



Rethinking American Grand Strategy, ed. Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols, and Andrew Preston. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021; xv + 483 pp. ISBN-13: 9780190695668.

Right from the introduction, Christopher McKnight Nichols and Andrew Preston remind us through two brief case studies, which approaches to American grand strategy throughout history have been diverse. Two modern US presidents had very different ideas about American grand strategy. Pres. George W. Bush, in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, capitalized on the opportunity to dispatch Iraq's Saddam Hussein—a task that his father, Pres. George H.W. Bush, was perceived as unwilling to do. Bush's failure in two military campaigns soon contrasted with a more sensible strategy and underappreciated legacy, to transform the decades-long AIDS crisis in Africa. Pres. Barack Obama's initial approach to grand strategy was simply, "Don't do stupid shit." The Obama administration would approach the world as it was, pivoting America toward Asia, rapprochement with Cuba, and signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. Lastly, readers are also reminded of the origins of "grand strategy" which are as old as the country itself. To the editors, grand strategy is presented, as not just about winning wars or achieving bold foreign policy objectives, but also about the creation of a durable peace and maintaining the stability of that peace. The introduction sets the tone for the book's five subsequent sections: I) Frameworks, II) Historical Grand Narratives, III) Recasting Central Figures, IV) New Approaches, and V) Reflections from the American Century.

In Part I, an all-too-brief look at frameworks, Hal Brands acknowledges some of the fundamental misconceptions about American grand strategy and presents ten common fallacies in the study of the concept, such as the idea that democracies are unable to orchestrate grand strategy, which dates to the writings of Thucydides. The other two chapters in this section, however, are much more exceptional. First, Beverly Gage draws attention to Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* as a way of thinking about grand strategy in the context of social movements and driving social change. She rightly also spotlights the work of American nonviolence expert Gene Sharp, whose tools for nonviolent civil disobedience have now been viewed as both normative and pragmatic. Second, Elizabeth Bradley and Lauren A. Taylor's review of George H.W. Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) not only offers a historical review that reveals the contrast between PEPFAR and America's centuries-long inattention to international health but provides a critical analysis of PEPFAR as an institution.

Part II, Historical Grand Narratives, comprises four chapters, beginning with Charles Edel's examination of the Federalist's early grand strategy of westward expansion, commercial and naval power, neutrality, and the building of the American navy. It is followed by Matthew Karp's discussion of the Confederate strategy of preserving the institution of slavery and Katherine Epstein's rare, yet rich examination of a number of important critiques of the industrial and technological age, such as the capacity of the American navy, overseas basing, as well as global cables and financial services—presented through the lens of globalization. The final chapter, David Milne's survey of the intellectual history of post-World War I grand strategists is the most compelling of the section. It examines "ascendant ideas" that have guided American foreign policy, public discourse, or pushed other grand ideas into decline, for better or worse, including Franklin Delano Roosevelt's about turn from Wilsonian idealism or isolationism. While the chapter adds considerable value to the section, it is by no means new, nor does it present information that invites the reader to reexamine or rediscover intellectual ideas. This is the main limitation of Milne's survey approach to historical grand narratives and is a missed opportunity.

Recasting Central Figures, Part III, is the most transformative and robust section of the volume and it makes up for the limitations of the previous section. Christopher McKnight Nichols begins this section with a focus on internationalism, from Woodrow Wilson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jane Addams. Du Bois is an overlooked figure by international relations scholars, and whose critique of colonial and imperial powers remains highly relevant today, in an age where a demographic dividend may unlock the full potential for the African continent. Elizabeth Borgwardt then reexamines Franklin D. Roosevelt and his emphasis on the

institutional pillars of collective security, economic stability, and accountability through rule of law, which underpin the current post-war international order. Michael Hoenicke Moore looks at the legacies of World War II and public discourse about American foreign policy, highlighting tensions between grand strategy and democracy. While most Americans favored intervention and avoidance, there were strong elements of racism that dominated Roosevelt's delicate coalition. Andrew Preston spotlights the contribution of Edward Earle Meade and his volume, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, sanctified the concept of grand strategy to the American public through a focus on national security. David Greenberg's essay on George F. Kennan complements Moore's, as it focuses on Kennan's bigotry, racism, and contempt for democracy, while William Inboden reflects on the Nixon-Kissinger revival of the National Security Council. Finally, Jeffery A. Engel's chapter on George H. W. Bush's grand strategy of emphasizing "democracy, free markets and freedom" that arguably ended the Cold War era. Like the previous section, Part III is partially undone by contributor choices. Christopher McKnight Nichols' lead chapter is the most significant of this section, but a surface-level examination of W.E.B Du Bois and Jane Addams feels like a missed opportunity. Critical volumes like this should partially, but properly reflect on current American discourses, and a perfunctory look at Du Bois and his critique of colonialism does not adequately rise to the occasion.

Part IV, *New Approaches*, suggests that certain aspects of American history have been ignored. For example, Emily Conroy-Krutz explores the roles of missionaries in the 19th Century and Adriane Lentz-Smith contrasts the roles of Carl Rowan, a Black diplomat and journalist with Sam Greenlee, a Black poet. The chapter is a worthy addition to the volume, as it seeks to better understand the role of race in the mechanics of grand strategy. As the author suggests, ignoring race means misunderstanding how political power works in America and how it colors foreign policy. Considerable attention is also given to the topic of immigration reform by Daniel J. Tichenor, who looks at the stressful politics of navigating immigration and implementing a grand strategy. Still, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, despite the feelings of Americans who preferred a more Caucasian country, abandoned the old highly favorable quotas of white immigrants from Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany. Other chapters are less intriguing than the politically charged topics of race and immigration. Julia F. Irwin examines American humanitarian assistance abilities from 1812 forward, while Ryan Irwin explores the cultural beginnings of a legal approach to American grand strategy seen in the work of Justice Felix Frankfurter. The section ends, however, on the highly contentious politics of abortion and adoption as a part of American grand strategy, as explored by Laura Briggs, who chronicles the path

from family planning as a means of controlling poverty under Pres. John F. Kennedy to its mixture with ugly abortion politics under Pres. Ronald Reagan.

The very brief final section, *Reflections from the American Century*, begins with Mary L. Dudziak's look at the psychological and physical tolls of war and considers how much "blood and treasure" (p. 427) the American public is willing to bear in terms of achieving a strategy as opposed to unavoidable consequences. Meanwhile, Frederik Logevall contemplates American success as a product of its geographic location as opposed to a successful grand strategy and concludes that the process of strategizing "may not do all that much for us and sometimes may do more harm than good." (p. 457)

For officers and leaders of the US Air Force, *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* is an invitation to discuss a concept that is both deeply connected to the military and to explore aspects of grand strategy that the volume argues transcend it. Aspiring military leaders should avail themselves of the opportunities that this book has to explore, such as vital military operations other than war (MOOTW), articulated in the Irwin chapter on the history of American humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts. Senior leadership, in the pursuit of understanding the larger picture behind foreign policy decisions that would result in Airmen deployed to combat situations, should be keenly aware of the geopolitics and visioning that underpinned those decisions. In that aim, the Epstein chapter, which covers the issue of basing, the Nichols chapter on Woodrow Wilson and W. E. B. Du Bois, and the rest of the entire third section of the book, should be compulsory reading.

Finally, the book is an important, yet not entirely academic look at a much-discussed topic. That is not a bad thing. While the volume invites researchers and historians to revisit colorful American characters and grand American ideas, it does not inundate the reader with terminology or language that undermine the appeal of the book to casual observers of American history. If the book fails—if at all—it is because it tries to cover so much ground that it fails to cover a topic properly. At the very least, however, these failings should be looked at as opportunities for others to fill whatever holes remain in the literature. This book should be welcomed at any institutional, public, or home library.

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