



Executive Summary

Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press



FORGING AN AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY: SECURING A PATH THROUGH A COMPLEX FUTURE

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS FROM A SYMPOSIUM AT THE
NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

Sheila R. Ronis
Editor

On November 8-9, 2011, the National Defense University (NDU), Washington, DC, held a conference entitled “Forging an American Grand Strategy: Securing a Path through a Complex Future.” The conversation that began at that conference needs to be further developed and continued. More importantly, our nation needs to explore the path ahead and answer questions regarding how and why the United States struggles with grand strategies. If developed and executed with a systemic orientation, grand strategies could help us shape our future in an ever changing and complex world.

This volume represents a compilation of some of the presentations given at the NDU conference. It also represents the great diversity of opinions regarding this subject. For more than 2 decades, it has been evident to many that the United States needs a new framework for a grand strategy, especially since the “containment” strategy of George F. Kennan that shaped U.S. policy during the Cold War is no longer relevant. But, what kind of framework do we need?

Most commonly, grand strategy is framed in the context of warfare or at least conflict among nations. There have been exceptions, and the focus of this symposium was not on warfare or preparation for war. Our intent was to promote a discussion about the elements of and prospect for a grand strategy for America.

Over the millennia, grand strategies have evolved as the complexities of the known world grew. Rulers have created and executed grand strategies for their nations through modern times. It is possible that a 21st century grand strategy will be very different than past models since our understanding of the world has and will change our understanding of how complex systems, including nations, behave. The empowerment of individuals or small groups with new technologies and communication tools can extend beyond anything imagined outside the realm of science fiction. Other factors may come into play as well. Some would also argue that, in a democracy, it is not possible to attain the necessary consensus to craft and implement a national grand strategy in the absence of an existential threat. Recent political discourse lends some credence to that line of reasoning.

Many of us believe that an American grand strategy is not only possible, but also critical to the future of the nation. A common strategic vision can do much to focus the attention and energies of the nation toward a common good. In a recently published article, Dr. Anne-Marie Slaughter, formerly the Director of Policy Planning at the Department of State, succinctly described the need for a grand strategy or, to use her terminology, a national strategic

narrative to serve as a guide to the future. As Dr. Slaughter says:

We need a story with a beginning, middle, and projected happy ending that will transcend our political divisions, orient us as a nation, and give us both a common direction and the confidence and commitment to get to our destination.

During recent years, the U.S. Government has generated a plethora of strategies and strategic plans, with most aimed at some aspect of security—national, economic, space, cyber, energy—the list continues to expand. It appears clear that none of these strategies, whether separately or combined, gets to the objective succinctly identified by Dr. Slaughter—“a story with a beginning, middle, and projected happy ending that will transcend our political divisions, orient us as a nation. . . .” That storyline, with associated ways and means, is the basis for an American grand strategy. Our goals with this symposium were to help illuminate that path to the future and, along the way, pose and answer a range of fundamental questions.

- What is grand strategy?
- What lessons does history offer to today’s strategists?
- Is a national grand strategy possible in today’s world of complexity and divisive political turmoil?
- What is the appropriate role of the President, the Congress, the Departments of State and Defense, and the private sector in developing, supporting, and sustaining America’s grand strategy?

- What system or processes are necessary to produce a U.S. grand strategy?
- What is the role of strategic foresight in developing and implementing grand strategy?
- What are the requirements for intelligence to serve national grand strategy?
- How should we educate today’s and tomorrow’s leaders to think strategically and develop the necessary skills to develop and execute grand strategy?
- What are, or should be, the connections between an American grand strategy and the various national defense and security strategy documents? How can we improve those connections?

More information about the programs of the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) and U.S. Army War College (USAWC) Press may be found on the Institute’s homepage at www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil.

Organizations interested in reprinting this or other SSI and USAWC Press executive summaries should contact the Editor for Production via e-mail at SSI_Publishing@conus.army.mil. All organizations granted this right must include the following statement: “Reprinted with permission of the Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, U.S. Army War College.”



This Publication



SSI Website



USAWC Website