrated in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). This point is made in Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 4–5.

⁸⁵Quoted in Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 316.

⁸⁶Charles N. Edel, *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 62.

ends and the means by which to achieve them changed over time. Edel finds evidence, however, that these ideas—which Edel calls a grand strategy—served as organizing principles that guided Adams’s decisions.

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. For many international relations scholars, there is a familiar cast of such principles and it is this cast that most immediately comes to mind in reference to grand strategy. In a seminal articulation of principles of this type, Posen and Andrew L. Ross identified four competing US grand strategies: neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy.⁸⁷ These principles were distinguished on three key bases: their identification of “the major purposes” of the United States, their “basic premises about international politics,” and their “preferred political and military instruments.”⁸⁸ From these bases more detailed grand plans could be developed, but the specifics of those plans are neither contained within nor necessary to the policy prescriptions themselves. As with containment, the specific content of the grand plans would vary depending on circumstances and how the principle is translated into a plan.

There are two approaches to demonstrating the existence of an organizing principle. Some scholars, like Edel, focus on direct evidence of individuals’ ideas. John Hattendorf articulates this approach explicitly. In the case of British grand strategy in the War of the Spanish Succession from 1702 to 1713, Hattendorf argues:

The lack of strategic planning documents in a twentieth-century style makes it necessary to construct artificially an outline of England’s basic strategic view from disparate sources and varied documents. In order to do this one must look first to the private and public correspondence of all the various envoys and diplomatic representatives, to the admirals at sea, the generals in the field, to colonial governors, to the Board of Trade, the Admiralty, the orders of the secretary of state, the scattered notes of officials, and the records of expenditure in the Treasury. Through this one can formulate a composite picture, drawing from a phrase here and a paragraph there.⁸⁹

Hattendorf uses these sources as “evidence of the assumptions, ideas, and purposes relating to England’s contribution in the War of the Spanish Succession.”⁹⁰ This approach to evidence is similar to that adopted by Parker, except in this case the aim is to demonstrate a “basic strategic view” whereas Parker sought evidence of a “comprehensive masterplan.” In another articulation of this approach to demonstrating the existence of an organizing principle, Aaron L. Friedberg explains

⁸⁷Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, “Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/97), 5.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁹Hattendorf, “Alliance, Encirclement, and Attrition,” 13.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 11.

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.”⁹¹

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.”⁹² 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.”⁹⁴ In another example of this approach, John P. LeDonne argues that in the case of the Russian Empire from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century there was a “global vision,” which was the establishment of Russian “hegemony within the Heartland.”⁹⁵ LeDonne finds no written evidence to support the existence of such a global vision.⁹⁶ Instead, he infers the existence of this organizing principle from the behavior of state agents. In LeDonne’s words, “Peter [I]’s actions speak for themselves.”⁹⁷

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. This is a prominent concern in other disciplines; an analogue to this approach in economics, for example, has generated sustained debate.⁹⁸ The issue of equifinality ought to be a central concern in the study of grand principles but thus far has received little attention from scholars.

⁹¹Aaron L. Friedberg, *Going Out: China’s Pursuit of Natural Resources and Implications for the PRC’s Grand Strategy* (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2006), 9. Another example is provided by S. Paul Kapur, who identifies “supporting jihad” as a “deliberate, long-running policy” that constitutes a “central pillar of Pakistani grand strategy.” S. Paul Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy: Islamist Militancy, National Security and the Pakistani State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8. Kapur uses public statements and internal government reports as evidence of the existence of that idea, in addition to observations of Pakistan’s behavior.

⁹²Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 13.

⁹³Gordon Adams and Cindy Williams, *Buying National Security: How America Plans and Pays for Its Global Role and Safety at Home* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵John P. LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire: 1650–1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

⁹⁶Ibid., 5–6.

⁹⁷Ibid., 7.

⁹⁸Revealed preference theory posits that consumers’ preferences are revealed by their purchasing choices. For a foundational article, see P. A. Samuelson, “A Note on the Pure Theory of Consumer’s Behaviour,” *Economica* 5, no. 17 (February 1938): 61–71. For a critique, see Stanley Wong, *Foundations of Paul Samuelson’s Revealed Preference Theory: A Study by the Method of Rational Reconstruction*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2006).

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*. This can seem an odd claim, particularly to international relations scholars who are accustomed to thinking of grand strategy as a consciously held organizing principle. It is, however, one that is represented clearly in the existing literature. 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."⁹⁹ Grand strategy, for Luttwak, is simply the employment of the state's resources, including military strength, diplomacy, and intelligence, which interact with the employment of these resources by other states.¹⁰⁰ There is a similar concept in the discipline of management studies, where it is more fully explicated. Henry Mintzberg argues that the notion that business strategy is a formal plan devised by senior managers and then implemented by an organization is a "myth."¹⁰¹ Instead, he posits an alternative concept of strategy, in which strategy is "a *pattern*, consistency in behavior over time."¹⁰² To distinguish this conceptualization from the "mythical" notion of business strategy, Mintzberg uses the term "realized strategy."¹⁰³ For the sake of clarity in the study of grand strategy, this third concept can be thought of using the shorthand "grand behavior."

Scholars who use the concept of grand strategy to mean grand behavior adopt one of 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 example, Dueck argues that "it does not really matter ... whether or not most governments actually follow any sort of conscious, coherent, and intentional strategic 'plan.'"¹⁰⁴ Dueck assumes that grand strategy emerges out of a series of decisions about "defense spending, alliance diplomacy, and military interventions."¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Narizny argues: "There is little analytical difference between a plan (e.g., NSC 68) and a pattern of behavior that reflects consistent values, goals, and trade-offs (e.g. containment). It does not matter whether executive decision makers ever explain their reasoning, or

⁹⁹Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 409.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹Henry Mintzberg, "Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent," in *Tracking Strategies: Toward a General Theory*, ed. Henry Mintzberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5. This research was first applied to grand strategy in Ionut C. Popescu, *Design and Emergence in the Making of American Grand Strategy* (PhD diss., Duke University: 2013), cited with permission from the author.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 1. Italics in the original.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 11.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

even if they consciously think about how their various decisions over different foreign policy issues are related to each other.”¹⁰⁶ Etel Solingen sets aside the question of the degree to which grand strategies are “embedded in more or less clearly defined blueprints” and assumes that “quite often, grand strategies unfold in tentative, reactive, and piecemeal steps.”¹⁰⁷ Scholars who adopt this approach offer various explanations for what causes patterns of state behavior, which, as noted above, are among the contributions that have not been tested directly against each other as explanations of grand strategy per se. For Dueck and Luttwak, patterns emerge as a result of “strategic cultures.”¹⁰⁸ For Narizny, it is the relative strength of coalitions of economic interest groups.¹⁰⁹ For Solingen, it is the power of “internationalist” versus “statist-nationalist” regional policy networks.¹¹⁰

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. In one example of this tendency, Lobell claims that “grand strategy involves long-term planning, over decades and perhaps centuries.”¹¹¹ He does not, however, use evidence of long-term planning to demonstrate the existence of a grand strategy. Instead, evidence of grand strategy is found in “a state’s diplomatic activity, resource extraction, trade policy, and military doctrine.”¹¹² The focus of Lobell’s case studies is not, therefore, on long-term planning but on state behavior.¹¹³ Although Brooks and Wohlforth import from Brands some confusion in their definitional discussion, their employment of the concept faithfully operationalizes grand strategy to mean grand behavior. Their focus is not on the existence or content of ideas, nor on documents that “[sprang] forth from the pen of George F. Kennan or any other single strategist,” but rather on the pattern of behavior that emerged over time from the “rough and tumble process of solving more immediate problems.”¹¹⁴

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. Christopher 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. This pattern of behavior, according

¹⁰⁶Narizny, *Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, 10.

¹⁰⁷Solingen, *Regional Orders*, 9. A similar approach is adopted in Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America’s Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 18–19.

¹⁰⁸Dueck *Reluctant Crusaders*; Luttwak, *Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, 11. Luttwak also uses the term “operational code.” *Ibid.*, 409, 418.

¹⁰⁹Narizny, *Political Economy of Grand Strategy*.

¹¹⁰Solingen, *Regional Orders*.

¹¹¹Lobell, *Challenge of Hegemony*, 3.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹³For a summary conclusion that demonstrates this point, see *ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁴Brooks and Wohlforth, *America Abroad*, 75.

to Layne, was the product of an organizing principle, that of "open door" internationalism.¹¹⁵ He claims this principle was consciously held and deliberately employed by individuals: "If the United States today is, indeed, an extraregional or 'global,' hegemon, it is not, as Barry Posen suggests, an 'accidental' one. 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."¹¹⁶ Layne does not refer to the organizing principle as a grand strategy. He also does not elaborate upon whether the pattern of behavior would be properly called a grand strategy if it were not the product of such a principle. In his operationalization of the concept, however, Layne is attentive to evidence both of a pattern of behavior and the ideas of individuals, suggesting that he uses the latter as evidence of the existence of the former.

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

The foregoing account of the three concepts of grand strategy has focused on the differences between them. These concepts also have important commonalities, which is what makes each "a concept of grand strategy" and what distinguishes them from other concepts such as foreign policy and military strategy. The three concepts are structurally similar in two important respects. First, as a consequence of their origins in the concept of strategy, they are each constituted by two elements: ends and means.¹¹⁷ Grand plans specify ends and the means by which to achieve them in detail. Grand principles do the same in more general terms. Grand behavior is a pattern in the relative allocation of means to certain ends, regardless of whether that pattern is the result of a grand plan, a grand principle, or some other factor. The point that ends and means constitute grand strategy seems a simple one, but in the employment of the concepts of grand plans and grand principles the focus is often on one of these elements at the expense of the other.¹¹⁸ Second, each concept has three characteristics, which is what makes each of them "grand." This section explains these "characteristics of grandness." The following section explains why some other factors—although they may seem like characteristics of grand strategy—are understood best as neither constituent elements nor necessary

¹¹⁵Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), chap. 1.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁷Those associated with the US military will tend to add "ways" as a third element to this list, but most scholars use the term "means" to refer to both the resources mobilized as well as the ways in which they are mobilized. The distinction between ways and means makes sense in the military sphere, where materiel and doctrine are distinct. Equivalent distinctions in other spheres of statecraft are relatively less meaningful, for example, between the structure of a diplomatic corps and the activities of that corps.

¹¹⁸NSSs are commonly lists of goals and fail to identify means to those ends. Rumelt, *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy*, 34. Exhibiting the opposite tendency, Krasner and Amy B. Zegart primarily focus on means in their prescription for US grand strategy, arguing that the United States' goals—which they identify only in general terms such as "democracy, prosperity, and liberty"—"are not contested." Stephen D. Krasner and Amy B. Zegart, "Pragmatic Engagement," *American Interest*, 4 May 2016. <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/05/04/pragmatic-engagement/>.

characteristics of the concept, but as qualities by which grand strategies can be assessed.

The first characteristic is that each concept of grand strategy is necessarily long-term in scope. This characteristic derives from Liddell Hart's exhortation that grand strategy extends beyond the present war to plan for the future peace.¹¹⁹ Kennedy provides a strong statement about the long-term nature of grand strategy when he states that grand strategy is "about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries."¹²⁰ This characteristic distinguishes each of the three concepts of grand strategy from the concept of foreign policy. In contrast to grand strategy, the concept of foreign policy is temporally indeterminate. It may equally refer to a single foreign policy decision, a foreign policy of a particular administration, or the foreign policy of a state since its inception.

The second characteristic of the concepts of grand strategy is that they are holistic in the sense of being concerned with, in Liddell Hart's terms, "all the resources" of a state. Kennedy translates this characteristic as concern with "all the elements, both military and nonmilitary."¹²¹ Posen's definition specifically lists "political" and "military," but in later work he clarifies that he believes grand strategy to be concerned also with economic means.¹²² The notion that grand strategy is concerned with the military, diplomatic, and economic spheres of statecraft is supported in numerous definitions of grand strategy, many of which have been quoted herein. A prominent counter-argument to this conclusion is made by Robert J. Art, who claims that the concept should be restricted to the use of military means to achieve political ends.¹²³ This limitation would render grand strategy synonymous with strategy. The use of military means to achieve political ends is essentially a restatement of the Clausewitzian concept of strategy. Grand strategy was conceived, at least by Liddell Hart, precisely to broaden the means element of the concept of strategy. 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.

The third characteristic of grand strategy is that, whether it is a plan, a principle, or a pattern of behavior, it is concerned with the making of trade-offs to advance the state's most important interests. This can be summarized as the characteristic of "importance." For Posen, the most important interest for all states is the same and that is "security," by which he means, he explains in later work, "the preservation of sovereignty, safety, territorial integrity, and power position."¹²⁴ There is thus a realist premise in Posen's definition, which is that the interests of states are

¹¹⁹Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 322.

¹²⁰Kennedy, "Towards a Broader Definition," 4.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 5.

¹²²Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundational for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.

¹²³Robert J. Art, *America's Grand Strategy and World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 190.

¹²⁴Posen, *Restraint*, 1.

externally determined by the imperative to survive in an anarchic international system.¹²⁵ Narizny, one scholar of grand strategy who criticizes this approach directly, argues that states may have interests other than security: "They might seek to expand their territory, protect their foreign trade and investment, promote their political ideology, or pursue humanitarian causes."¹²⁶ Rather than specifying the content of states' interests, Narizny leaves that question open for empirical investigation. This is the approach implicitly adopted by many scholars, who—instead of specifying interests as "security"—note that grand strategy is concerned with interests that are "important,"¹²⁷ "large,"¹²⁸ "vital,"¹²⁹ or "ultimate."¹³⁰ This approach accords with the Clausewitzian concept of strategy, in which policy is treated "as representative of all interests of the community," regardless of its sources or content.¹³¹ The characteristic of importance further distinguishes the three concepts of grand strategy from the concepts of foreign policy or military strategy, neither of which are concerned—as a necessary characteristic of the concepts—with the state's most important interests. It is a logical possibility that a state may have a foreign policy or military strategy that concerns a region or issue area of secondary or tertiary importance with only a distant relationship to the state's primary interests. The characteristic of importance makes it a logical impossibility to use the term grand strategy to refer solely to a strategy for such a region or issue area. This is not to say that interests of a secondary and tertiary (and so on) nature are irrelevant to grand strategy. On the contrary, a corollary of the characteristic of importance is that grand strategy is concerned with trade-offs (whether intentional or effective) between important and lesser interests.

The Qualities of Grand Strategy

There are two other candidates for factors that may be considered necessary characteristics of the concepts of grand strategy. These factors are understood best as qualities by which grand strategies can be evaluated or assessed, rather than as characteristics that constitute grand strategy, because the absence of these factors does not render an entity or phenomenon something other than a grand strategy.

It is common for scholars and commentators to claim that grand strategy must be "coherent"¹³² or "balanced,"¹³³ or variants thereof. In general, these claims are

¹²⁵On these assumptions, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 91–92.

¹²⁶Narizny, *Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, 9.

¹²⁷Gaddis, "What Is Grand Strategy?," 7; Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 45–46.

¹²⁸Gaddis, "What Is Grand Strategy?," 7.

¹²⁹Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, 13; Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, 45.

¹³⁰Stephen D. Biddle, *American Grand Strategy after 9/11: An Assessment* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), 1.

¹³¹Howard, Paret, and Brodie, eds., *Carl von Clausewitz "On War,"* 606–7.

¹³²Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 1, 7; Luttwak, *Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, 409. See also, generally, Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice*.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 32; Lobell, *Challenge of Hegemony*, 3. Relatedly, Brawley writes of "harmonizing" means and ends. Brawley, *Political Economy and Grand Strategy*, 3.

not included in the actual definitions of grand strategies proposed by scholars, although William Martel provides a prominent exception when he states: “Grand Strategy is a *coherent* statement of the state’s highest political ends to be pursued globally over the long term. Its proper function is to prioritize among different domestic and foreign policy choices and *to coordinate, balance, and integrate* all types of national means—including diplomatic, economic, technological, and military power—to achieve the articulated ends. In effect, grand strategy provides a framework of organizing principles that *in a useful way* help policy makers and society make coherent choices about the conduct of foreign policy.”¹³⁴

The problem with stating or implying that coherence is a necessary characteristic of grand strategy is that it leaves the negative pole of the concept unclear.¹³⁵ This problem particularly retards debates about the effects and desirability of grand strategy because the effect of a cause typically cannot be identified without clarity regarding what constitutes the absence of that cause. If a grand strategy must be coherent to exist, is an incoherent grand strategy a “not-grand strategy?” Even scholars who stress that grand strategy must be coherent do not tend to operationalize the concept accordingly. For example, Brands claims that grand strategy must be coherent, but his employment of the term does not follow that logic. 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.¹³⁶ Instead of using coherence as a necessary characteristic for determining the existence of the phenomenon and classifying incoherent grand strategies as not-grand strategies, Brands uses qualifiers such as “less effective” to describe grand strategies that lack coherence.¹³⁷ In his application of the concept, therefore, grand strategies may be incoherent, but they are still grand strategies, indicating that coherence is not a necessary characteristic of the concept. Rather, it is a quality by which a grand plan or grand principle can be assessed. Grand behavior is somewhat different than the other two concepts in this respect because, if coherence is understood to denote some consistency between the successive actions of an official or the state, coherence is an indicator of the existence of a pattern.

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.¹³⁸ The use of excessive or inadequate force makes a strategy a bad one, not a not-strategy. Liddell Hart describes this quality in the following terms: “Strategy depends for success, first and foremost, on a sound calculation and coordination of the end and the means. The end must be proportioned to the total means, and the means used in gaining each intermediate end which

¹³⁴Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice*, 32–33. Emphasis added.

¹³⁵On the positive and negative poles of concepts, see Goertz, *Social Science Concepts*, 30–35.

¹³⁶Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 9–10, chap. 4.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, 6–7.

¹³⁸Howard, Paret, and Brodie, eds., *Carl von Clausewitz “On War,”* 177, 213, 585–94.

contributes to the ultimate must be proportioned to the value and the needs of the intermediate end—whether it be to gain an objective or to fulfill a contributory purpose.”¹³⁹ Note in this formulation that strategy depends on sound calculation and coordination for its success, not for its existence. An imbalanced strategy is still a strategy and, as a matter of logic, this holds true for all three concepts of grand strategy.

Three Definitions of Grand Strategy

If the concepts of grand plans, grand principles, and grand behavior are understood each to consist of two constituent elements, ends and means, and to have the characteristics of being “long-term,” “holistic,” and “important,” then definitions for each of the concepts can be derived as follows:

1. Grand plans are the detailed product of the deliberate efforts of individuals to translate a state’s interests into specific long-term goals, establish orders of priority between those goals, and consider all spheres of statecraft (military, diplomatic, and economic) in the process of identifying the means by which to achieve them. Given their level of detail, grand plans are likely to be—but are not necessarily—set down in written documents.
2. Grand principles are overarching ideas that are consciously held by individuals about the long-term goals that the state should prioritize and the military, diplomatic, and/or economic means that ought to be mobilized in pursuit of those goals. They tend to be expressed in single words or short phrases.
3. Grand behavior is the long-term pattern in a state’s distribution and employment of its military, diplomatic, and economic resources toward ends. In this context, the ends that receive the greatest relative resources can be deemed to be priorities, but the concept implies no inference that those ends were necessarily prioritized as a result of a grand plan, a grand principle, or any other factor.

Resolving Foundational Conceptual Questions about Grand Strategy

The foregoing differentiation between the three concepts of grand strategy aids in resolving the foundational conceptual questions that persistently trouble the study of grand strategy.

Is Grand Strategy Intentional?

The issue of intentionality is one of the key cleavages that has produced three different concepts of grand strategy over time. The answer to the question of whether grand strategy is intentional, therefore, has been addressed in the foregoing

¹³⁹Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 322–23.

discussion about distinguishing the three concepts. To recap, grand plans and grand principles are, by definition, intentional, whereas the concept of grand behavior explicitly or effectively leaves the question of intentionality open for empirical investigation.

Does Grand Strategy Exist?

Once the object or phenomenon to which grand strategy refers has been clarified, then the question of whether grand strategy exists becomes a matter of evidence and measurement. In the case of a grand plan, evidence of its existence may be direct in the form of a single written document. In the absence of such direct evidence, its existence may be inferred from other sources such as indirect written records (which is Parker's method in the case of Philip II of Spain), or from patterns of behavior, although the latter approach on its own is attended by the problem of equifinality. A grand plan identifies specific ends, projects into the long-term, considers all spheres of statecraft in the process of identifying means to ends, and addresses the state's most important priorities. If the plan is lacking in one of these respects, it is something less or other than a grand one (such as a list of goals, a short- or medium-term plan, an economic plan, a military strategy, or a diplomatic strategy). If the plan is incoherent or imbalanced, then it is a bad grand plan, not a "not-grand plan."

If grand strategy is conceptualized as an organizing principle, then the question of whether it exists depends upon evidence of the key ideas held by the relevant individuals about the state's highest priorities and the means that should be mobilized in pursuit of those ends over the long term. Again, there are multiple methods for generating such evidence. These include methods that aim to measure ideas directly, such as interviews, surveys, or the analysis of documents authored by or about the relevant individuals. There are also indirect methods of generating evidence of organizing principles, such as observing the decisions and actions of the individual or the state and inferring the existence of an organizing principle from those observations, although this method on its own is also subject to the problem of equifinality. A "not-grand principle" is one that does not provide a general sense of the key long-term goals of the state or that does not identify the means (at least selected from—if not inclusive of—all spheres of statecraft) by which to achieve them.

Finally, if grand strategy is conceptualized as a pattern of behavior, then its existence depends upon demonstrating that pattern. In this case no inference is made: the pattern of behavior is itself the grand strategy. The characteristic of holism mandates that scholars attend to the distribution of the state's resources in each of the military, diplomatic, and economic spheres of statecraft. The characteristic of importance can be operationalized by devising *ex ante* measures of what patterns of distributions would indicate which ends are effectively prioritized relative to

others. A study of grand behavior should also specify the period for which the pattern would need to be observed to be considered "long-term."

Can Small States Have Grand Strategies?

The answer to the question of whether grand strategy is a plan, a principle, or a pattern of behavior also contributes toward resolving the problem of whether all states have grand strategies. The existing literature focuses overwhelmingly on the United States, to a lesser extent on other great powers, and much less again on smaller states. As a result, scholars tend to equate the concept of grand strategy with great powers.¹⁴⁰ It is obvious why: great powers have on average far greater effects on important outcomes in the international system than smaller states. There is nothing inherent, however, in any of the three conceptualizations of grand strategy that would preclude the concepts from being applied to other states. Small states can, at least in theory, produce grand plans in which they make choices from among all their resources about which ends to prioritize and the means to devote to those ends. Similarly, the leaders of small states can hold organizing principles in mind that govern their decisions across the spheres of statecraft with the view to achieving long-term goals. Finally, patterns of behavior may be detected equally in the outputs of small states as in the outputs of great powers. Control over military, diplomatic, and economic resources is essential to the very definition of a state. All states distribute those resources. Those distributions—and patterns within them—can be observed over the long term. Thus, at least in theory—regardless of which conceptualization of grand strategy is used—all states can have a grand strategy.

Does Every State Have a Grand Strategy?

The conclusion that grand strategy can apply to any type of state raises the question of whether every state has a grand strategy. If grand strategy is conceptualized as a plan, then the answer is clearly no. If grand strategy is conceptualized as an organizing principle or a pattern of behavior, the answer to this question depends on the level of generality scholars can tolerate in their measurements. It is possible that, given that all states necessarily distribute their resources, some pattern in that distribution can be found for all states if state outputs are observed at a high level of generality. For example, it is uncommon for a state massively to defund or increase a top-level budget item over a short period of time; to the contrary, there is substantial continuity for most states in the relative proportion of their budgets allocated to major line items from one year to the next. Whether such patterns, or changes in such patterns, meaningfully could be operationalized as an object of study or dependent variable would depend on the research question motivating the study. Similarly, whether it can be said that all leaders have an organizing

¹⁴⁰For statements of this equation, see, for example, Murray, "Thoughts on Grand Strategy," 1; Kennedy, "Towards a Broader Definition," 6.

principle would depend on the level of specificity in terms of the content of the principle that scholars require for the purposes of their research questions. It seems plausible that all leaders have conscious ideas about their priorities and how to achieve them. In this general sense, it may be said that all states have organizing principles.

To What Extent Is Grand Strategy Constant or Flexible?

The question of how constant grand strategy must be to be properly so-called also turns on whether grand strategy is conceptualized as a plan, a principle, or a pattern of behavior. If grand strategy is a plan then it is not a necessary characteristic of the concept that the plan remain constant. In this case, the long-term characteristic of grand strategy refers to the nature of the plan, not to the plan's longevity in operation. In Kennedy's words, the plan "should" operate for decades or more.¹⁴¹ Whether it does or not does not determine the existence of the plan. The plan must be long-term in its original scope, not something that remains in existence for a long time. Similarly, it is not necessary for an organizing principle to be operative for a long-term period. The concept could be used, for example, in reference to a proposal for an organizing principle, in which the principle "exists" by virtue of being proposed but may never actually be operative. The long-term characteristic of the concept refers to the content of the principle, not to the duration of the existence or effect of the principle. In the case of a pattern of behavior, the pattern must exist for a period that can be considered long-term for it to constitute grand behavior. In this case, constancy is evidence of existence and a high frequency of change would tend to be evidence against the existence of grand behavior.

Conceptual Frameworks to Advance the Study of Grand Strategy

The foregoing discussion has refrained from commenting on which of the three conceptualizations of grand strategy is the "right" one. This is for two reasons. The first is that each concept identifies a phenomenon or object of interest to historians, political scientists, and policy analysts that is not denoted specifically by any other concept. This interest is demonstrated by each concepts' representation in the existing literature, as detailed above, but there are also good reasons why scholars and commentators should be interested in these phenomena as both independent and dependent variables (or causes and effects), which are discussed in this section. The second reason it would be unwise to deem only one of the concepts "correct" is that retaining all three offers great potential for investigating the relationships among the three phenomena or objects to which they refer. These relationships ought to be central to the study of grand strategy, but systematic investigation of them has been hampered by the conflation of concepts in existing definitions.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 4.

Grand Plans as a Conceptual Framework

Grand plans are the product of the efforts of individuals to control in detail the outputs of the state. This concept gives rise to a framework for asking questions about whether and/or how those processes, or those individuals, and the organizations they represent, matter in determining the state's outputs, as well as about what determines whether such plans are formulated and their content. These questions include why plans are drafted when they are, what mechanisms transmit plans into state outputs, what determines which plans are implemented, and why the effects of some plans may be enduring whereas others may not be. The characteristics of grandness as applied to plans give rise to a range of further questions about those efforts, including whether and how individuals attempt to coordinate plans across the spheres of statecraft, project into the long-term time horizon, and make conscious trade-offs. These questions constitute a research agenda on the subject of "grand" strategic planning. Strategic planning in general and grand strategic planning in particular are subjects that have received surprisingly little attention in the subfield of security studies. There has been some prescriptive and descriptive work to date,¹⁴² but there is little by way of systematic empirical research.¹⁴³ Scholars are familiar with thinking in terms of foreign policy decision making and, to a lesser extent, intelligence gathering and analysis, but there is a realm of executive activity that exists before, between, and after these processes, which should be addressed by the study of strategic planning.

Grand Principles as a Conceptual Framework

There is an extant literature on the effects of ideas on foreign policy, some of which addresses ideas that could be considered to be grand principles, although this literature does not tend to use the term grand strategy.¹⁴⁴ It is not necessary for scholars working on ideas in foreign policy to acknowledge explicitly when they are working with ideas that are "grand strategic" and, indeed, those scholars may criticize the concept of grand principles for overlapping too much with the concepts with which they work. The case against this potential criticism, and for the use of the term grand principles, is two-fold. First, the concept of grand principles

¹⁴²See Leffler and Legro, eds., *In Uncertain Times*; Emily O. Goldman, *Power in Uncertain Times: Strategy in the Fog of Peace* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Daniel W. Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia: The Role of Strategic Planning in American Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009); Bruce W. Jentleson and Andrew Bennett, "Policy Planning: Oxymoron or Sine Qua Non for U.S. Foreign Policy?" in *Good Judgment in Foreign Policy: Theory and Application*, ed. Stanley A. Renshon and Deborah Welch Larson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 219–46.

¹⁴³For exceptions, see Jordan Tama, "Does Strategic Planning Matter? The Outcomes of U.S. National Security Reviews," *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 735–65; Jordan Tama, "The Politics of Strategy: Why Government Agencies Conduct Major Strategic Reviews," *Journal of Public Policy* 37 no. 1 (March 2017): 27–54; Popescu, *Design and Emergence*.

¹⁴⁴See, for example, G. John Ikenberry, "Creating Yesterday's New World Order: Keynesian 'New Thinking' and the Anglo-American Postwar Settlement," in Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, ed. *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 57–86; King, *China–Japan Relations*.

provides a framework for investigation into a type of ideas that is specific and, to the author's knowledge, unique: those consciously held ideas about what the state's overall goals should be and how those goals can be advanced over the long term. One corollary of this specificity is that, in the examination of the effects of such ideas, the concept directs attention to continuities in state outputs. This presents a challenge to—or an opportunity for—political scientists in particular, who are oriented toward explaining variation. If grand principles do produce continuities, this may have broad implications for scholarly explanations of state interactions. For example, the existence and effect of grand principles may complicate Robert Jervis's observation that states' belief that other states have grand plans—that they “carefully and skilfully orchestrate moves over a long period of time and a wide geographic area”—is “much more common than the reality.”¹⁴⁵ It may be that even if a state does not have a grand plan, it may behave as though it has one (and therefore be perceived as having one) because of the cohering effect of a grand principle, rather than because of, as Jervis argues, a misperception caused by observers' cognitive biases. Second, the effect of acknowledging when ideas are grand principles would be to build a valuable relationship between the literature on ideas in foreign policy and the literature on grand strategy, which are currently close but unacknowledged cousins. As one example of the many potential benefits of acknowledging that relationship, scholarship on the effects of ideas on foreign policy should inform the prescriptive literature on grand strategy that aims to inject ideas into foreign policy processes.

Grand Behavior as a Conceptual Framework

The concept of grand behavior provides a framework for investigating the long-term behavior of the state as a whole. The overwhelming tendency within the sub-field of foreign policy analysis (FPA) and in foreign policy commentary is to focus (in the United States) on presidential administrations. This focus implies some causality: that incumbents significantly affect foreign policy outputs. The study of grand behavior offers an alternative framework, which facilitates observations of state behavior over periods of decades or more.¹⁴⁶ This framework can reveal continuities and discontinuities that may not be observed if questions and cases are scoped in the time horizon of presidential administrations. Indeed, there is an obvious dialogue to be had between scholars of grand strategy and FPA about the extent to which changes in executive administrations cause changes in grand behavior.

The inclusion of each of the military, diplomatic, and economic spheres of statecraft in the concept of grand behavior also provides a valuable frame for examining the complex interactions between these spheres. This opportunity has yet to be

¹⁴⁵Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 320–21.

¹⁴⁶For an example of research that adopts this lens, see Silove, “Pivot before the Pivot.”

capitalized upon fully by scholars of grand strategy. In particular, there is a tendency to shy away from analysis of the economic sphere.¹⁴⁷ This tendency is evident in Posen's original definition of grand strategy, which omits any reference to the economic sphere. It is further noted and then demonstrated in Posen and Ross' seminal article on competing visions of grand strategy, which explains that "most of the literature ... treats the economic component [of grand strategy] in a cursory way, if at all," before proceeding to confine their own work "to the political and military aspects" of grand strategy.¹⁴⁸ There has been substantial commentary about the tendency for the economic aspects of security and the security aspects of economics to be underappreciated by security studies scholars.¹⁴⁹ The framework provided by the concept of grand behavior can advance the project of building cross-disciplinary bridges between security studies and economics.¹⁵⁰

The Relationships between Grand Plans, Grand Principles, and Grand Behavior

The most important reason for distinguishing the three concepts is that questions about the relationships among grand plans, grand principles, and grand behavior ought to be central to scholarship on grand strategy. Why promote, as Liddell Hart effectively did, the formulation of grand plans if not because of an unexamined assumption that such plans would produce more effective patterns of state behavior? Why engage in the "Kennan sweepstakes" if not because of a strong assumption that organizing principles promote coherence in the otherwise disparate actions of the state? Why develop detailed proposals for new grand strategies of, for example, "restraint"¹⁵¹ or "deep engagement,"¹⁵² if not for the belief that such proposals have at least some potential of guiding future administrations' decisions? The entire literature on grand strategy fundamentally depends on the assumption that there are positive relationships between grand plans, grand principles, and grand behavior. Yet, that assumption is rarely articulated and—more importantly—rarely examined empirically, because the three concepts have been conflated under the umbrella term grand strategy.

Beyond opening new frameworks for investigating central questions, differentiating the three concepts of grand strategy should propel the coalescence of the study of grand strategy into one or more research programs. For political scientists, historians, and policy commentators alike, concepts of grand strategy that have

¹⁴⁷For exceptions, see Narizny, *Political Economy of Grand Strategy*; Brendan Taylor, *Sanctions as Grand Strategy* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies Adelphi Paper 411, 2010); Lars S. Skålnes, *Politics, Markets, and Grand Strategy: Foreign Economic Policies as Strategic Instruments* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁸Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions," 8, n. 8.

¹⁴⁹For two examples, see Ethan B. Kapstein, "Two Dismal Sciences Are Better Than One—Economics and the Study of National Security: A Review Essay," *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002/03): 158–87; Norrin M. Ripsman, "False Dichotomies: Why Economics Is High Politics," in *Guns and Butter: The Political Economy of International Security*, ed. Peter Dombrowski (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 2005): 15–34.

¹⁵⁰On this project, see Mastanduno "Economics and Security."

¹⁵¹Posen, *Restraint*.

¹⁵²Stephen G. Brooks, G. John Ikenberry, and William C. Wohlforth, "Don't Come Home, America: The Case against Retrenchment," *International Security* 37, no. 3 (Winter 2012/13): 7–51.

been constructed carefully to have identifiable negative poles will advance debates within those fields about the existence, effects, and/or desirability of grand strategy. Those debates depend upon a clear concept of what constitutes absence of the phenomenon of interest. Furthermore, many international relations studies of grand strategy are currently “orphans” in the literature on grand strategy.¹⁵³ They frame themselves as responses to theories of international relations or FPA, but do not identify that they have “parent” or “sibling” studies that aim essentially to explain the same dependent variable or to test the same independent variable, or both. It should be the case that using more precisely constructed concepts will prevent the creation of future orphans.

Conceptual Clarity in the Study of Grand Strategy

Grand strategy is an obvious candidate for being dismissed as a buzzword. It connotes that which is “higher-order,” “important” and “complex.” There is a clear temptation for scholars to include the term in the title of a publication to lend these connotations to that work. There is also a lack of clarity in the study of grand strategy about what the objects of explanation are and the primary contending explanations relating to those objects. These circumstances give rise to reasonable suspicion that the attachment of the label “grand strategy” to a publication is more the product of grandiosity than intellectual honesty.

This article has argued that conceptual clarity can be brought to the study of grand strategy. This clarity is available because scholars have not been—despite appearances—opportunistic in their embrace of the term. Rather, they have employed the concept in different ways as frameworks for asking important questions about three phenomena of great interest to political scientists, historians, and policy analysts. Distinguishing these approaches from one another aids in resolving many of the basic conceptual questions that seem to confound perpetually the study of grand strategy.

Originally, grand strategy was a concept developed and applied by military historians to mean the deliberate strategy employed by officials to win a war and create the conditions for the future peace, drawing from among all the resources of the state. This original concept of grand strategy was borrowed and applied by scholars and commentators to denote three distinct types of phenomena. Whether grand strategy exists, whether it is intentional, the degree to which grand strategy remains constant or changes, and whether all states can or do have a grand strategy are questions that all turn on whether grand strategy is conceptualized as a plan, a principle, or a pattern of behavior. There is not one concept of grand strategy. There are three, which have been labelled here “grand plans,” “grand principles,” and “grand behavior,” respectively.

¹⁵³The author thanks David T. Smith for the “orphans” metaphor.

It may be tempting to discard two of the three concepts in order to promote a single definition of grand strategy. This approach is not recommended here for two reasons. First, each concept provides a distinct and useful framework for scholarly inquiry in history and political science, and for policy analysis and prescription. Second, distinguishing the three concepts facilitates the formulation of new, important questions in the study of grand strategy regarding the relationships among the phenomena to which they refer, and between each of these phenomena and other causes and effects. Instead of condemning two of the three uses of the concept of grand strategy, the preferable approach is to differentiate clearly between the three concepts and operationalize each concept carefully in accordance with its specific meaning.

Precision matters in defining, employing, and/or operationalizing concepts. To investigate the effect of grand strategy, it is necessary to be clear about what grand strategy is and is not. To debate the causes or sources of grand strategy, there must be some agreement on how the object of that explanation is identified. To develop new grand strategies, it is necessary to think in terms of both ends and means—an analytic task that sounds simple but is rarely accomplished—while projecting into the long term and considering all spheres of statecraft. To develop a good grand strategy, ends and means must be reconciled and the strategy must be coherent, that is, the elements of the strategy should not work at cross-purposes. It is insufficient for individual scholars' and commentators' definitions of grand strategy merely to accord with their employment or operationalization of the term, although that is a preferable beginning. It is also necessary to build greater consensus about the meaning of the term. Such consensus will allow the concept of grand strategy to rise above the suspicion of being a buzzword, thereby increasing the good "buzz" that the study and advocacy of grand strategy deserves.

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