



Rethinking American Grand Strategy, ed. Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols, and Andrew Preston. New York: Oxford University Press 2021, ISBN 9780190695699, 502 pp.

This volume uses the United States as a grand strategy case study to illuminate various ways in which generally ignored voices and issues—such as white supremacy, reproductive rights, public health, humanitarian assistance, missionary work, policymaking organization, and several other domestic influences—have shaped and driven United States foreign policy. As the collective articles survey a history of United States foreign relations from the Federalists at the founding of the republic through the George H. W. Bush administration, they eschew the idea that a state is a unitary actor within international politics while bringing out the many domestic influences that have been overlooked within this historiography.

The authors are recognized scholars in their fields, many holding distinguished chairs. In addition to historians, the contributors represent public policy; public health; women, gender, and sexuality studies; African studies; and political science, making this volume a true interdisciplinary study.

Editors Christopher Nichols and Andrew Preston pen the volume’s introduction. In it they pose the questions the articles attempt to answer: “What is grand strategy? What does it aim to achieve? Does it have relevance—and if so, applicability—beyond questions of war and peace? And what differentiates it from normal strategic thought—what, if other words, makes it ‘grand’?” (pg. 1) They find that these questions are worth asking because, although there are useful defini-

tions of grand strategy, there are also criticisms of the field, and the term itself, as too narrowly focused on states' behaviors with respect to issues of war and the following peace. While issues of war and subsequent peace are obviously still important, contemporary world politics must deal with a broader array of issues including race, gender, the environment, public health, and a host of other social and cultural tensions. Hence grand strategy "should examine the bases of security and policy as broadly as possible." (pg. 2) The editors use the adjective "capacious" to describe their approach to grand strategy—and, as if it were part of a side bet, the majority of the authors also worked this term into their articles.

The book's final essay, "American Grand Strategy: How Grand Has It Been? How Much Does It Matter?," written by Fredrik Logevall, concludes that historical thinking has much to offer by showing how policymakers confronted difficult problems and sought to overcome them. In support of this idea, he quotes historian Marc Trachtenberg stating, "certain principles emerge: one reaches conclusions about what would have been better in particular situations, and these conclusions are bound to have certain points in common. Those principles then define a general framework for dealing with new problems." (pg. 456) The book taken as a whole, however, falls short of offering any general frameworks. The authors provided their own answers to the introduction's questions. What Logevall contends is that grand strategy is not all that grand. It can help shape a national response to emergent existential threats, but it can also lead to narratives that distort and constrict responses to particular events. Most of the time, the United States has not faced an all-consuming challenge, so grand strategy was unnecessary, may not have done much at all, and in fact may be harmful.

William Inboden's contribution, "Implementing Grand Strategy: The Nixon-Kissinger Revolution at the National Security Council," also makes salient a decision that the authors had to make as they wrote: Should scholars, historians in particular, confine themselves to employing grand strategy as a heuristic frame to help us understand the past actions of leaders and nations in the realm of statecraft? Or might they also employ grand strategy as a framework to help translate historical insights into possible use by policymakers today? Andrew Preston echoes the latter sentiment in his excellent article on Edward Meade Earle, editor of *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to Hitler*, the best-known book in the genre. Earle was not simply writing for "fellow academics but also to policymakers and other influential Americans," (p. 240) whom he hoped to educate so that they might make better decisions with respect to national strategy and security. Earle's primary influence came about though not from scholarly writings but through the seminars on foreign policy, security, and strategy that he ran at Princeton University's Institute for Advanced Study between 1939 and 1943. As gov-

ernment rapidly expanded to deal with the war effort, many seminar participants joined the government bringing with them ideas generated within the seminar experience.

Also advocating the latter approach in the article “The Unbearable Whiteness of Grand Strategy,” Adriane Lentz-Smith wrestles with America’s racism. Using the experiences of Carl Rowan, at one time the highest ranking African-American in the US government as Undersecretary of State and Ambassador to Finland as a case study, she argues that in his experience, South Asia views America as incurably addicted to racism and this perception is further fueled by communist propaganda so that it damages America’s standing and posture in the world. Her recommendation is that racism must be cured domestically before America can hope to eliminate the perception and begin to have the influence in the world that it seeks.

In “Disastrous Grand Strategy: US Humanitarian Assistance and Global Natural Catastrophe,” Julia F. Irwin critiques disaster relief aid supplied by America post World War II and how the United States attempted to use the assistance to improve its international reputation. Nevertheless, she still made the volume’s one policy recommendation in that if policymakers anticipate increased global vulnerability due to population growth, rise of mega-cities, and climate change then America’s mechanisms for providing foreign disaster relief must improve – but this recommendation is made without the presentation of any specific actions that America should undertake.

In the volume’s other articles, the authors have elected to treat grand strategy solely as a heuristic frame. Many of the articles refer to what voices and policies influenced strategy and, in answering the questions posed in the introduction, focus on defining grand strategy and who does it. When the authors address their readers, they repeatedly refer to scholars, academics, and historians. While there are some glimpses of an agenda to influence the thinking of current and future policymakers as was done by Edward Mead Earle in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, this book is ultimately not about how to create grand strategy, or what it ought to be in the complex global environment policymakers find themselves in today. It is, strictly speaking, a rethinking of how academics should treat the topic as they write about the history of US foreign policy. Historians specializing in US foreign relations and their graduate students are the intended readers and will find the volume rewarding. Given the focus of the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, few of its readers will find this collections of essays worthwhile—they are simply not the intended audience.

Dr. Phillip G. Pattee

Dr. Pattee is the Lieutenant General William Eldridge Odom Chair of Joint, Interagency, and Multinational Studies at the US Army Command and General Staff College, Army University.

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