

What is Grand Strategy and is it a Useful Concept?

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Abstract

This article draws upon a variety of literature in order to produce a definition of grand strategy that underlines the essential elements that distinguish it from other instruments of statecraft. But as this understanding is not sufficient on its own to grasp what grand strategy is, the article then moves on to comprehensively assess the different, yet complementary, forms that grand strategy may adopt in real-life. Finally, based on the definition of grand strategy developed in the first part, the article turns to measuring the utility of grand strategy as an instrument of statecraft.

Keywords: grand strategy, strategy, Cold War, policymaking, decisionmaking.

Introduction

A universal definition of *grand strategy* continues to elude scholars and diplomats and it is often described as ‘fuzzy’ and ‘slippery’, despite the increasing popularity of the term.¹ To address this problem, this article draws upon a variety of literature that delves into the topic of grand strategy in order to produce a definition that underlines the essential elements that distinguish grand strategy from other instruments of statecraft. These are specifically: a long-term scope, a holistic view of power, and a focus on prioritization of interests. Together these components produce a comprehensive interpretation of grand strategy as the efficient mobilization and allocation of the entirety of a state’s finite power in the advancement of its multiple long-term national interests. Nevertheless, this understanding is not sufficient on its own to grasp what grand strategy is. This article will therefore also comprehensively assess the different, yet complementary, forms that grand strategy may adopt in

¹ Hal 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; and Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

real-life, be they as detailed plans, as sets of organizing principles, or as patterns of behaviour.²

The second part of this article measures the utility of grand strategy as an instrument of statecraft. It argues that grand strategy's utility lies in its capacity to impose an element of order in the anarchy of international relations, despite its many pitfalls. It dedicates the definition of grand strategy developed in the first part of the article to demonstrate with clear examples of how matching means to ends, prioritizing objectives, and tethering strategic thought to an underlying logic about world affairs can be useful for political leaders. Furthermore, this practice can be useful to both superpowers and minnows on the world stage.

What is Grand Strategy?

The ability to distil grand strategy into a single definition is among the most contested debates in strategic studies to date. However, its utility cannot be questioned as it is a multitude of concepts that, when aggregated, will equip policy-makers with an instrument to navigate the tumultuous waters of international relations.³ At its most basic, it seeks to assist difficult decision-making by offering a systematic and purposeful view of one's interests and how best to articulate policy to attain them. Given the chaotic nature of world politics, constructing an overarching view of the world that guides policymaking is a challenging task; enforcing it even more so. But there are many tools to do this in statecraft; it is therefore important to begin by defining grand strategy by what it is and what it is not.

Grand strategy is solely concerned with the attainment of long-term interests. Historian and military theorist Basil Liddell Hart, often called the father of the discipline for his work developing strategy, wrote that 'grand strategy extends beyond the present war to plan for the future peace'.⁴ The ends to which grand strategy is developed for are, almost by definition, within the distant future. It is obviously inspired by the Clausewitzian quip that policy is the extension of war by other means.⁵ This distinguishes grand strategy from other

² Nina Silove, "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy,'" *Security Studies* 27(1), no. 1 (2018): 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd Edition (Toronto: Meridian, 1991), 322.

⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 84.

applications of statecraft like foreign policy and strategy because these are indeterminate in the scope to which they are applied. Foreign policy, for instance, may refer to a single initiative, to the broader diplomatic direction under a certain leader, to a set of policies in a particular region, or even to the broad sum of external actions undertaken by a state since its inception.⁶ It may be both a process or a self-interested tool of the state. The ends of grand strategy are inevitably distant by nature.

Another vital aspect of grand strategy is its holistic character. It has a multidimensional interpretation of power, meaning that it aims to 'direct all the resources of a nation' towards a defined goal.⁷ If grand strategy is concerned with winning both the war and the peace that comes after, it requires an understanding of power that includes and expands on military might; this involves all the resources that confer power to a state such as its aforementioned military power, economic might, natural resources, workforce, cultural output, and many others, as well to account for the constraints placed on the exercise of that power.⁸ Thus, the *grand* in grand strategy does not refer to the grandiosity of the plans involved but rather indicates the mobilization of *all* the state's resources towards the state's perceived interests. Grand strategy is a 'means-ends chain' employing all instruments of the state designed to maximize its security in war and peace.⁹ To define grand strategy as a purely military endeavour would render it void as it would be undistinguishable from military strategy.

But while power is multidimensional, it is also finite. There is only a limited amount of the financial, military, and social resources a state can create its power from. Therefore, grand strategy is uniquely concerned with making trade-offs between a state's many – and often contradictory – interests. A rational, security-minded state will thus have to evaluate the relative importance of its objectives, some of which will be contradictory or overlapping, and prioritise accordingly. Realists would argue that the state's territorial integrity and relative power position are foremost; others would argue that states are also motivated to protect foreign trade, promote ideologies,

⁶ Hal Brands, *The Promise and Pitfalls of Grand Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), 4.

⁷ Hart, *Strategy*, 321–322.

⁸ Paul Kennedy, "Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition," in Paul Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

⁹ Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.

or even defend humanitarian causes.¹⁰ Regardless of how political leaders choose to operationalize their *raison d'état*, theorists agree that the core concern of grand strategy is achieving 'vital' and 'ultimate' interests.¹¹ To do so, political leaders need to be ruthless in their prioritization. Once again, this distinguishes grand strategy from foreign policy. Grand strategy 'provides an explanation for a state's behaviour' whereas foreign policy 'describes a state's relations with the wider world' and 'makes no claim on a state's objectives and its ability to meet them'.¹² A state may have a particular strategy during a crisis or towards a certain region, but the secondary nature of such interests will disqualify it from being classified as grand strategy. Thus, grand strategy involves the pragmatic definition of its most important priorities – and most pressing opportunities and threats – to deploy resources accordingly.

By aggregating these three points we can define grand strategy as the *efficient allocation and mobilization* of a state's *entire resources* to accomplish its *long-term interests*. It is an intellectual framework designed to gear a state's means towards its ends. Policy initiatives grow out of the exercise of grand strategy and order a state's external relations with the world through a coherent logic for action. It is therefore distinct from foreign policy in that it is simply the rationale behind making the exercise of foreign policy more efficient and goal-driven.

Operationalising Grand Strategy

In practice, grand strategy is operationalized under different, yet complementary, configurations. It is most often described in the literature as a clearly laid-out plan in the form of a document or memorandum detailing the translation of interests into goals, the order of priority of national interests, and the deployment of all military and non-military instruments of statecraft.¹³ A notable example of such documents is the US National Security Strategy (NSS), which is mandated to 'address US interests, goals, and

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 1; and Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 9.

¹¹ John L. Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 7.

¹² William James, "Grandiose Strategy? Refining the Study and Practice of Grand Strategy," *The RUSI Journal* (2020): 3.

¹³ Kennedy, *Grand Strategy*; and Stephen D. Krasner, "An Orienting Principle for Foreign Policy," *Hoover Institute Policy Review*, October 1, 2010, www.hoover.org/research/orienting-principle-foreign-policy.

objectives; the policies, worldwide commitments, and capabilities required to meet those objectives; and the use of elements of national power to achieve those goals'.¹⁴ George Kennan's famous Long Telegram of 1946, Truman's NSC-68 memorandum, or the 2002 NSS are other notable examples of long-lasting codified plans of grand strategies for American foreign policy.¹⁵

However, as demonstrated by Geoffrey Parker's 1998 study of Philip II of Spain's coordinated military, economic, and diplomatic efforts against England, the absence of codified thinking in an official document is not necessarily evidence for the absence of grand strategy.¹⁶ If the criteria to define grand strategy were a laid-out detailed plan, few leaders would have one. Using a broader interpretation, grand strategy can also be an overarching set of principles of thought or consciously-held ideas about interests and how best to achieve them.¹⁷ Most leaders tend to make decisions based on a set of pre-existing assumptions and preferences structuring their approach to international relations. These organizational principles are distinct from formal plans in their level of detail, because the only the former provide a framework composed of goals and preferences that orchestrate decisions over long periods of time.¹⁸ In their contribution to the post-Cold War search for an American statement of purpose (to replace George Kennan's theory of Containment), Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross proposed four competing organizing principles for US post-Cold War grand strategy: neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy.¹⁹ In the absence of a 'smoking gun' document, shared strategic visions serve to determine a course for a state's objectives and are usually expressed

¹⁴ Catherin Dale, *National Security Strategy: Mandates, Execution to Date, and Issues for Congress*, R43174 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 3.

¹⁵ "George Kennan's 'Long Telegram'," in U.S. Department of State, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Volume VI, Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 696-709; "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security, National Security Council Report, NSC 68," *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, US National Archives*, April 14 1950; *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C: The White House, 2002).

¹⁶ Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ William Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 37.

¹⁸ Colin Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

¹⁹ Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996): 5-53.

by catchy titles like Russia's seventeenth-century grand strategy of 'hegemony within the Heartland' or America's nineteenth-century Monroe doctrine'.²⁰

Grand strategy does not just consist of *ex ante* ideas about world order. It is also a pattern of behaviour across time that ties a country's goals to its regular interactions with external actors, which is also a form of grand strategy.²¹ The world in which states operate is continuously in flux, and while certain objectives and interests remain constant the means to achieve them must inevitably accompany such changes. A grand strategy is therefore a multitude of subcomponents and corollary implementation strategies coordinated towards a single goal. As John Lewis Gaddis argued, containment was not a single policy enacted over the duration of the Cold War, but rather a coherent development and application of grand strategies articulated towards the single goal of countering the power of the Soviet Union.²² The process itself qualifies the strategy.

While the plans and organizing principles proactively shape policy, the application of these ideas within the changing parameters of international politics into detailed policies is equally important. Given the range of new threats which one might encounter, the reactive and adaptive capacity of any strategy is as important to its success as the soundness of its design. 'The very idea of a single, one-size-fits-all grand strategy', Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski argue, 'has little utility in the twenty-first century. Indeed, it is often counterproductive'.²³ Understanding grand strategy as a flexible, context-dependent process rather than a fixed policy, one might argue that every state possesses one whether they actively declare it as such or not, as Edward Luttwak does in his study of the Byzantine Empire. 'That is inevitable', he argues, 'because grand strategy is simply the level at which knowledge and persuasion, or in modern terms intelligence and diplomacy, interact with military strength to determine outcomes in a world of other states, with their own grand

²⁰ John P. LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650–1831* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 155; Peter Feaver, "Eight Myths about American Grand Strategy," in Sheila R. Ronis, *Forging an American Grand Strategy: Securing a Path Through a Complex Future* (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2013), 37–44.

²¹ Silove, *Beyond the Buzzword*, 43; Narizny, *Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, 7–13.

²² John L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²³ Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski, *The End of Grand Strategy: US Maritime Operations in the 21st Century* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2018), 2.

strategies'.²⁴ In other words, the Byzantines succeeded in matching means to ends while navigating threats and opportunities with a certain coherence and effectiveness without needing 'central planning staffs to produce documents in the modern manner'.²⁵ In this manner, whether a decision-maker has a coherent strategy or not is irrelevant as long as the individual actions that compose it are premised upon the same interests, geared towards fulfilling the same goals, and follow an unspoken operational code.²⁶ It is almost second nature to any leader to rank priorities, evaluate threats, and measure their ability to meet them.²⁷

This view of grand strategy as a pattern of behaviour serves to demonstrate that the different shapes that grand strategy may take are mutually inclusive and address different dilemmas of planning and application. For example, American post-1945 grand strategy centred around the idea of Containment, which was simultaneously a detailed plan in the form of Kennan's Long Telegram and his *Sources of Soviet Conduct* article, an organizing principle which defined the foreign policy of US President Harry S. Truman and his successors, and a pattern of behaviour evidenced by its NATO policy and its intervention in Korea. In fact, any definition of grand strategy is inherently incomplete without each of these points being individually assessed.

Debating Usefulness

With the key concepts of grand strategy defined, it is worthwhile to discuss the usefulness of operating grand strategies. If employed correctly, grand strategy can become a useful tool because it solves the dilemmas presented by the complicated realities of international affairs. First, grand strategy helps to allocate resources appropriately. It fills the gap between the 'unlimited aspirations and the limited capabilities' of states.²⁸ It is critical to avoid strategic overstretch, whereby states attempting to do everything will be left incapable of doing anything well while exhausting the very sources of that power. Nazi Germany's decision to prematurely violate the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of non-aggression in mid-1941 proved a

²⁴ Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 409.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, 10.

²⁷ See, James, "Grandiose Strategy?".

²⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

valiant attempt at subduing the Soviets, but also opened a two-front war which depleted its manpower and resources, and directly led to the ultimate fall of the Nazi regime. Simultaneously, the murder of millions of active members of society in the Holocaust demonstrate a prime example of how ideological myopia can trump strategic long-term priorities. The absence of a coherent mobilization of national resources, or at least one that was not grounded on misperceptions of national objectives based on ideologies trumping an assessment of national capabilities, is a prime example of a faulty grand strategy.²⁹

Second, grand strategy is necessary to determine where and when to dedicate time, effort, and resources. By deploying a coherent grand strategy, states can avoid 'theateritis', the term US Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall used to describe the tendency of leaders to look at immediate needs of present crises in specific areas while ignoring the broader picture.³⁰ Without grand strategy to navigate a wide diversity of interests, events will determine policy-making and not vice-versa. For example, US President Bill Clinton, during the 1990s, had between ten and 15 top priorities for American national security. The lack of appropriate prioritization and culling of these 'priorities' effectively meant the US had none.³¹ Clinton in general espoused a doubtful position regarding adopting a general paradigm for his administration's approach to foreign affairs.³² Indeed, his foreign policy record demonstrates a crisis-driven behaviour conducted unsystematically: in his Russia policy, for instance, Clinton promoted NATO's enlargement toward Russia's border that undercut his simultaneous efforts at fostering liberalization and sponsoring Western-friendly actors in Moscow.³³ Similarly, his approach to humanitarian interventionism was also crisis-driven and incoherent.³⁴

²⁹ See, Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking, 2007).

³⁰ J.L Gaddis, "Grand Strategy in the Post-Cold War World," in Thomas H. Henriksen, ed., *Foreign Policy for America in the Twenty-First Century: Alternative Perspectives* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2001), 20.

³¹ Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America's Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 200–205.

³² *National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, October 1998).

³³ Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 204–210.

³⁴ Richard Haass, "Fatal Distraction: Bill Clinton's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* 108, no. 3 (1996): 112–123.

These examples demonstrate how disorder can germinate in the absence of a hierarchy of priorities.³⁵

Third, grand strategy is useful because it offers a heuristic framework to the daily diplomatic process. Leaders cannot possibly expect and prepare for the varied threats and opportunities they will face in office and must deal with these within a narrow interval of a few hours or days under intense media scrutiny. As Kissinger's problem of conjecture goes, the scope of action is inversely proportional to the knowledge upon which such action can be based.³⁶ While a grand strategy does not offer immediate solutions, it certainly helps to provide a conceptual guidebook that can help determine the appropriate course of action in such crises. It provides the framework through which states and their bureaucracies imagine their strengths and weaknesses and how to leverage them. The grander strategic goals of the Kennedy Administration, for example, assisted the Executive Committee of the National Security Council to navigate the Cuban Missile Crisis by calibrating a response to mitigate potential retaliatory aggressions while devising military strategy in line with the broader objectives of the state without being bogged down by lower-level pressures.³⁷

Problems of Implementation

Grand strategy is not a panacea. Leaders face many factors that may hinder its usefulness. Strategizing requires them to perform the contradictory tasks of visualizing broad patterns in a complex world while condensing actions to their most essential without getting sidetracked by secondary pressures. The exercise of grand strategy is only as good as the leaders who design it. It is inherently bound by the limits of a leader's intelligence or capacity to deal with complicated situations abroad. This process is ultimately determined by the eye of the beholder because decisions are grounded upon a prior assumptions, biases, ideologies, and experiences that may often be faulty or imperfect.

³⁵ Richard Haass, "The Squandered Presidency: Demanding More from the Commander in Chief," *Foreign Affairs*, 79, no. 3 (2000): 136.

³⁶ Henry Kissinger, "Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy," *Daedalus* 95, no. 2 (1966): 505.

³⁷ Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 3 (1969): 689-718.

Additionally, the utility of grand strategy is also defined by the process of its application: it is as much determined by those who imagine it than by the large cohort of bureaucrats who implement it. The bureaucratic inflexibility of a large state apparatus is often cumbersome while interagency competition can have pernicious effects on the effectiveness of strategy. As a result, leaders often attempt to circumvent the bureaucratic process to ensure maximum effectiveness.³⁸ Democracies make it particularly difficult for grand strategies to be sustained. Each incoming government lays out different priorities and different strategies to the preceding administrations, making consistency difficult. Subjection to the changing whims of the electoral imposes significant costs to continuity of a policy.

Moreover, some scholars argue that grand strategy worked well under the bipolar order of the Cold War era but is now an anachronistic tool given the current multipolar world order. They contend that the absence of superpower politics and the diffusion of power across multiple foci around the world make impossible the concentration of priorities as dictated by grand strategy-making.³⁹ Grand strategy, as a way of matching means and ends, 'works best on predictable terrain—in a world where policymakers enjoy a clear understanding of the distribution of power, a solid domestic consensus about national goals and identity, and stable political and national security institutions'.⁴⁰ These have gradually disappeared, leading some to believe that the practice of grand strategy has outlived its usefulness. Instead, rather than a grand strategic vision, they favour operating on a case-by-case basis. In a world of such daunting complexity, it is hard to perform the tasks involved in grand strategizing, namely to prioritize national interest and to credibly evaluate threats. The world is becoming too complex to be narrowed down, and power is too fluid and disordered for a durable long-term plan to be formulated upon it. 'Today's pressures', Lord Peter Ricketts

³⁸ Robert Jervis, "US Grand Strategy: Mission Impossible," *Naval War College Review* 51, no. 3 (1998): 22–36.

³⁹ Krasner, *Orientating Principle for Foreign Policy*; and Fareed Zakaria, "Stop Searching for an Obama Doctrine," *The Washington Post*, 6 July 2011, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/stop-searching-for-an-obama-doctrine/2011/07/06/gIQAQMm1H_story.html.

⁴⁰ Daniel W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, and Randall Schweller, "The End of Grand Strategy: America Must Think Small," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 3 (May/June 2020): 107–118.

writes, 'push ministers to short-term crisis management'.⁴¹ As a result, Daniel W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, and Randall Schweller have declared that 'Grand strategy is dead', not due to a flaw in its design but rather because an unpredictable strategic environment in which it is designed to operate can no longer accommodate it.⁴² The cumulative effect of these factors presents a clear challenge to the usefulness of employing grand strategic designs nowadays. As a result, some may believe that grand strategy, especially in the modern era, is disadvantageous. The great historian A. J. P. Taylor approached this with humour when he wrote that the greatest strategists 'are those who do not know what they are doing'.⁴³

However, the problems of implementation do not necessarily discredit grand strategy as a whole. Grand strategy does not solve everything, nor does it claim to. These challenges remind us that grand strategy is far from being just an all-encompassing plan, it can be more modest in scope, a 'a habit of mind' that allows us to look 'beyond the confines of short-term requirements' and 'day-to-day, immediate foreign policy'.⁴⁴ More importantly, it is hard to imagine how the explicit choice not to design a grand strategy offers a better alternative to policy-makers. Grand strategy certainly does not offer solutions to everything, but performing the process of thinking strategically about coordinating goals to the means, defining priorities for national action, and establishing heuristic assumptions about the nature of world order will equip leaders with the intellectual background against which to formulate an educated and coherent response to crises.⁴⁵ Admittedly, it fails to eliminate the risk of crisis mismanagement—and indeed the relationship between policy and outcome remains highly uncertain—but at least it can ensure that long-term objectives will remain in focus for both leaders and diplomats when dealing with unexpected events. 'Plans are nothing', US President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, 'but the planning is

⁴¹ Peter Ricketts, "How British Foreign Policy Lost the Art of Grand Strategy," *New Statesman*, 26 February 2020, www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/02/how-british-foreign-policy-lost-art-grand-strategy.

⁴² Drezner, et. al., "The End of Grand Strategy," 116.

⁴³ A.J.P Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (NY: Atheneum, 1998), 72.

⁴⁴ Andrew Ehrhardt and Maeve Ryan, "Grand Strategy is No Silver Bullet, but it is Indispensable," *War on the Rocks*, 19 May 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/grand-strategy-is-no-silver-bullet-but-it-is-indispensable/>.

⁴⁵ Francis J. Gavin and James B. Steinberg, "The Vision Thing: Is Grand Strategy Dead?," *Foreign Affairs*, 99, no. 4 (July/August 2020): 187–193.

everything'.⁴⁶ The current multipolar—or perhaps apolar—world order does not reduce our need for grand strategy but rather reaffirms it. The concept is most useful not in times of stability and predictability but in times of fluctuating balance of power.

Grand strategy is unequivocally useful. But is it equally useful to all states regardless of size and stature? This question is important because grand strategy has been often been described as an exclusive prerogative of those states impervious to external influence by virtue of their power and influence.⁴⁷ In this vein, scholars like Daniel Drezner have stated that 'the rest of the world is not waiting up nights to learn about Belgium's grand strategy (although a government would be nice)'.⁴⁸ But this article's understanding of grand strategy does not preclude its application to the foreign policy-making of smaller states. Whether big or small, all states confront the same dilemmas about threats and opportunities that require ruthless prioritization of interests and the design of coherent means-ends chains to advance the national interest. They also face the risk of addressing each crisis with ad hoc policies and having their national standing decrease, be it in a nuclear confrontation between China and the US over Taiwan or a maritime demarcation dispute between Slovenia and Croatia over the Bay of Piran. An outstanding example of this is Hillary Briffa's case-study of Malta's ability to assert its status as a neutral state. It has avoided any military alliance in order to offer a diplomatic bridge between Europe and its Maghreb neighbours across the Mediterranean and to act as a mediator in the Arab-Israeli and Libyan conflicts.⁴⁹ Grand strategy defined Malta's status-seeking national interest, translated it into constitutional neutrality and leveraged that into the position of regional champion of multilateral security. This example shows that, if implemented with ability, grand strategy can be useful to states regardless of power capability.

Conclusion

⁴⁶ Kenneth Weisbrode, "Diplomacy in Foreign Policy," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, May 2017, 12.

⁴⁷ Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey, *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

⁴⁸ Daniel W. Drezner, "Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy? Why We Need Doctrines in Uncertain Times," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (2011): 57–68.

⁴⁹ Hillary Briffa, *Malta: Bridge of the Mediterranean*, Policy Brief 17, SSANSE, 26 June 2018, <http://ams.hi.is/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Malta-Bridge-of-the-Mediterranean-Neutrality-as-a-Small-State-Status-Seeking-Grand-Strategy.pdf>.

Overall, grand strategy allows us to shield what Kissinger characterized as 'an element of choice from the pressure of circumstance' in the unruly world of international relations.⁵⁰ It offers presidents and prime ministers, their bureaucrats and diplomats, as well as their constituencies and the broader public an element of coherence, order, and logic to their approach to foreign relations. Grand strategy conciliates the tensions between a leader's need for simplicity and the intricacies of diplomacy, as well as the obligation of planning with the improvisation required to deal with unexpected crises. And therein lies the usefulness of grand strategy.

⁵⁰ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 54.