1.2: Grand Strategy

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Grand Strategy

• What is (Grand) Strategy?
• Is Strategy an Illusion?
• What are the options for a Grand Strategy for the US?
What is Strategy?

• Sun Tzu: Doesn’t define, but…

• Clausewitz: “The use of engagements for the object of the war.”

• Betts: “[T]he link between military means and political ends, the scheme for how to make one produce the other.”
OK, what is Grand Strategy?

“How do we do it?”
Policy

Strategic Doctrine

“What do we do?”
General

Specific

Strategy

Grand Strategy

Operations

Military Doctrine

Tactics

• The use of forces to win battles
• The use of battles to win campaigns
• The use of campaigns to achieve objectives
Three Critiques of Strategy

1. Anything can be justified/rationalized in advance
2. Nothing can be selected post hoc
3. Psychological, organizational, or political barriers prevent effective strategies
1. Anything Goes?

- Difficult to determine chances before
- Some strategies not ambitious enough
  - Desert Fox “degrade” Hussein’s capabilities
- What’s a good risk?
  - Hitler, Churchill, MacArthur
- Material standards v. Moral Standards
  - Difficult to determine risks beforehand; moral implications easier to judge.
2. Nothing Goes?

- Problem is not risks, but uncertainty
- 1/2 of all strategies lose…
- Many win despite strategies…
  - Serbia, Bosnia
- Many lose the peace after winning…
  - Persian Gulf I, II?
- Strategies backfire in the long term
  - Afghanistan
- Non-linearities
- But *ceteris paribus*, strategy is still useful.
3a. Individual Pathologies

- Psychological: Self-delusion of strategists
  - “See what they want to see.”

- Cognitive: Strategy too complex
  - “See what they expect to see.”

- Cultural: Communication a problem
  - “See what they are taught to see.”

- Problems, but overemphasized and circumventable.
3b. Organizational Pathologies

- Operational Friction prevents expression
  - Vietnam bombing strategies: tit-for-tat
- Goal Displacement leads to hijacking
  - Daily Air Tasking Order in Gulf War I
- True, but don’t determine outcomes of wars.
3c. Political Pathologies

• “[T]he purpose of war is to serve policy, but the nature of war is to serve itself.” (p.37)
  – Germany and Japan WWI, WWII

• Strategy links Policy & Operations; either can go too far in driving Strategy.

• Democracy prevents clear preferences and creates halfway measures.

• But prevents excessive top-down planning; ambiguity can be strategically valuable.
Betts: Conclusions

• “[T]here is no alternative but to engage in strategy unless one is willing to give up the use of force as an instrument of policy.” (47)
• Resort to force should be rare where costs and benefits are equal.
• Keep strategy simple.
• Keep civilians who control informed.
• Measure objectives by material means.
US Grand Strategy: Options

• Historical Debates about grand strategy
  – Liberal/Ideal v. Realpolitik
  – Isolationism v. Interventionism

• Reflected in major IR schools of thought:
  – Liberalism v. Realism
  – Variants of each
    • Offensive v. Defensive Realism
    • Liberalism v. Neoliberal Institutionalism

• Keep in mind difference between theory and practice:
  – “World can be described by liberalism”
  – “A grand strategy embracing liberalism.”
US Grand Strategy: Limits

• Capabilities
  – Inherited from previous administrations
  – Inherent due to economic capacity

• Intent
  – Suspicion due to past behavior

• Organizational/Political
  – Military and goal displacement
  – Myth of US as “indispensable nation”
  – Restrictions placed on executive branch
  – Measurement of effectiveness difficult
Past US Administrations

• Cold War: Containment, except periods of Détente
  – E.g. Nixon w/China, Soviet Union
  – Realpolitik thinking, varied between offensive & defensive realism

• Post-Cold War: “Rogue State Doctrine”
  – Mixture of liberal and realist notions
  – NAFTA and WTO

• Pre-9/11 Bush: “Promoting the national interest”
  – Focus on Great Power relations
  – Limited disengagement
US NSS 2002: Liberal or Realpolitik?

• champion aspirations for human dignity;
• strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends;
• work with others to defuse regional conflicts;
• prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends, with weapons of mass destruction;
• ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade;
• expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy;
• develop agendas for cooperative action with other main centers of global power; and
• transform America’s national security institutions to meet the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.
An Alternative: Offshore Balancing?

• Current US grand strategy: predominance
• Alternative US grand strategy: Offshore Balancing
  – Let regional powers control their own spheres of influence
  – Intervene in conflicts after regional balancers have failed
  – Security over economic and human rights goals
  – Abandon existing US commitments (esp. East Asia)
  – Relation to energy security: in order to disengage, must become independent
Grand Strategy: Two Dimensions

Engagement

Washington Consensus

NSS 2002

Pre-emptive coercion

Clinton Admin.

Pre-9/11

Containment

Offshore Balancing

Monroe Doctrine

Isolationism

Realpolitik

Liberalism

Pre-9/11 Clinton Admin.

NSS 2002

Pre-emptive coercion

Offshore Balancing Monroe Doctrine

Isolationism

Realpolitik

Liberalism
Discussion Questions

• Is grand strategy an illusion?
  – Can we evaluate grand strategy (before or after)?
  – Can grand strategy be effective?

• Is there an inherent tradeoff between security and other goals (e.g. human rights, trade)?

• Are there other dimensions along which strategy could be measured/pursued?

• What should the grand strategy of the US be?