

UNITED STATES INTERESTS AND GRAND STRATEGIES

I. GRAND STRATEGIES MATTER. Some failed grand strategists: Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, Hitler, Neville Chamberlain. Ouch! Bad strategies bring bad outcomes! And Woodrow Wilson lacked a post-war strategy for taming Germany. Result: WWII. Ouch!

II. NATIONAL SECURITY GRAND STRATEGIES, COLD WAR ERA (1947-1989)

A. The "Whether to Contain" Debate: Isolation vs. Containment vs. Rollback (1947-1964). The debate turned on four questions:

1. How cumulative are industrial resources? Can a conqueror convert these resources into military power, then use them to take more?
Isolationists: "resources are not cumulative--empires bleed their owners."
Rollbackers: "resources are very cumulative--empires strengthen their owners."
2. How easy is conquest? Can the USA conquer the USSR? Vice versa?
Isolationists: "conquest is very hard"; Rollbackers: "conquest is easy."
3. How aggressive is the USSR? (Is war with the USSR inevitable?)
Isolationists: "The Soviets are moderately aggressive, war is avoidable."
Total Rollbackers: "The Soviets are very aggressive, war is inevitable."
4. Will offensive action against the USSR provoke it or calm it down?
Containers: "offensive policies will provoke Soviet retaliation and war."
Partial Rollbackers: "offensive policies will scare the Soviets into a stand-down."

Key reading, Gaddis, Strategies of Containment.

Key debaters: Robert Taft for Isolation, George Kennan and Walter Lippmann for Containment, James Burnham and General Nathan Twining for Rollback.

B. The "How to Contain" Debate: Finite Containment vs. Global Intervention (for example, in Vietnam, Guatemala, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, etc.) (1965-1991). Four key questions underlay this debate:

1. Size of Soviet threat to Third World: can the Soviets seize it?
 - a. By direct military intervention?
 - b. By victory of local Marxist proxies? (Do birds of reddish feathers fly together?)
2. How "cumulative" are Third World resources? Would a Soviet empire in the 3rd World tilt the global balance of power toward the USSR?

- a. Value of 3rd world military bases?
 - b. Does US economy depend on 3rd world raw materials?
 - c. Domino theory--is it true?
 - d. Credibility theory--are commitments interdependent?
 - e. Does the nuclear revolution make conventional-era cumulativity arguments obsolete, by making conquest so hard that no Third World gains could position the USSR to conquer the USA?
 - > An axiom relevant to debates #1 and #2: "A wise warrior shoots with a rifle, not with a shotgun."
 - 3. Can US interventions against the 3rd world left succeed?
 - 4. Would independent communist states threaten US security?
- Key debaters: George Kennan, Walter Lippmann, & Hans Morgenthau for Finite Containment; NSC-68 (Dean Acheson) and Walter Rostow for Global Intervention.

III. NATIONAL SECURITY GRAND STRATEGIES, POST-COLD WAR ERA (1991-9/11/2001)

Seven U.S. grand security strategies were proposed during 1991-2001:

1. **Isolation:** the USA comes home. The Soviet collapse in 1991 removed the only real threat to the U.S. Time to come home and celebrate!
2. **Neo-containment/ Type #1:** the USA contains the new potential Eurasian hegemon (usually identified as China). The USA would contain the potential hegemon's imperial expansion, and might also try to hamper its economic growth.
 - > Tactical debates about executing strategy 2 (and 3 and 4):
 - a. Unilateral vs. multilateral strategy. The George W. Bush ("Bush 43") administration (2001-2009) leaned unilateral, the Barack Obama administration (2009-17) was more multilateral, the Donald Trump administration is more unilateral.
 - > A relevant strategist: Tom Sawyer. Sawyer's axiom: it is better to persuade other boys to whitewash the fence than to whitewash it oneself.
 - b. Threats vs. inducements to win allies. Bush 43 relied mainly on the big stick to win friends; Obama used both sticks and inducements; Trump threatens sticks.
3. **Neo-containment Type #2:** the USA contains the world's most crazy or hostile states (North Korea, Iran) by limiting their control of special technologies (weapons of mass destruction, or "WMD") or oil resources, using active deterrence and coercion and by lowering US dependence on their products (oil).
4. **Neo-rollback:** the USA wages preventive war against rogue states that pursue WMD such as Iraq 2003 (and perhaps North Korea or Iran today) and against otherwise unfriendly regimes (Taliban in Afghanistan 2001, Qadafy in Libya 2011,

Chavez in Venezuela, Aristide in Haiti). For example, neoconservatives in the 1990s and the Bush 43 administration favored "regime change" of rogue regimes and other unfriendly regimes. Framing this strategy are Sanger, "Bush to Formalize," and Lieber and Lieber, "Bush National Security Strategy" (assigned).

5. **Selective pacification**, or "selective engagement": the USA prevents interstate conflict/war in industrial regions (Europe, E. Asia, Persian Gulf). "War elsewhere hurts the USA, so let's prevent it."
6. **Global pacification**/New World Order: the USA prevents interstate conflict/war everywhere. The US could do this:
 - a. Unilaterally: the US acts as a global policeman; or
 - b. Multilaterally: the US acts with allies or in a collective security system.
7. **U.S. global social engineering/global empire**: the USA undertakes to prevent civil war, and/or protect human rights, and/or spread democracy, and/or spread market economics around the world (or in part of the world, such as the Middle East).

The rationale is mainly idealist/philanthropic, but can include security: "civil wars tend to spread to entangle the US so let's stop them"; "democracies seldom fight other democracies, hence the US enjoys more peace in a democratic world, so let's impose democracy"; and "democracies produce fewer terrorists, so the US is more secure in a democratic world, so let's impose democracy."

Examples: Bill Clinton's policy of "engagement and enlargement" of the zone of democracy, 1993-2001; Bush 43's pro-democracy 2nd inaugural address, 2005; the imperial policy favored by some conservatives since 2001 (see assigned news articles on "American Imperialism, Embraced," The New York Times Magazine, December 9, 2001; and Thomas E. Ricks, "Empire or Not? A Quiet Debate over U.S. Role," Washington Post, August 21, 2001); US intervention in Somalia 1992-3; US/French/British overthrow of the Qadafy regime in Libya, 2011; and recent calls for the US to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria.

Can the U.S. pull this off? Will the U.S. benefit by doing it? Specifically: can democracy be exported by force to other societies? Does the US know how to do it? Is democracy good for everyone? Are market economics good for everyone? Is regime change always a good remedy for human rights abuse? For civil war?

Where is counter-terror in this scheme? It's not prominent.

IV. SECONDARY INTERESTS AND STRATEGIES TO PROTECT THEM, ALL ERAS. BUT ARE THESE INTERESTS REALLY SECONDARY?

- A. Human rights: should the U.S. act to protect them? E.g., should it have moved to stop genocide in Rwanda in 1994? In South Sudan and Darfur, 1982-2008? Brutality in Libya,

2011? Mass murder in Syria in 2011-present? The killing of a million in Zimbabwe since 1990? The killing of millions in Congo, 1996-present? The ongoing expulsion of the Rohingya from Burma? See Kaufmann, Cooper, Kristof and Kinzer in your assigned readings.

- B. Environmental interests: preventing climate change and other environmental damage. Many fear that human-caused warming will reach catastrophic levels in a few years if unchecked. If so, oceans rise will destroy large coastal regions, including many great cities. Verdant regions will become deserts. Scores or hundreds of millions will be made homeless. Great economic damage will ensue. Conflicts may erupt as desperate groups fight for a place in this dark new world. (Oh dear! This interest doesn't sound secondary!)

The climate change problem has feasible solutions--a carbon tax would likely work well--but here are some reasons why we may be unable to solve it:

1. It pits a concentrated interests (carbon fuel industries) against a more dispersed general interest (everyone else). Concentrated interests usually win such fights.
2. Solutions require international cooperation among states. Instead states will free-ride, letting others solve the problem while they shirk.
> Problems #1 and #2 are manifestations of Mancur Olson's collective goods theory in action.
3. The climate science community is neither adept at using nor fond of using public relations techniques to make its findings known to publics. But such techniques are necessary to reach global publics.
4. Western ethical and religious traditions do not emphasize moral obligations to future generations (unlike, for example, the Iroquois Great Law, which requires that we consider the effects of our actions down to the seventh generation.)
5. The climate change danger has no analogies in human history. Humans often think analogically; so, seeing no analogies to the danger, people dismiss it. (But offering useful analogies is Jared Diamond, Collapase, a valuable book).
6. The climate change danger does not have a primordial signature such as screaming, big teeth, spattering blood, or fire. Humans over-respond to dangers with such primordial signatures, but under-respond to slow-rising dangers that lack them, like climate change.
7. In the USA today, government money is almost never spent to solve problems that are not yet causing pain. Unfortunately, the pain of climate change will be delayed until long after the actions that cause it, setting in fully only after the harm is done. If we wait to feel real pain before acting we may wait until

the catastrophe is unavoidable.

Oh dear. :- (

Key readings: Frank, "Small Price"; Homer-Dixon, "Terror in Weather Forecast"; and Davenport, "Climate Change."

- C. Managing emerging threats to public health:
 - a. Emerging natural diseases. The 1918 flu killed 675,000 Americans--more than World Wars I and II combined--and 40-100 million people worldwide. AIDS has killed ~30 million worldwide. The growing human intrusion into natural habitats increase the danger of that new mass-killer diseases will emerge; and the advance of medicine promises new defenses against such diseases. Defeating such diseases requires international cooperation on public health. The danger they pose is an argument for preserving cooperation with other states. Key reading: Troedsson and Rychener, "Influenza Takes Flight."
 - b. Emerging antibiotic resistant pathogens--a scary problem that requires international solutions.
- D. Economic interests:
 - 1. Economic primacy: "We must remain the #1 economy." Questions:
 - a. What matters more: relative or absolute prosperity?
 - b. How can relative prosperity be maximized? By hard-line (trade restrictions, subsidies to US industries, etc.) or soft-line foreign economic policies?
 - 2. Other interests: preserving access to raw materials? Defending US overseas investments? Promoting free trade/fair trade?
- E. Defending America's cultural/historic kin: Israelis, Poles, Cubans, Georgians, S. Koreans, Africans.
- F. Miscellaneous: controlling drugs, migrants.

V. A PRIMARY NATIONAL SECURITY INTEREST, POST 9/11/01: THWARTING WMD TERROR AGAINST THE UNITED STATES. BUT DOES THE U.S. HAVE A COUNTER-TERROR STRATEGY?

How large is the terrorist threat? What should be US strategy vs. terror?

- A. The 9/11/01 attack convinced many people that the terrorist threat was larger than previously believed.
 - On 9/11 al-Qaeda showed considerable skill--far more than other terrorist groups.
 - Nuclear weapons and materials are less secure from theft or purchase than they once were, due to Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons and the collapse of the Soviet dictatorship in the USSR in 1991.
 - The al-Qaeda attack dramatized al-Qaeda's vast destructive ambitions. Terrorism experts once argued that terrorists only want large audiences, not large numbers of dead. But former al-Qaeda spokesman

Suleiman Abu Ghaith declared al-Qaeda's right to kill 4 million Americans including two million children.

- B. Is the US succeeding against al-Qaeda? Does the US have a winning strategy?

Al-Qaeda has been weakened, especially by the U.S. killing of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011 and the attrition of the al-Qaeda organization in Pakistan by drone strikes since 2009. But AQ affiliates have sprouted since 9/11/01 in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, the Sinai, Mali, and Nigeria. Al-Qaeda spinoff ISIL controls much of Iraq and Syria. AQ affiliates al-Nusra and Khorasan pose a current threat in Syria.

The al-Qaeda narrative remains widely believed in the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda & affiliates & similar groups (ISIL) will not be defeated until the al-Qaeda narrative is destroyed.

VI. FIVE PRIME U.S. INTERESTS TODAY: AVERTING A EURASIAN HEGEMON (BUT THAT'S EASY); PREVENTING/DEFEATING CATASTROPHIC TERRORISM (SOME SAY THAT'S EASY TOO--IS IT?); CONTROLLING WMD SPREAD; PROTECTING GLOBAL COMMONS (ENVIRONMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH); PRESERVING WORLD ECONOMY.

Can these five interests be protected without broad cooperation with other major states?

VII. SIX CONTENDING GRAND STRATEGIES TODAY

Two grand strategies focused on other great powers:

1. **Isolation** (Favored by: Ron & Rand Paul, strong libertarians).
2. **Containment vs. China and/or Russia.** "China and/or Russia pose the greatest threat to U.S. national security. The U.S. should contain their expansion. Specifically, the U.S. should prevent Russia from creating a sphere of influence in the Caucasus or Ukraine; and should organize an encirclement of China, e.g., using India, Vietnam." (Favored by: John McCain; Steve Bannon (China only); implied by Obama pivot to Asia.)

Three grand strategies focused on **countering WMD terror.** "WMD terror poses the greatest threat to U.S. national security. Addressing this threat by countering its two prime elements-- WMD proliferation and terrorist networks that have global ambition and reach--should be America's top priority":

3. **Containment vs. proliferators, state sponsors of terror, and terrorist movements.** Use sieges and deterrence to counter proliferator states (e.g., North Korea, Iran) and terrorist states and movements (e.g., ISIS in Iraq and Syria, al-Qaeda central in Pakistan, the Taliban, AQAP in Yemen). "We must contain and weaken bad actors by sieges, harassment, and sabotage while deterring their aggression. They will eventually

collapse or mellow." (Favored by: Obama, Biden.)
 Barry Posen's strategy of restraint is a tempered
 version of strategies #2 and #3. Key reading on Posen:
 Dizikes, "Time to Rethink."

4. **Rollback vs. proliferators, state sponsors of terror, and terrorist movements. Move to conquer and/or destroy proliferator states** (e.g., North Korea, Iran) and terrorist states and movements (e.g., ISIS, al-Qaeda central in Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban, AQAP in Yemen, Syria). "We must conquer and/or destroy bad actors. Specifically, we must remove and replace the regimes of proliferator states and state sponsors of terror; and destroy terrorist movements by conquering and policing their stomping grounds." (Favored by: Tom Cotton, Lindsey Graham, William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Trump administration.)
5. **A Concert of major powers vs. proliferators, state sponsors of terror, terrorist networks, and climate change.** Forge cooperation with other major powers, including Russia and China, to defeat these threats. "It's 1815 again. Other major powers no longer threaten U.S. security because the nuclear revolution makes conquest among major powers impossible. But WMD terror now poses a serious threat from below. It threatens all powers and cannot be defeated without cooperation by most or all powers. Climate change also threatens all states and cannot be stemmed without common action. Hence a concert of cooperation by all powers against WMD terror and climate change is feasible and necessary." (Favored by: SVE, and Obama administration at times.) (Key readings: Van Evera, "American Foreign Policy for the New Era"; and Sanger and Baker, "Obama Reorients.")

A Concert strategy has two variants: Concert-by-containment and Concert-by-rollback. The consensus that a Concert requires is easier to achieve on Concert-by-containment.

A hybrid strategy:

6. Countering WMD terror plus ending unfair trade deals and ending illegal immigration. The Trump administration. See Kahl and Brands, "Trump's Strategic Train Wreck."

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

17.40 American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, Future
Fall 2017

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.