GRAND STRATEGIES

in War and Peace

Edited by

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quence, it needs to integrate its political, economic, and military aims in a coherent fashion, for years of peace as well as the possibility of war. The two essays by the editor, one preceding and one following the historical case studies, are an attempt to relate those European experiences to the American position today.

Paul Kennedy

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Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition

Paul Kennedy

In much of the older literature on the nature of armed forces and warfare, a simple division was made between two levels of analysis: tactics and strategy. Such a division appeared perfectly straightforward, especially to those engaged in training future battlefield commanders at the military academies. "Tactics," as Clausewitz had proposed, "is the art of using troops in battle; strategy is the art of using battles to win the war."[1] And what could be more important to military men than deploying troops and winning wars?

Like most simple definitions, however, this one also required modification—and further subdivision. For example, tactics itself might be divided into the actual techniques of fighting by the troops (infantry squares, combined-arms), and into the maneuvering of the entire army or the fleet by the commander—"grand tactics," as it is sometimes referred to.[2] According to other authorities, the conduct of a single battle or campaign—Blenheim, say, or Gallipoli—is best described as taking place at the *operational* level, midway between the tactical and the strategic.[3]

Just as tactics can be analyzed and understood at various levels, so also can strategy. One use of the word would be almost purely military in its focus, as in, say, General Sir Douglas Haig's strategy on the western front, or General Douglas MacArthur's "island-hopping"

strategy in the Pacific. As such, it leaves little or no room for the consideration of the nonmilitary dimensions of conflict, or for the longer-term and *political* purposes of the belligerent state as a whole. To cover those dimensions, therefore, military writers have suggested that the most appropriate term to employ is *grand strategy*. In Edward Mead Earle's words, "strategy is the art of controlling and utilizing the resources of a nation—or a coalition of nations—including its armed forces, to the end that its vital interests shall be effectively promoted and secured against enemies, actual, potential, or merely presumed. The highest type of strategy—sometimes called grand strategy—is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that the resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory."[4] By such a definition, Earle massively extended the realm of enquiry about "grand strategy" to encompass national policies in peacetime as well as in wartime. But perhaps even that was not as radical in its implications as the argument advanced by the military writer Sir Basil Liddell Hart in his book *Strategy*, where he proposed that since "the object in war is to obtain a better peace—even if only from your own point of view— . . . it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire." It therefore followed that "if you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought for the after-effect, you may be too exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war."[5]

This argument led Liddell Hart to draw two broad conclusions. The first was a widening of the meaning of the word *victory*, since (he felt) "victory *in the true sense* implies that the state of peace, and of one's people, is better after the war than before. Victory in this sense is only possible if a quick result can be gained or if a long effort can be economically proportioned to the national resources. The end must be adjusted to the means."[6]

The second conclusion, following directly from Liddell Hart's belief that the key task facing national decision makers was to relate ends and means, was that "grand" strategy had to involve much more than the supervision of battles. On the contrary,

> Grand Strategy should both calculate and develop the economic resources and manpower of nations in order to sustain the fighting services. Also the moral resources—for to foster the peoples' willing spirit is often as important as to possess the more concrete forms of power. Grand Strategy, too, should regulate the distribution of power between the several services, and between the services and industry. Moreover, *fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy*—which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent's will. . . . It should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace—for its security and prosperity.[7]

Although those words are rather abstract and general, they were not formulated in a vacuum. Liddell Hart's definition of grand strategy was, as many later observers pointed out, intimately connected with his own personal circumstances.[8] After being gassed and wounded on the Somme in 1916, he later developed a strong criticism not only of Haig's frontal offensives but also of Britain's World War I strategy of the "continental commitment." To restore battlefield mobility, he urged the idea of the primacy of the "indirect approach," thereby becoming forever associated with the intellectual origins of blitzkrieg warfare. Moreover, Liddell Hart's dislike of Britain's overcommitment (as he viewed it) to the western front led him to put the case for "the British way in warfare": that is to say, for the "historical strategy" of an island-state chiefly reliant upon sea power, and contributing the instruments of the maritime blockade, financial subsidies, and peripheral operations—but *not* a large-scale continental army—to the coalition assembled to defeat any power which sought to dominate Europe by force. Such a grand strategy was economical (in terms of both Britain's manpower and resources), it was calculated and moderate, and it involved a constant assessment of means and ends, as had occurred in the eighteenth-century struggles against France. The British strategy of 1914–1918 flouted that tradition and, because it cost too much, meant that the nation and its people were not better off in "victory" than they had been previously.[9]

Over the past two decades, Liddell Hart's strategical diagnosis has come in for considerable criticism. It displayed, various writers aver, a nostalgia for an eighteenth-century mode of warfare which had become much less efficacious in the twentieth century, when neither maritime blockades nor peripheral operations could bring down Wilhelmine (let alone Nazi) Germany; only a full-scale, unrelenting, and costly "continental commitment" could ensure that. And if Liddell Hart's proposals were somewhat defective in respect of British strategy, they were far less appropriate—and useful—for *other* nations (for example, Poland) to adopt.[10]

But if Liddell Hart's ideas about British strategy remain debatable, his contribution to the study and understanding of grand strategy as a whole was very important. What he and, slightly later, Earle were arguing for was a substantial broadening of the definition of the term, to show what a complex and multilayered thing a proper grand strategy had to be—and thus to distinguish it very firmly from the strictly operational strategy of winning a particular battle or campaign.

Just how broad that definition has become is worth some further reflection. To begin with, a true grand strategy was now concerned with peace as much as (perhaps even more than) with war. It was about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries.[11] It did not cease at a war's end, nor commence at its beginning. This was, Liddell Hart observed, the real point of Clausewitz's observation that war was "a continuation of policy by other means."[12]

Second, grand strategy was about the balancing of ends and means, both in peacetime and in wartime. 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 sustained by a flourishing economic base; and not enough, in peacetime, to order a range of weapons systems without careful examination of the impacts of defense spending. It is true that Liddell Hart himself showed little interest in the financing of war, or even in such a critically important field as the logistics of war;[13] but in his emphasis upon whether a war paid or whether victory could have been achieved at a lesser cost, and especially in his highlighting of the economic purposes and underpinnings of Britain's traditional policy, he pointed to components of grand strategy which later historians have come to regard as central.[14]

Third, because this broader definition comprehends much more than what happens on the battlefield itself (more, even, than what is happening amid the armed forces themselves), the student of grand strategy needs to take into consideration a whole number of factors that are not usually covered in traditional military histories, including:

1. The critical importance of husbanding and managing national resources, in order to achieve that balance between ends and means touched upon above. As the recent historiography of the early modern European state now makes clear, the juggling of scarce resources was the constant preoccupation of monarchs and statesmen, and the single most important factor in explaining defeat or victory.[15]

In the era of industrial and technological warfare, the economic component to grand strategy occupies a no less critical place.

2. The vital role of diplomacy, in both peacetime and wartime, in improving the nation's position—and prospects of victory—through gaining allies, winning the support of neutrals, and reducing the number of one's enemies (or potential enemies). It is, for example, difficult to imagine the brilliantly swift unification of Germany under Prussian leadership in the 1860s without Bismarck's success in diplomatically isolating Berlin's successive foes. It was also through the weapon of diplomacy (tightening the alliance with Russia, winning over Italy and Spain, forging the Entente Cordiale with Britain) that the French Foreign Ministry under Theophile Delcassé helped to "compensate" for its economic and military inferiority to Germany after 1900.[16] Conversely, a clumsy diplomacy like that of Germany under Wilhelm II or Brezhnev's Soviet Union can all too frequently weaken a country's grand-strategic position.

3. The issue of national morale and political culture, which is of importance not only on the battlefield but also in a population's willingness to support the purposes and the burdens of the war—or the cost of large defense forces in peacetime. The lack of enthusiasm among much of the Italian population for Mussolini's military ventures, as compared with the Japanese conviction that death was the only honorable alternative to victory, provide good modern examples of the importance of these nonmaterial factors. But so also, more recently, does the story of United States involvement in the Vietnam War, where the massive commitment of men and resources was not sustained by the popular support of the American nation—in contradiction of Clausewitz's belief that the *political* component of war was central, and in disregard of Liddell Hart's observation that fostering "the people's willing spirit is often as important as [possessing] the more concrete forms of power."[17]

The crux of grand strategy lies therefore in *policy*, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests. Such an endeavor is full of imponderables and unforeseen "frictions." It is not a mathematical science in the Jominian tradition, but an art in the Clausewitzian sense—and a difficult art at that, since it operates at various levels, political, strategic, operational, tactical, all interacting with each other to advance (or retard) the primary aim.

The history, geography, and culture of each country on our planet are unique—just as each war is different, and each battle particular unto itself—but there are always some unifying elements, deriving from our common humanity. One of them is the demand placed upon the *polities* of this world, whether ancient empires or modern democracies, to devise ways of enabling them to survive and flourish in an anarchic and often threatening international order that oscillates between peace and war, and is always changing. Given all the independent variables that come into play, grand strategy can never be exact or fore-ordained. It relies, rather, upon the constant and intelligent reassessment of the polity's ends and means; it relies upon wisdom and judgment, those two intangibles which Clausewitz and Liddell Hart—despite their many differences—esteemed the most. Finally, we need to understand that wisdom and judgment are not created in isolation; they are formed, and refined, by experience—including the study of historical experiences.

It is with this in mind that the following case studies of grand strategy are presented. They are all located in the European historical experience and they all, rather naturally,[18] concern "great" rather than "small" or medium-sized powers. Because Liddell Hart's own concepts about grand strategy derived from his study of the British experience from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, three essays focus upon that nation. The authors—John Hattendorf, Michael Howard, and Eliot Cohen—use the context of a great wartime struggle to illustrate the British efforts to evolve a grand strategy which would integrate all the necessary strands of policy, the European and the extra-European, the military and the diplomatic, the economic and the political. Despite all the changes over time, they confirm an essential continuity, of both problems and "solutions," in the story of British grand strategy. Whether in Marlborough's time or in Churchill's, decision makers in London faced much the same scene: alliances had to be preserved, but the often unwelcome and distorting consequences of those ties needed to be minimized; the pursuit of all-out victory had to be set against the costs of a premature or over-ambitious campaign; tactical incompetence and operational setbacks constantly threatened the cleverest strategical stroke; the lack of resources, or the constraints of being heavily committed to theaters which it was impossible to abandon, compelled Britain to conduct war (in Lord Kitchener's words) "as we must, not as we should like"[19]—and often made a nonsense of having fixed strategic blueprints. Again and again, therefore, one is struck by the importance of flexibility and frequent self-assessment, by the need for broad vision and balance, and by the centrality of the political dimension in grand strategy.

The three essays on British wartime grand strategy are followed, and complemented, by five further essays (by Arther Ferrill, J. H. Elliott, Dennis Showalter, Douglas Porch, and Condoleezza Rice), each of which focuses upon an individual great power. The countries themselves were deliberately chosen to provide the reader with a set of case studies widely different both in time and place: the Roman Empire, with perhaps the most successfully (if subconsciously) sustained "grand" strategy in history; imperial Spain in the early modern era; Germany and France—so close together, yet so different in their strategies—in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and the Soviet Union, yesterday and today. Once again, in all cases the emphasis is not simply upon winning battles, or even upon winning wars, but upon the broad political[20] circumstances in which victory should be set. In all cases, the intention is to follow Clausewitz and Liddell Hart in conceiving of grand strategy in the widest possible terms.

The collection concludes with the editor's reflections upon American grand strategy, today and tomorrow. This seems appropriate for a number of reasons. The United States today in many respects occupies a position similar to that of earlier "number one" great powers like Rome, Spain, and Britain.[21] It faces challenges to its interests in different parts of the globe; there are never enough armed forces to be safe everywhere, and priorities have to be set; even in peacetime, it has to think about and prepare for war—although not to the extent that such preparations would weaken its long-term power; and it needs to integrate the military dimensions of its grand strategy with nonmilitary diplomacy, technology, and culture. All this must take place in a world of constant flux, where it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish ephemeral happenings from those which will alter the strategic landscape.

The purpose of this collection is therefore twofold. First, to present a set of historical case studies of grand strategy, which synthesize and survey the experiences of the most important of the European great powers, from classical times to the present. As such, they can be used in the course of academic study, or for general erudition.

The second purpose is to use these case studies, as Churchill himself used history, for instruction.[22] No doubt the circumstances in which American policymakers find themselves at the close of the twentieth century are special unto themselves. There is also no doubt that history does *not* repeat itself, in the very narrow sense of the term. But even as America's leaders seek to evolve their own "integrated, long-term strategy,"[23] they ought to do so with an awareness of history, and with an understanding of those features of grand strategy which exist at all times, and in all countries.