

Bridging Divergent Ideas of Grand Strategy

An analysis of how the strategic documents of the United States and the European Union relate to three academic approaches to grand strategy.



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Contents

- Introduction 1

- Literature Review: The Divergent Evolution of Grand Strategy 6
 - 1.1 The history of grand strategic thought 6
 - 1.2 Three approaches to grand strategy 9
 - 1.2.1 The generalship approach 9
 - 1.2.2 The holistic approach 11
 - 1.2.3 The fundamental assumptions approach 13

- Case Study One: The United States – America First 16
 - 2.1 Formulation: Crafting a National Security Strategy 16
 - 2.2 Articulation: Continuity or change? 19
 - 2.3 Implementation: A failed blueprint 22

- Case Study Two: The European Union – A Stronger Europe 24
 - 3.1 Formulation: Becoming a global strategic actor 24
 - 3.2 Articulation: Shared vision 27
 - 3.3 Implementation: Common action 29

- Comparison and Analysis: Beyond Grand Strategy 31
 - 4.1 Comparing US and EU grand strategy 31
 - 4.2 The future of grand strategy 33

- Conclusion 36

- Bibliography 38
 - Primary sources 38
 - Secondary sources 38
 - Literature 38
 - Internet sources 41

Introduction

In a complex world where leaders' knowledge is always inadequate, foreign policy victories are often won through improvisation, incrementalism, and adaptation to changing circumstances.¹

The American scholar Ionut Popescu argues that grand strategy is obsolete and overrated, because planning in advance is impossible as a result of the difficulty of predicting the future of the international security environment. He claims that the United States (US) President *Trump Doesn't Need a Grand Strategy*, because it a useless and static process that merely leads to a blueprint.² In stark contrast to Popescu, the American historian Hal Brands argues that “[t]here is no good alternative to grand strategy.”³ According to Brands, the conceptual anchors that a grand strategy provides should effectively guide a nation through a geopolitical storm. It is clear that these scholars have certain biases towards the concept of grand strategy. This raises questions about the overall consistency in the understandings of the concept. If scholars are diametrically opposed to one another on the subject, how well can practitioners relate to these academics? To feed into this debate about the practical use of the academic concept of grand strategy, the present paper will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the concept by analysing the wider decision-making process of grand strategy, which necessarily includes not only the art of formulating a strategy, but also the strategy's implementation.⁴

It seems easy to use the academic concept of grand strategy as an analytical tool and relate it to the decision-making processes of the grand strategies of various polities. However, the fact that there is no single overarching definition of the concept makes this complex. This view is echoed by the Latvian-American scholar Lukas Milevski, who argues that modern understandings of the concept “display a wide range of meaning, of conceptual purpose, and of theoretical function, and differ not only among disciplines but also within single disciplines.”⁵ History proves that the concept of grand strategy evolved simultaneously with the particular context in which the individual scholars developed the concept. Furthermore, the assumptions and biases of scholars towards grand strategy influenced the evolution of the concept. Throughout the conceptual history of grand strategy, it becomes clear that scholars interpret the

¹ Ionut Popescu, ‘Trump Doesn't Need a Grand Strategy’, *Foreign Affairs* (2018).

² *Ibidem*.

³ Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca 2014) 194.

⁴ Strategy is simply a bet on the future. So, although the strategy's foundation may be static, its character shows that it is a dynamic and continuous process, which includes a formulation, implementation, and perhaps an adaptation phase.

⁵ Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford 2016) 1.

concepts of grand strategy, strategy, and foreign policy as overlapping concepts or as synonyms. This thesis argues that this undermines the practical relevance of grand strategy as an academic concept. Therefore, it is necessary to contribute to the conceptual mapping of the terms related to grand strategy by recognising their true purposes.

For the purpose of this thesis it is necessary to examine a representative part of the interpretations of grand strategy throughout its history. Grand strategic thought did by no means evolve linearly. Nonetheless, there is a certain level of continuity in the evolution of three separate academic approaches to grand strategy. Together, they represent the greater part of the concept's history. The first approach focuses on relating military means to political ends. This will be referred to as the generalship approach to grand strategy, which roughly equates to the art of exercising military command. Although this approach emerged in the nineteenth century, a modern example is found in the interpretation of the American scholar Robert J. Art, who stated that “a grand strategy tells a nation's leaders what goals they should aim for and how best they can use their country's military power to attain these goals.”⁶

The second approach consists of scholars who include a broader array of instruments to their understanding of grand strategy. This approach will be referred to as the holistic approach, in the sense that instead of the military means as the main instruments, these scholars draw on the full spectrum of political power. Thus, they also include non-military instruments, such as economic and diplomatic power. The theorists of British maritime strategy Alfred Thayer Mahan and Julian Stafford Corbett set this approach into motion. Mahan stressed that sea power is “based upon a peaceful and extensive commerce”, and Corbett noted that major strategy, or grand strategy, “in its broadest sense has also to deal with the whole resources of the nation for war.”⁷ Especially Corbett can be recognised as the founder of the concept in a way that is recognisable to modern scholars of grand strategy.

Mainstream modern grand strategic thought consists of scholars who include non-military means to their understandings. However, in contrast to the previous approaches, the primacy of policy came to an end with the emergence of a third approach to the grand strategy. This final approach represents an entirely unique logic, because these scholars place grand strategy at a hierarchical level of responsibility above policy. This will be referred to as the fundamental assumptions approach, because these scholars interpret grand strategy as the

⁶ Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca 2003) 1.

⁷ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660–1783* (Cambridge 2011 [original edition: 1890]) 25; Julian Stafford Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis 1988 [original edition: 1911]) 308.

conceptual framework that guides foreign policy for decades, or even centuries. Therefore, policy is ultimately based upon fundamental or ideological assumptions. The British historian Paul Kennedy probably is the most prominent scholar whose interpretation is in line with this third approach. He interprets grand strategy as a concept that controls policy. According to him, grand strategy is an art that “can never be exact or fore-ordained” and one that goes beyond the “nonsense of having fixed strategic blueprints.”⁸

It is striking that although the three aforementioned approaches to grand strategy emerged in history, they are still separately discussed today. The three approaches all provide a unique logic that could lead to different conclusions about practical cases of grand strategy. If one person’s grand strategy is another’s foreign policy, how can decision-makers know how to craft the right strategy? To work towards a more nuanced understanding of grand strategy, it is relevant to present a case study of the decision-making process of grand strategy. Although it is by no means necessary, this process often culminates in the articulation of a set of strategic documents. It is relevant to analyse these documents, because they represent the visible part of a polity’s strategic culture, a concept that is generally described as “the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to strategy.”⁹ It should be emphasised that this thesis agrees with the British-American strategic thinker Colin Gray that one should never distinguish culture from behaviour.¹⁰ Therefore, this thesis will focus on both the explicit and implicit grand strategy of the cases presented below.

The most discussed example of a grand strategic document is the US *National Security Strategy* (NSS) with its subordinate strategies represented in the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) and the *National Military Strategy* (NMS).¹¹ Since its first publication in 1987, the NSS “has become synonymous in the United States with grand strategy.”¹² For the purpose of this thesis, it is relevant to analyse the December 2017 version of the NSS, because this allows a

⁸ Paul Kennedy, ‘Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition’, in: *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven 1991) 6.

⁹ Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations* (Santa Monica 1977) 8.

¹⁰ Colin S. Gray, ‘Strategic culture as context: the first generation of theory strikes back’, *Review of International Studies* 24 (1999) 49–69, 50.

¹¹ Donald J. Trump, ‘The National Security Strategy of The United States of America’ (2017); Jim Mattis, ‘National Defense Strategy of The United States of America’ (2018); Martin Dempsey, ‘The National Military Strategy of The United States of America’ (2015).

¹² Peter Layton, ‘The Idea of Grand Strategy’, *The RUSI Journal* 157 (2012) 56–61, 57.

reflection on most prior research on grand strategy. To provide a more nuanced view, it is necessary to make a comparison with a second case.

This thesis will make a comparison with the overarching strategic document of the European Union (EU), which is generally regarded as a representation of its grand strategy.¹³ It is relevant to analyse the EU, since it represents an entirely unique case in the sense that it is a regional organisation that consists of individual member states that potentially all have their own grand strategies. Hereby, this thesis provides a more nuanced view on the practice of grand strategy, and it goes beyond a state-centric approach. In the case of the EU, this thesis will analyse the 2016 *European Union Global Strategy* (EUGS) and its subordinate document, the *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence* (IPSD).¹⁴ It is highly relevant to compare the US and the EU, because this research is conducted at a time of uncertainty for the US-EU relationship. With the United Kingdom (UK) leaving the EU and an American president whose rhetoric causes some tension in the transatlantic relationship, it is interesting to examine how the two democratic polities will manage their future in the international environment. Comparing two polities that enjoy close economic and military ties but simultaneously have crucial political differences may yield key insights for future research on grand strategic decision-making.

The present thesis aims to create a better understanding of the divergent ideas of grand strategy. This thesis argues that in order to establish grand strategy as a practically relevant concept, it is crucial to appreciate the progress made in the past and to learn from all of the three approaches to grand strategy. In addition, it is necessary to bridge the gap between theory and practice. First, because the interdisciplinary character of the academic study of grand strategy has the potential to provide a historical and scientific context that policy-makers need in order to understand the conditions of pursuing an effective strategy. And second, because practitioners could help theorists gain new insights based on the implications of various political and bureaucratic systems. To help bridge this gap, this thesis poses the following main research question: to what extent does the practice of the grand strategic decision-making processes in the cases of the 2017 NSS and the 2016 EUGS reflect any of the three academic approaches to grand strategy?

¹³ See for example: Simon Duke, *Europe as a Stronger Global Actor Challenges and Strategic Response* (Basingstoke 2017) 55; Sven Biscop, 'The EU Global Strategy 2020', *Security Policy Brief* 108 (2019) 1–3, 1.

¹⁴ Federica Mogherini, 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy' (2016); Federica Mogherini, 'Implementation Plan on Security and Defence' (2016).

In accordance with the aim of the thesis, it is relevant to pose four sub questions. Accordingly, these questions form the structure of the thesis. First, this thesis seeks to provide a clear overview of the three approaches to grand strategy presented in the literature. To effectively link this theory to the practice, it is necessary to find out why the scholars choose to approach grand strategy from their perspective. Therefore, the first chapter is a literature review that will focus on the following question: what are the purposes of the three approaches to grand strategy related to the practice of grand strategic decision-making? This chapter will also briefly outline the methods that will be used to make the connection between the academic concepts and the cases. Subsequently, it is necessary to present the case studies. Therefore, chapter two will cover the following question: which characteristics of any of the three approaches to grand strategy does the US draw on in their decision-making process of the 2017 NSS? Chapter three will focus on the similar question: which characteristics of any of the three approaches to grand strategy does the EU draw on in their decision-making process of the 2016 EUGS? Finally, the theory will be connected to practice in chapter four. This chapter compares and analyses the cases presented in chapters two and three. Thus, this chapter focuses on the question: how do the decision-making processes of the 2017 NSS and the 2016 EUGS compare, and how does this relate to the literature on grand strategy? With this focus on bridging the gap between theory and practice, this thesis aims to go beyond the current literature on grand strategy.

Literature Review: The Divergent Evolution of Grand Strategy

One reason for the failure to deal properly with grand strategy has been debates about the interrelationship between, and the failure to properly distinguish among, strategy, grand strategy, and foreign policy.¹⁵

The American scholar William C. Martel rightly noted that scholars use and abuse the terms related to grand strategy in various different ways. They continue to do so in line with the three approaches identified in this thesis. In order to comprehend this complexity of the current state of the concept of grand strategy, it is necessary to first appreciate the progress made in the past. Therefore, this literature review will provide a historical overview of the conceptualisation of grand strategy. Subsequently, this chapter will focus on the purposes of the three approaches in their relation to the practice of grand strategic decision-making. Finally, this chapter will provide the methods that will be used to make the connection between the three approaches and the case studies.

1.1 The history of grand strategic thought

Grand strategy emerged as a concept in the English language in the early nineteenth century. Deriving from Napoleonic strategic thought, the concept was already interpreted in various different ways. For example, grand strategy was seen as a subset for strategy, an interpretation that stands diametrically opposed to the modern interpretations of the concept.¹⁶ Other nineteenth century thinkers emphasised the importance of manoeuvre, planning an attack, the way in which one should fight, and how to handle military formations.¹⁷ So, in general, grand strategy was a purely military concept that resembles of the concept of military strategy as most scholars see it today. This is where the generalship approach to grand strategy was born.

Most modern interpretations of grand strategy, in which scholars include all instruments of political power, are a product of the early twentieth century. When waging a war became increasingly complex, it became necessary to think more precisely about the long-term effects of war. Maritime strategy, in which Mahan and Corbett explored a wider breadth of means of grand strategy, laid the foundation for the evolution of the holistic approach to grand strategy. The British context in which they explored the concept led, for example, to the assumption that

¹⁵ William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: the Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (New York 2015) 4.

¹⁶ Milevski, *Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*, 16.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 19–24.

it was not only security that was at the nation's best interest, but also "the most economically gainful peace."¹⁸ Also within this British school, the interwar theorists J.F.C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart developed the idea of grand strategy as both a war and peacetime activity. According to Fuller, war should extend the preceding period of prosperity by effectively connecting economics and war. In addition, according to Liddell Hart, "war [...] should be conducted with constant reference to the peace that you desire."¹⁹ Therefore, according to this idea of limiting war, there should be no such thing as a Pyrrhic victory.

American grand strategic thought differed greatly from the interpretations of the British school. The American thinkers not only developed ideas related to the holistic approach, but also continued to draw on the generalship approach to grand strategy. For example, the American political scientist Quincy Wright focused on the nineteenth century idea of connecting military means to political ends. He viewed grand strategy exclusively as a war activity that is guided by military policy, which in turn is subordinate to national policy.²⁰ However, it was his contemporary Edward Mead Earle who left a more significant mark on the development of the concept with his statement that 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".²¹ Hereby, he presumably was the first to place grand strategy at a level above policy. Nonetheless, it was not until the end of the Cold War that this fundamental assumptions approach was further developed.

The evolution of grand strategic thought came to a standstill when the use of atomic bombs hastened the end of the Second World War (WWII). Scholars and policy-makers became preoccupied with theorising about nuclear strategy. Consequently, the study of grand strategy was for the greater part of the Cold War, at least to a large extent, put to one side.²² Ironically, partly because of Cold War events, the concept re-emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s. During this same period, the concept made its way into the field of International Relations (IR).²³ This outgrowth of the fields of military strategy and history implied that scholars of grand strategy took an ideological turn. By viewing the concept from the perspective of IR theories, scholars

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 43.

¹⁹ Michael Howard, 'Grand Strategy in the Twentieth Century', *Defence Studies* 1 (2001) 1–10, 1.

²⁰ Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago 1942) 292.

²¹ Edward Mead Earle, 'Introduction', in: *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton 1944) viii.

²² Milevski, *Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*, 96.

²³ Braz Baracuhy, 'The Art of Grand Strategy', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 53 (2011) 147–152, 147.

started to prescribe grand strategies to specific countries.²⁴ In addition, scholars continuously brought in new insights, making the concept ever more diverse and incoherent.

One of the first scholars to resurrect grand strategy in the late 1970s was the Romanian-born political scientist Edward Luttwak. In his work on the grand strategy of the Roman Empire he interprets grand strategy as military statecraft, in which non-military instruments are merely put into use as force multipliers.²⁵ It is only in his later work that he abandons this idea that resembles of the generalship approach. Similar to Luttwak, the American scholar Barry Posen initially only incorporated military instruments into his idea of grand strategy. Although he held on to a strict security-oriented interpretation, he eventually allowed grand strategy to go beyond the sole use of military instruments. Nonetheless, he argued that “without some boundaries, the concept [...] can be expanded to unmanageable dimensions.”²⁶

The British historian Paul Kennedy did want to work towards a broader understanding of the concept. In his work published right after the end of the Cold War, he interprets grand strategy as a long-term conduct that goes beyond the idea of using means to achieve ends. Instead, he argued that grand strategy should focus on balancing means and ways against each other. Influenced by Earle and Liddell Hart, he interprets grand strategy as an art that is “about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even centuries.”²⁷ Kennedy’s lasting influence is shown in the fact that most modern scholars now have an interpretation similar to his idea that grand strategy controls policy.

An example of such a modern scholar is the American historian Hal Brands, who interprets grand strategy as the foreign policy director that aligns “today’s initiatives with tomorrow’s desired end-state.”²⁸ Brands developed his views as a student at Yale University, where Paul Kennedy, along with his colleagues John Lewis Gaddis and Charles Hill, set up a grand strategy course in 1998.²⁹ This again shows the importance of context in the divergent way in which the concept evolved. To go beyond the current conceptualisation, it is important to find out why the scholars choose to follow a logic that is in line with one of the three approaches. So, to be able to effectively relate this literature to practice, the next paragraph will focus on the practical purposes of the respective approaches.

²⁴ Milevski, *Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*, 129–131.

²⁵ Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century to the Third* (Baltimore 1979) 2.

²⁶ Barry Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany Between World Wars* (Cornell 1984) 220.

²⁷ Kennedy, ‘Grand Strategy in War and Peace’, 4–5.

²⁸ Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?* 4.

²⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, ‘What is Grand Strategy?’, *American Grand Strategy after War* (2009) 1–17, 1.

1.2 Three approaches to grand strategy

1.2.1 The generalship approach

The most striking example of a modern scholar who fits in the list of thinkers of the generalship approach is Robert J. Art. He points out that “grand strategy is a broad subject.” Nonetheless, Art argues that in order to reach the desired ends – or foreign policy goals – that the grand strategy prescribes, a state can only draw strength from its military instruments. Foreign policy, on the other hand, deals with the same desired ends, but it determines how all instruments of national power should be integrated and employed in order to achieve these ends.³⁰ Thus, the strength of his argument lies in the believe that grand strategy should be distinct from foreign policy in order to be useful. Hereby, he effectively takes distance from scholars who cannot differentiate between the two concepts. The British military historian Hew Strachan points out that even “today strategy is too often employed simply as a synonym for policy.”³¹ This distinction should be present in any interpretation of grand strategy in order to successfully relate theory to practice.

As aforementioned, the American scholar Posen also initially incorporated only military means to his understanding of grand strategy.³² He used the term strategic doctrine to describe his interpretation of grand strategy, which he later defined as “a political-military, means-end chain.”³³ Although this understanding may not be as narrow as that of Art, he follows a similar logic that focuses on military force and the ways to achieve security. Unsurprisingly, both scholars subscribe to the IR theory of neorealism. This helps to explain their focus on military power, which, although it “is the most expensive and dangerous tool of statecraft, [...] it can also promise great benefits.”³⁴ These benefits are best described within the context of their main actor: the US. From a neorealist perspective, military power is the instrument to bring about political change in the anarchic world system. Thus, with American military power at its peak, it possesses great ability to shape the world. Therefore, having a grand strategy focused on military power could be highly important.

Art and Posen both theorised about grand strategy at times in which the US heavily focused on rethinking its military position in world affairs. Namely, Posen theorised in the post-

³⁰ Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, 1-2.

³¹ Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge 2013) 11.

³² In his Ph.D. dissertation, Posen only casually used the term grand strategy, which he labelled as strategic doctrine: Barry Posen, ‘The Systemic, Organizational, and Technological Origins of Strategic Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars’ (1981).

³³ Posen, *Sources of Military Doctrine*, 13.

³⁴ Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, 4.

Vietnam period, in which the debate centred around US security and defence.³⁵ Art mostly wrote at a time when it was totally unclear what the threats were for the US and what their allies were capable of. The dislocation of American power wrought by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 made scholars like Art especially keen on rethinking post-Cold War dynamics. As a result, both scholars focused on maintaining the usefulness of the concept. Consequently, they were able to make grand strategy prescriptions. For example, Art advocated the grand strategy of selective engagement for the US, whilst other scholars preferred the strategies of neo-isolationism, cooperative security, or primacy.³⁶

These grand strategy prescriptions seem useful at first sight. Prescriptions have the potential to effectively relate a polity’s current or historical behaviour to tomorrow’s alternative choices. However, they would only be useful if scholars like Art and Posen could explain under what conditions their grand strategies should be formulated and implemented. In addition, the Australian scholar Nina Silove rightly observed that “from these bases more detailed grand plans could be developed, but the specifics of those plans are neither contained within nor necessary to the policy prescriptions themselves.”³⁷ So, prescriptions may not even effectively contribute to the art of crafting grand strategy documents. Therefore, the problem still lies in the connection between theory and practice.

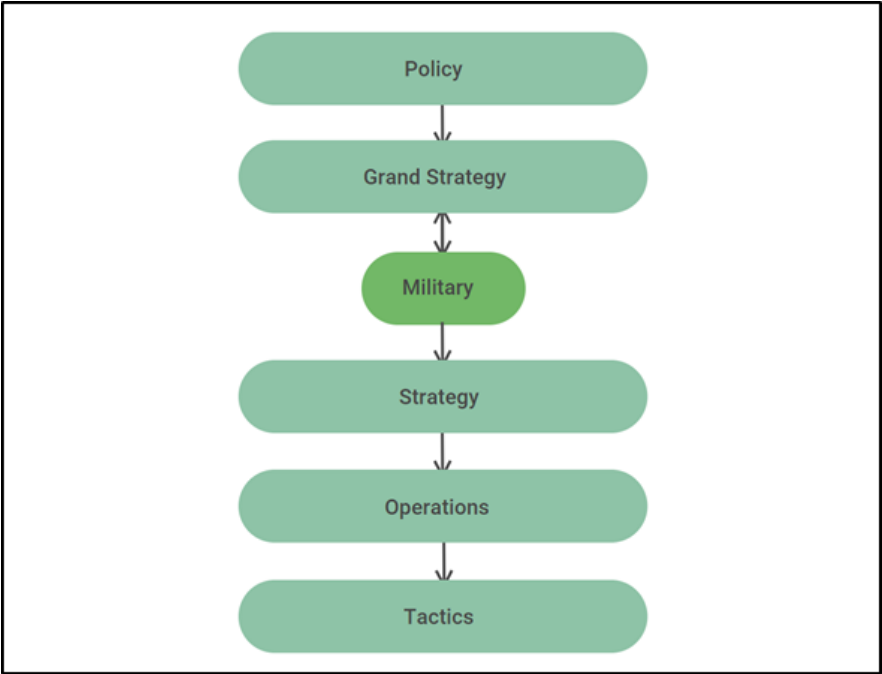


Figure 1: Generalship approach

³⁵ Milevski, *Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*, 116.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 130, 135.

³⁷ Nina Silove, ‘Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of “Grand Strategy”’, *Security Studies* 27 (2018) 27–57, 41.

So, from the perspective of the generalship approach, a practical case of grand strategy would exclusively address the military means of a polity. For the purpose of clarity, the hierarchy is illustrated in figure 1. A document, or set of documents, would focus on the security-oriented objectives that derive from the polity's foreign policy. Subsequently, it would identify ways by which a polity's military means could achieve these ends. Altogether, it is doubtful whether this approach to grand strategy is transferable to practice, because scholars tend to not go into details on how their grand principles should be translated into detailed plans. For the case studies, it is thus relevant to look for if and how the documents succeed in translating principles into a more detailed strategy.

1.2.2 The holistic approach

The holistic approach to grand strategy is fundamentally different from the generalship approach, because it expands the available resources from which a grand strategy can draw its strength from. Nonetheless, with its subordination to the level of policy it maintains a similar logic. Therefore, this paragraph will mainly focus on the purposes of this evolution into a wider breadth of means in combination with this particular logic that places grand strategy at a hierarchical level of responsibility below policy. The first characteristic of this approach, including non-military instruments of power to the way grand strategy is conceptualised, is meant to cover all aspects of conflict. As Colin Gray points out: "no matter the character of a conflict, [...], even if military activity by far is the most prominent of official behaviours, there must still be political-diplomatic, social-cultural, and economic, inter alia, aspects to the war."³⁸ For example, polities could turn to diplomacy to coerce an enemy in order to avoid the costs of military force.

Furthermore, we have arrived in an age of internet trolls and violent non-state actors using insurgency tactics to break their enemy's will. Amongst other things, these characteristics of the so-called fourth-generation warfare "removed the centrality of purposive violence from war, leaving signals and messages in its place."³⁹ The 2014 Russian intervention into Crimea, for example, shows how a polity implements a way of full-spectrum conflict, in which they "coordinated between all military and non-military means, ranging from the political-strategic to the tactical."⁴⁰ The fact that this surprised the West should be a clear signal that grand

³⁸ Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford 2010) 24.

³⁹ Lukas Milevski, 'The nature of strategy versus the character of war', *Comparative Strategy* 35 (2016) 438–446, 439.

⁴⁰ Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, 'Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28 (2015) 1–22, 4.

strategic theory should pay more attention to the interaction between the military and non-military means of power. So, the holistic approach has the potential to effectively bridge grand strategic theory to the practice of strategy-making.

However, it might be a near impossible task for the theorist to complete this task of explaining how policy-makers should integrate the wider breadth of means within a single concept. Perhaps Posen was right in pointing out that there should be some boundaries to the concept. In addition, according to Milevski, “there is no theory yet which may guide those who desire to master grand strategy in this manner.”⁴¹ Although this does not necessarily imply that effective strategies cannot be made, without academic guidance it is inevitable that there will be “chaos among the various military and non-military instruments.”⁴² So, without a better understanding of the connection between the various means of political power, this approach to grand strategy is useless to practitioners.

The second characteristic of the holistic approach is its subordination to policy. As the American scholar William T. Johnsen observes: “strategy formulation ideally but rarely follows a simple flow: national or coalition interests dictate policy, [which] in turn, drives strategy.”⁴³ This line of reasoning allows a grand strategy to be truly strategic, because it comprises the trinity of ends, ways and means. Specifically, grand strategy has the potential to outline the ways in which the given polity should synchronise its means of national power in support of the policy objectives as decided by politics. Moreover, the holistic approach also allows grand strategy to be detached from ideological assumptions, which in practice are a shift away from translating strategy into action.

Since it is subordinate to policy, grand strategies require revision when the policy objectives change. Therefore, this logic allows flexibility. Although this can still result in long-term grand strategies, in practice it will have the potential to always be up-to-date when it comes to changes in the international environment. Furthermore, this line of reasoning counters the views of Ionut Popescu, who, as mentioned in the introduction of the present thesis, argues that grand strategy is obsolete because it is impossible to predict the future. He assumes that grand strategy is all about having a longer-term coherence. However, this may only be a characteristic of the third approach to grand strategy: the fundamental assumptions approach.

⁴¹ Lukas Milevski, ‘Can Grand Strategy be Mastered?’, *Infinity Journal* 5 (2017) 33–36, 34.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ William T. Johnsen, *The Origins of the Grand Alliance: Anglo-American Military Collaboration from the Panay Incident to Pearl Harbor* (Lexington 2016) 6.

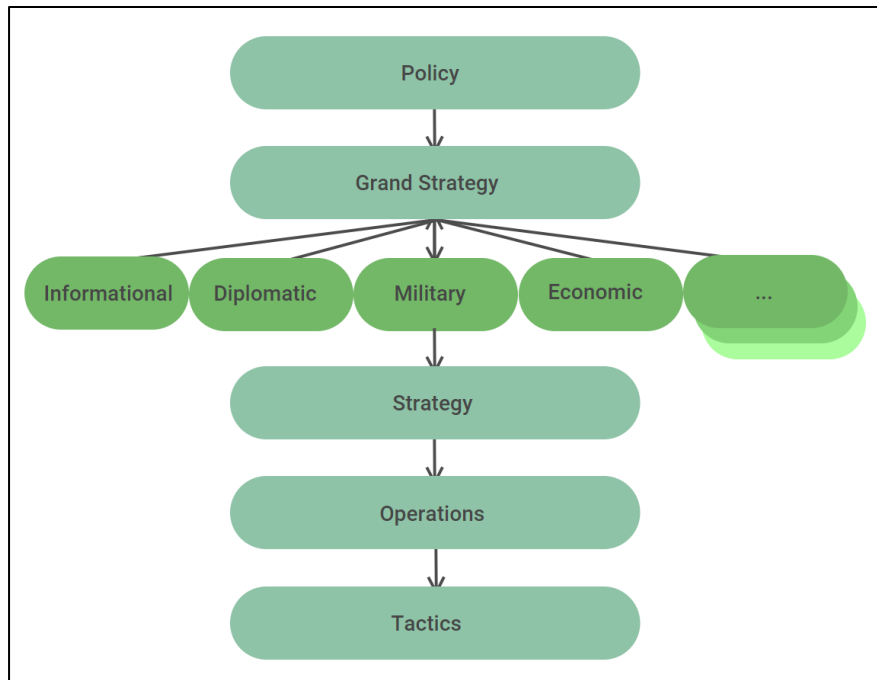


Figure 2: Holistic approach

So, from this perspective, a practical case of grand strategy would address a combination of two characteristics that are representative for the holistic approach. Namely, as illustrated in figure 2, it would focus on a wide array of means and it is guided by policy. The latter implies that it would have the potential to be a flexible and short-term strategy. The first, however, is crucial to understand this particular approach to grand strategy. Therefore, in the case studies, it is relevant to find out whether the documents explain a potential focus on the multi-instrumentality of grand strategy.

1.2.3 The fundamental assumptions approach

[I]t is the grand design, the overall mosaic into which the pieces of specific policy fit. It provides the key ingredients of clarity, coherence and consistency over time.⁴⁴

In the quote above, the American scholar Gregory Foster sums up the characteristics of the fundamental assumptions approach. He places grand strategy at the hierarchical level of responsibility above policy and he considers grand strategy to be the provider of a longer-term coherence. Since Foster, and more notably Paul Kennedy, assigned this role to grand strategy, more and more scholars started to adopt this approach to the concept. It had such a significant impact on the development of the concept that these modern scholars started to argue that

⁴⁴ Gregory D. Foster, 'Missing and Wanted: A U.S. Grand Strategy', *Strategic Review* 13 (1985) 13–23, 14.

“[t]here is no good alternative to grand strategy” and “policymakers [...] simply cannot make effective policy decisions unless they have an explicit grand strategy.”⁴⁵ Why do scholars choose to approach grand strategy as a long-term director of policy?

The first characteristic of this approach, placing grand strategy at a level above policy, should prevent leaders to simply react to separate events and handle them on a case-by-case basis. Rather, it should provide leaders with “a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so.”⁴⁶ However, as Milevski argues, this line of thought “disconnects it from even the loosest understanding of strategy.”⁴⁷ The ends-ways-means trinity of strategy is nowhere to be found if grand strategy is assigned to be the director of policy. At this level, one considers ways by which a polity could fit in the global environment. Therefore, there is no balance between allocating resources to reach a particular objective and finding the ways to do so. Moreover, as aforementioned, this line of reasoning leads to scholars prescribing particular grand strategies, which are nothing more than ideologies based upon the theorist’s assumptions.

The second important characteristic of this approach allows grand strategy to preserve and enhance a polity’s long-term best interests.⁴⁸ Therefore, scholars that have interpretations in line with this approach assume that a grand strategy can guide foreign policy for decades, or even centuries. For example, Earle believed that the French Government pursued a three-hundred-year grand strategy that was aimed to keep Central Europe weak and to maintain their own border at natural geographical boundaries.⁴⁹ The retired US Marine Corps officer Paul van Riper supports this claim that a grand strategy should have enduring qualities. He argues that a grand strategy should anchor the most fundamental strategic practices, such as the defence of a nation’s homeland.⁵⁰ However, it is highly doubtful whether this long-term approach is transferable to the practice of strategy-making. How can a grand strategy remain valid if changes in the international environment are inevitable?

Advocates of the so-called emergent strategy may be at the other end of the spectrum. This type of short-term decision-making, as explained by Popescu, is “a process of navigating

⁴⁵ Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?* 194; William C. Martel, ‘Grand Strategy of “Restraint”’, *Orbis* 54 (2010) 356–373, 358.

⁴⁶ Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?* 3.

⁴⁷ Milevski, ‘Can Grand Strategy be Mastered?’ 34.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, ‘Grand Strategy in War and Peace’ 5.

⁴⁹ Milevski, *Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought*, 72.

⁵⁰ Paul Van Riper, ‘From Grand Strategy to Operational Design: Getting it Right’, *Infinity Journal* 4 (2014) 13–18, 16.

through an unpredictable world by improvisation and continuous learning.”⁵¹ Although planning in advance is near impossible according to emergent strategy scholars, successful and coherent strategies can emerge over time.⁵² Paradoxically, these arguments are, to a certain extent, echoed by the Australian grand strategic theorist Peter Layton. He stresses the importance “not to perceive a grand strategy as a set-and-forget, launch-and-leave methodology.”⁵³ Following this line of thought, grand strategy can be seen as a long-term process, in which a strategy arises, evolves, and transitions into the next. So, ultimately, it is purposed to shape events and achieve the desired ends of the future.

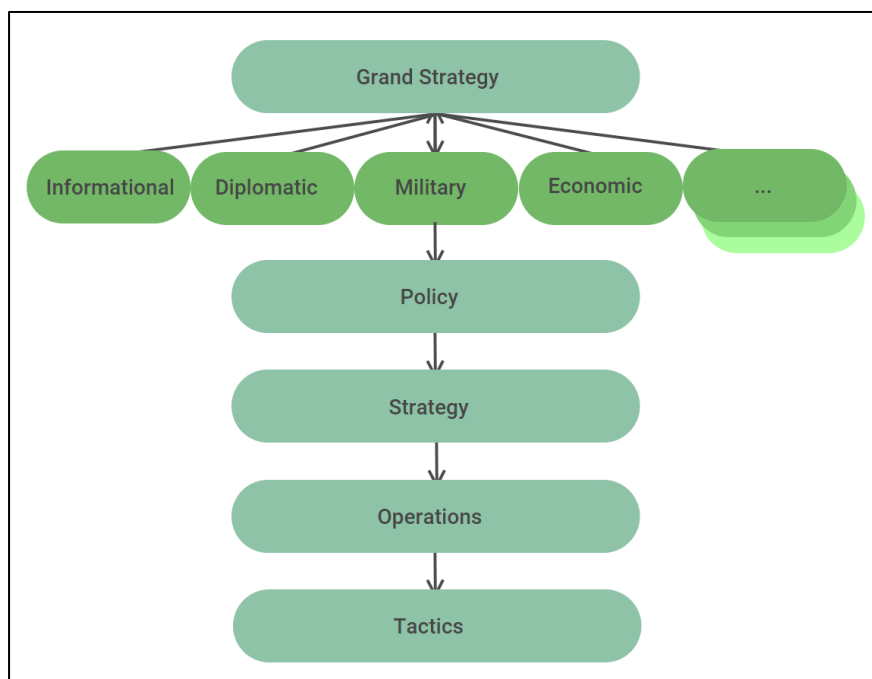


Figure 3: Fundamental assumptions approach

So, as illustrated in figure 3, a grand strategic decision-making process would uniquely be at the level above policy from the perspective of the fundamental assumptions approach. Furthermore, it would have a longer-term coherence. Therefore, it is relevant to find out whether the case study documents are guided by policy or whether they guide policy. Moreover, it is necessary to find out if the documents are still able to provide a strategic framework that holds true to the ends-ways-means trinity, even though they might be supposed to guide policy. And finally, the case studies should provide empirical evidence on whether the documents provide a short-term or a long-term strategy.

⁵¹ Ionut Popescu, ‘Grand Strategy vs. Emergent Strategy in the conduct of foreign policy’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41 (2017) 438–460, 446.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Peter Layton, ‘Rethinking Grand Strategy’, *Small Wars Journal Blog* (2018) 1–6, 5.

Case Study One: The United States – America First

The problem with such documents is that they often create the false impression that strategy formulation is a rational and systemic process.⁵⁴

In the quote above, Don Snider, who as a US Army colonel contributed to the development of the 1988 NSS, points out that there is a serious disconnect between grand strategic theory and practice. An articulated grand strategy is always the result of an inherently political process, which is subject to compromises and protracted bargaining.⁵⁵ It is relevant to find out what the implications are of this political process in the way practice relates to theory. Namely, this process will create a better understanding of the extent to which the characteristics of any of the three approaches to grand strategy are transferable to the practice of formulating and implementing a grand strategy. Therefore, this chapter presents a case study of the 2017 NSS and its subordinate documents. Through an analysis of the formulation process, the contents of the documents, and the implementation, this chapter will provide the political and bureaucratic implications that are relevant to the theory of grand strategy.

2.1 Formulation: Crafting a National Security Strategy

During the Cold War, scholars could for the most part only speculate about US grand strategy. This longstanding tradition of grand strategic secrecy ended in 1986, when US Congress enacted the *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act*.⁵⁶ Hereby, explanation and accountability replaced a focus on implementation. The Goldwater-Nichols Act states that each US president should transmit a comprehensive report on national security strategy to Congress each year.⁵⁷ Although by no means annually, since 1987, six US presidents have published one or more of their strategies. Given the scant information on how an NSS is precisely crafted, it is relevant to first elaborate on why the US regularly publishes an NSS.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act states that each NSS report should address US “worldwide interests, goals, and objectives [...]”; the “foreign policies, worldwide commitments, and capabilities” required to meet these objectives; the “short-term and long-term uses of the political, economic, military, and other elements of the national power”; and a costs and risks

⁵⁴ Don M. Snider, ‘The National Security Strategy: Documenting Strategic Vision’ (1995) iii.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ United States of America, *Goldwater-Nichols Defense Department Reorganization Act*, US Code Title 50 Chapter 15, 404a (1986).

⁵⁷ Ibidem, section 104. (a) 1.

assessment to evaluate the “adequacy of the capabilities of the [US] to carry out the national security strategy.”⁵⁸ In short, it is indeed supposed to be comprehensive. First, because it is to be structured in line with the well-known ends-ways-means framework of strategy, in which one defines the desired ends, identifies and develops the means, and designs ways to achieve the ends with the available means. Second, because the NSS should focus on both the short-term and long-term. Finally, because an NSS should address a wide array of means. That said, the NSS is purposefully general in content. This is mainly due to the fact that it does not necessarily constitute the entire US grand strategy. As mentioned in the introduction of the present thesis, the NSS provides guidance to the NDS and the NMS as its subordinate documents.

President Trump issued his first NSS on 18 December 2017, followed by the US Department of Defense (DoD), who released its unclassified version of the NDS on 19 January 2018.⁵⁹ The grand strategic document missing for the Trump administration is the NMS, which was last issued in 2016. Joe Dunford, US Marine Corps general and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, explained that his team will update the NMS, but the details may not be published.⁶⁰ Moreover, he described the NMS “as the operational version of the [NDS], outlining how the military will execute the goals laid out in the NDS.”⁶¹ Therefore, it is not crucial to analyse the NMS. The NDS, however, is key to understand the entire US grand strategy, because it identifies the capabilities required to “prevail in conflict and preserve peace through strength.”⁶² In addition, it flows from the NSS and directly provides strategic guidance to all DoD activity, including campaign and contingency planning, and force development.⁶³ Thus, the NDS specifically addresses the military aspects of the objectives identified in the NSS. Therefore, without further examination, this may be the document closest related to the theory of the generalship approach.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the formulation process of the documents is an inherently political process. This process is important because it sets the agenda for future

⁵⁸ Ibidem, section 104. (b) 1-4.

⁵⁹ Trump, ‘National Security Strategy’; Mattis, ‘National Defense Strategy’.

⁶⁰ The NSS, NDS, and NMS are normally transmitted in both a classified version, listing all details only available to Congress; and an unclassified synopsis, which is available to the public: United States of America, *Goldwater-Nichols Act* Title 50 Chapter 15, 404a, section 104. (c).

⁶¹ Aaron Mehta, ‘National Military Strategy update in the works’, *Defense News* (2018) [<https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2018/01/16/national-military-strategy-update-in-the-works-most-of-which-will-again-be-classified/>] <consulted on 07-03-2019>.

⁶² Mattis, ‘National Defense Strategy’, 1.

⁶³ Ibidem.

decision-making, it determines who contributes to these decisions, what options will be presented, and how the outcomes are communicated to the rest of the government.⁶⁴ Ultimately, this will provide “coherence in articulating a clear vision of values, interests and objectives, as well as the appropriate instruments of power to be called upon in advancing them.”⁶⁵ Subsequently, through US Congress, the unclassified versions of the NSS and the NDS enter the realm of public relations, in which debate can further shape policy. Before it comes to that, however, key decision-makers influence the formulation of the documents. It is remarkable that although the 2017 NSS is signed by President Trump, he did not actively contribute to the formulation process. Namely, Michael Anton, a former senior national security official in the Trump administration, stated that the NSS is merely “based on Mr Trump’s words. It’s based on his campaign speeches and his major speeches.”⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the rhetoric provides great insight into a potential implementation of Trump’s America First doctrine, which is formalised through the NSS.

The actual development of the NSS is done by the National Security Council (NSC), led by the National Security Advisor (NSA). Specifically, the principle author of the 2017 NSS was the former deputy NSA, Nadia Schadlow. Interestingly, there are no rules telling the NSC to interact with other agencies in order to create consensus. Nonetheless, in a radio interview with Schadlow on 18 December 2018, she stated that the main purpose of the 2017 NSS was to “bring people on board, to be collaborative, and to make arguments about why you want to pursue a certain path.”⁶⁷ Therefore, grand strategy-making in the US aims to inform all departments and agencies related to the strategy, and it sets in motion the political process that ensures a timely implementation of the plans presented in the NSS.

So, from the perspective of the formulation process, it is clear that US grand strategy is at the level above policy, because policies and strategies are meant to flow from the NSS. Moreover, although the strategy may be set out for the long-term, the key decision-makers are keen on publishing the NSS early in the president’s administration to be able to implement policies on the short-term. Furthermore, a new grand strategic course of action seems to be the

⁶⁴ Center for Strategic & International Studies, ‘Formulating National Security Strategy: Past Experience and Future Choices’, *CSIS International Security Program* (2017) 1–171, 1.

⁶⁵ Travis J. Cram, ‘Rhetoric, World-View, and Strategy in United States National Security Strategy Documents’ (Doctoral Dissertation: Kansas City 2014) 6.

⁶⁶ Mythili Sampathkumar, ‘White House official “can’t say” if Trump actually read all of America’s new national security strategy’, *The Independent* (2017) [<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-national-security-speech-read-entire-strategy-white-house-official-cant-say-a8119476.html>] <consulted on 07-03-2019>.

⁶⁷ Intelligence Matters, ‘The National Security Strategy: Lead Author Nadia Schadlow On Its Origins And Impact Intelligence Matters podcast’, *CBS News Radio* (2018) [<https://player.fm/series/intelligence-matters-2291086/the-national-security-strategy-lead-author-nadia-schadlow-on-its-origins-and-impact>] <consulted on 10-03-2019>.

likely result of the end of a president's term. This could potentially facilitate a significant disconnect between purpose and implementation. However, before this thesis jumps to conclusions about whether this case provides evidence for short-term or long-term coherence, it is necessary to analyse the contents of the 2017 NSS.

2.2 Articulation: Continuity or change?

My statement on NATO being obsolete and disproportionately too expensive (and unfair) for the U.S. are now, finally, receiving plaudits!⁶⁸

In the months prior to the publication of the 2017 NSS, President Trump's campaign and Twitter diplomacy repeatedly hinted at softening the US' stance towards Russia, shredding international arrangements and tossing aside alliances, as displayed in the quote above. So, one could only expect drastic changes to US grand strategy. Was the 2017 NSS the articulation of this change? The present thesis argues that the document gives a great insight into the president's worldview. However, despite the fact that he stands diametrically opposed to the foreign policy establishment in some of his views, continuity prevails. Furthermore, this continuity has crucial implications on how the NSS draws on the characteristics of any of the approaches to grand strategy.

The 2017 NSS consists of sixty-eight pages, but the first four pages are arguably the most important. Namely, this introduction states that the NSS rests on four pillars, which represent the vital national interests or the desired ends that the NSS aims to achieve. Specifically, the strategy aims to “protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life”; “promote American prosperity”; “preserve peace through strength”; and “advance American influence.”⁶⁹ Hereby, the 2017 NSS echoes the first three pillars from the Obama administration's NSS of 2015.⁷⁰ Moreover, the NSS claims to pursue a “strategy of principled realism that is guided by outcomes, not ideology.”⁷¹ In order to comprehend the decisions made in the NSS, this core notion requires further examination.

So, what does principled realism mean? First, it is supposedly realist in the sense that “[t]his National Security Strategy puts America First.”⁷² Leaving aside this statement of the

⁶⁸ Donald J. Trump, ‘Twitter post 27 March 2016’, @realDonaldTrump [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/714095595888238592] <consulted on 14-03-2019>.

⁶⁹ Trump, ‘National Security Strategy’, 4.

⁷⁰ Barack Obama, ‘National Security Strategy’ (2015).

⁷¹ Trump, ‘National Security Strategy’, 1.

⁷² Ibidem, ii.

obvious, the 2017 NSS declares that it shifts towards a focus on great power competitions.⁷³ Moreover, it asserts that “these competitions require the United States to rethink the policies of the past two decades [...]”⁷⁴ Hereby, it claims to represent a shift away from an idealistic approach to statecraft and foreign policy. The NDS supports these claims to deal with “long-term strategic competition” by aiming to integrate “multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military.”⁷⁵ Importantly, however, the NDS does not provide an explanation on how these means should be connected and how they should be put into use to achieve the desired ends.

Second, it is seemingly principled in the sense that the strategy aims to hold true to the core principles that made the US as it is today. For example, the NSS states that “The United States distinguishes between economic competition with countries that follow fair and free market principles and competition with those that act with little regard for those principles.”⁷⁶ In short, a strategy of principled realism could be defined as a way of dealing with the world, in which a values-based moral compass aides the pursuit of realism.

Only on first glance does this indicates a clear shift away from tradition. For example, the Canadian scholar Aaron Ettinger assumes that the focus of the NSS on a competitive world “rejects Obama’s internationalism, Bush’s transformational agenda, and Clinton’s embrace of globalisation.”⁷⁷ However, on further consideration, the NSS proves that the US’ way of dealing with grand strategy is surprisingly stable. This is displayed in the way the documents reassure allies, promise continued dominance of key regions, and ensure military preponderance. For example, the NDS states that “mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are critical to our strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match.”⁷⁸ This seems to directly contradict Trump’s earlier statements on the relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). So, what are the roots of these indications of long-term coherence in grand strategy?

Some observers attribute this to the believe that Trump is unaware of the contents of his own strategy and that the notion of principled realism is simply there to please foreign policy

⁷³ Ibidem, 27.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, 2.

⁷⁵ Mattis, ‘National Defense Strategy’, 4.

⁷⁶ Trump, ‘National Security Strategy’, 19.

⁷⁷ Aaron Ettinger, ‘Trump’s National Security Strategy: “America First” meets the establishment’, *International Journal* 73 (2018) 474–483, 475.

⁷⁸ Mattis, ‘National Defense Strategy’, 8.

advisers.⁷⁹ However, this argument is irrelevant because it is likely that the NSS is merely based on the president's words, as shown in the previous section. Rather, it is an interaction between power and political habit that causes this grand strategic continuity. The British scholar Patrick Porter rightly argues that with the persistence of the so-called Blob, or foreign policy establishment, successive presidents have found it difficult to bring about significant change to US grand strategy.⁸⁰ The rapid growth in relative power after WWII enabled the US to shape the international environment. This process that ultimately led to US hegemony was subject to an emerging foreign policy elite: The Blob. This internationalist elite "want the United States to remain engaged in upholding world order. They are primacists."⁸¹ Therefore, Porter argues that the US continues to pursue a path of primacy, a grand strategy "that sees global US military exertions [...] as the only guarantee of national security, global stability, and free trade."⁸²

A staffing dilemma gave the final push that ensured grand strategic continuity. Namely, on the one hand, Trump wanted to appoint people that did not belong to the Blob, but this would come at the cost of incoherence. On the other hand, he needed to appoint experienced officials, but they would unavoidably be defenders of the status quo. Ultimately, time pressure left him with "no choice but to turn to veterans with government experience to launch a new administration."⁸³ On a side note, time has shown that these veterans were by no means guaranteed of long-lasting White House careers.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, they did guarantee a solid foundation. It may seem that a new president facilitates change, but the persistence of the foreign policy establishment is decisive. Hereby, this is evidence for inevitable long-term coherence. However, this is arguably simply a way by which the US has aimed to interact with the world over the past decades.

⁷⁹ Peter Beinart, 'Trump Doesn't Seem to Buy His Own National Security Strategy', *The Atlantic* (2017) [<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/nss-trump-principled-realism/548741/>] <consulted on 17-03-2019>.

⁸⁰ Patrick Porter, 'Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment', *International Security* 42 (2018) 9–46, 11.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 15.

⁸² Benjamin H. Friedman and Justin Logan, 'Why Washington Doesn't Debate Grand Strategy', *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (2016) 14–45, 14.

⁸³ Rew Restuccia, Isaac Arnsdorf and Nancy Cook, 'Insurgent Trump taps GOP insiders, lobbyists for transition', *POLITICO* (2016) [<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/donald-trump-transition-gop-insiders-lobbyists-231224>] <consulted on 17-03-2019>.

⁸⁴ Francisco Navas and Erum Salam, 'Trump keeps firing White House staffers. Can you remember them all?', *The Guardian* (2018) [<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/nov/29/trump-cabinet-white-house-high-level-official-fired-quiz>] <consulted on 17-03-2019>.

2.3 Implementation: A failed blueprint

"However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results." -- Winston Churchill⁸⁵

Although this quote is most likely falsely attributed to Sir Winston Churchill, Trump's Twitter post illustrates the necessity of analysing the implementation of grand strategy. The 2017 NSS and its subordinate documents are not self-executing and they do not automatically guarantee consistent results. Therefore, it is not enough to analyse the articulation of a grand strategy. It is clear that US grand strategy identifies national interests, sets priorities, and supposedly encompasses all instruments of national power. However, it is not clear how well the US is able to integrate these conditions and translate them into action in the global environment. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the documents actually provide a strategic framework, within which the US is able to balance the ends, ways, and means.

Beginning with the latter, are the documents actually strategic? The present thesis argues that they miss a crucial strategic balance that is necessary for consistent implementation. A representative example is found in the way the 2017 NSS deals with world regions. For example, in the section about the Middle East, the document outlines the current situation, threats, and opportunities. Subsequently, it sets policy priorities for the political, economic, and military objectives.⁸⁶ Hereby, it thus identifies the desired ends and general ways to achieve these objectives. The NSS only addresses means in a way that it prioritises the development of them. Consequently, the NSS fails to connect the means to the ways and ends, as it is supposed to do according to the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act. Therefore, there is absolutely no balance between the ends, ways, and means. The reason behind this is that the NSS and its subordinate documents function as a framework for policy. Hereby, it merely presents a general way of dealing with international affairs. So, the ideology that drives the strategy may be consistent over a longer period of time, but this leaves flexibility to the tactical and operational levels.

This is expressed in the way US grand strategy is seemingly implemented. Since the 2017 NSS sets priorities and identifies objectives for US foreign policy, a great amount of policies flow directly from the documents. At first sight, it seems like the NSS guarantees consistent implementation. For example, in May 2018, the US withdrew from the Iran nuclear

⁸⁵ Donald J. Trump, 'Twitter post 11 July 2012, @realDonaldTrump [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/223058412546691072] <consulted on 18-03-2019>.

⁸⁶ Trump, 'National Security Strategy', 48–50.

deal, followed by a re-imposition of significant sanctions on the Iranian regime.⁸⁷ Moreover, whereas Obama held true to his policy of “strategic patience”, Trump was ambitious in initiating talks with the North Korean regime. These actions clearly are a direct implementation of the NSS’ intentions to “work with partners to deny the Iranian regime all paths to a nuclear weapon and neutralize Iranian malign influence”, and “to achieve [...] denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.”⁸⁸

However, practice exposes an imbalance between the ends, ways, and means through the fact that US allies, and even its own military, are taken by surprise by the president’s actions. For example, this happened when Trump decided to withdraw all US troops from Syria in December 2018.⁸⁹ This indicates a lack of a grand strategic framework that ensures an allocation of means. It must be pointed out, however, that “Trump’s impulsivity raises the question of whether this administration could implement any strategy at all.”⁹⁰ Nonetheless, a grand strategy that merely prioritises ends and ways does not allow for sufficient policy implementation. Hereby, the NSS represents a vision of the world, but it fails to function as a clear plan that leads to coordinated and consistent strategic action. Therefore, this echoes the views on the potential lack of a strategic framework as put forward in the first chapter of this thesis. Still, US grand strategy altogether focuses on a wide array of national instruments, and, although its implementation is likely to be subject of short-term change, it inevitably has a long-term coherence. So, the US more or less manages its grand strategy in line with the fundamental assumptions approach.

⁸⁷ Mark Landler, ‘Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned’, *The New York Times* (2018) [<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-nuclear-deal.html>] <consulted on 21-03-2019>.

⁸⁸ Trump, ‘National Security Strategy’, 47, 49.

⁸⁹ Mark Landler, Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, ‘Trump to Withdraw U.S. Forces From Syria, Declaring ‘We Have Won Against ISIS’’, *The New York Times* (2019) [<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/19/us/politics/trump-syria-turkey-troop-withdrawal.html>] <consulted on 20-03-2019>.

⁹⁰ Rebecca Friedman Lissner, ‘The National Security Strategy Is Not a Strategy’, *Foreign Affairs* (2017) [<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-12-19/national-security-strategy-not-strategy>] <consulted on 20-03-2019>.

Case Study Two: The European Union – A Stronger Europe

As grand strategies go, the 2016 EU Global Strategy is a good document. It defines the vital interests of the Union, outlines the principles according to which the EU will act, and sets five clear priorities that constitute an agenda for action.⁹¹

The Belgian scholar Sven Biscop concludes that the 2016 EUGS is a good grand strategic document. However, it is unlikely that this would be the same conclusion if one relates the document to all three of the grand strategy approaches outlined in the first chapter of the present thesis. Before this thesis jumps to conclusions on why this would be the case, it is relevant to find out how the EU deals with grand strategy. Similar to the previous case study, this chapter presents an analysis of the formulation process, the contents of the documents, and the implementation of the strategy.

3.1 Formulation: Becoming a global strategic actor

A brief EU strategic history will provide the context needed to analyse the 2016 EUGS. For the purpose of this thesis, it is relevant to go back to 2003, when the EU presented its first ostensibly grand strategic document: the *European Security Strategy* (ESS).⁹² With an emphasis on good governance, rule of law, human rights, and democracy promotion, the ESS provided intentions to take more global responsibilities. However, it failed to provide a strategic framework that could help the EU, for example, become a global military power. This view is echoed by the scholar Maria Mälksoo, who argues that “[t]he EU’s aspiration to become a ‘global power’ is well highlighted throughout the ESS, but the strategy fails to lay out clear policy objectives, means, and instruments.”⁹³ Consequently, and most specifically in the aftermath of the 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid, a public discussion started on the development of a new strategic framework for EU foreign affairs.⁹⁴

Only after a lobby of scholars, thinktanks, and policymakers succeeded in convincing the EU that the ESS “is outdated, does not connect threats, ends and means and is too vague on

⁹¹ Sven Biscop, ‘The EU Global Strategy 2020’, *Security Policy Brief* 108 (2019) 1–3, 1.

⁹² European Council, ‘European Security Strategy - A secure Europe in a better world’ (2003).

⁹³ Maria Mälksoo, ‘From the ESS to the EU Global Strategy: external policy, internal purpose’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 37 (2016) 374–388, 379.

⁹⁴ James Rogers, ‘From ‘Civilian Power’ to ‘Global Power’: Explicating the European Union’s ‘Grand Strategy’ Through the Articulation of Discourse Theory’, *JCMS* 74 (2009) 831–862, 832.

common interests and the EU's ambitions", the EU started to take steps towards action.⁹⁵ This is reflected in the European Council conclusions of December 2013, in which the EU calls for a new strategy that outlines the priority actions for stronger defence cooperation.⁹⁶ Finally, in June 2015, the European Council mandated the Italian politician Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), to prepare the new strategy document for the EU.⁹⁷ Before this section proceeds to the formulation of the EUGS, it is necessary to elaborate on the position of the HR/VP.

The HR/VP is the main decision-maker related to the formulation process of the EUGS. The VP in the title's abbreviation reflects her vice presidency of the European Commission (EC), which is the EU's executive arm that proposes new laws and implements policies. Simultaneously, as outlined in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, she acts as the leader of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and as the President of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC).⁹⁸ The first is the EU's diplomatic service and foreign and defence ministry, and the latter is a configuration in which the Foreign Ministers of the member states convene once a month in order to ensure coherence in the EU's external action.

The fact that Mogherini has such a broad job description gives her the opportunity to achieve a high level of consistency and coherence in the EU's foreign and security policy. This is further formalised through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The first is the EU framework for foreign policy decision-making, and the latter is, as an integral part of the CFSP, aimed at structuring EU's military, and its missions and operations abroad.⁹⁹ It should be pointed out that within the CFSP framework, the HR/VP cannot take any action without the approval of the member states. Namely, CFSP decisions require unanimity among all member states.¹⁰⁰ This is both a strength and a weakness of EU decision-making. On the one hand, it ensures coherence among the member states. On the other hand, however, there is a chance of a structural lack of decisions if the member states cannot come to an agreement on policy issues. This may cause problems

⁹⁵ Margriet Drent and Lennart Landman, 'Why Europe needs a new European Security Strategy', *Clingendael Policy Brief* 9 (2012) 1–6, 1.

⁹⁶ European Council, 'European Council conclusions: EUCO 217/13' (December 2013).

⁹⁷ European Council, 'European Council conclusions: EUCO 22/15' (June 2015).

⁹⁸ European Union, 'Treaty of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community' 2007/C 306/01 (13 December 2007) Articles 9, 13a, 18.

⁹⁹ European Parliament, 'Common Security and Defence Policy Fact Sheet' (2019).

¹⁰⁰ Stratfor, 'The EU and the Unanimity Trap', *Stratfor* (2018) [<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/eu-and-unanimity-trap>] <consulted on 31-03-2019>.

for the strategy's implementation. Next, it is relevant to analyse the EUGS formulation process that started in June 2015.

As Mogherini stated herself, “the process [...] is as important as the end product of the exercise itself.”¹⁰¹ To find out why and how the EUGS was crafted, it is of course relevant to turn to the writer of the strategy. In this case, the single penholder was the Italian scholar Nathalie Tocci, who acted as special advisor of the HR/VP during the formulation process of the EUGS. In a speech in October 2017, one year after the EUGS' publication, she elaborated on the purposes of the document. She points out that the main motivations behind the development of the strategy were to bring together a variety of related actors, to send a message of political unity, and to direct policy.¹⁰² The latter directly indicates that the decision-making process of the EUGS adheres to the logic of integrating policy. In addition, Tocci admits that she was influenced by academic critics who urged the EU to stop reacting to day-to-day events in these times of European crises.¹⁰³ Hereby, she clearly drew on fundamental assumptions approach theory.

If the EU wanted to become a truly global strategic actor by integrating its policies in a grand strategy, it had to be able to become politically coherent. In accordance with its purpose of sending a message of political unity, Tocci thus relied on the input of all member states, as well as various civil society actors. Although the EC determined how the strategies would be structured, she received suggestions through questionnaires, conferences, and seminars held throughout Europe.¹⁰⁴ So, the organisational skeleton was top-down, but the flesh was bottom-up. Therefore, this formulation process represents the creation of a narrative where all member states ultimately agreed on. So, the EUGS could provide a coherent framework that enables the EU to anticipate.

From a constructivist perspective, the formulation process of the EUGS can be seen as a soul-searching exercise. Namely, through this process, the EU seeks to craft a document that represents a shared strategic narrative and identity that is aimed at acting as one, rather than as many individual strategic actors. Therefore, it seeks to shape the EU strategic culture.¹⁰⁵ Whatever approach to grand strategy is considered, the concept of grand strategy will help to

¹⁰¹ Pol Morillas Bassedas, *Strategy-making in the EU* (Barcelona 2019) vi.

¹⁰² Nathalie Tocci, ‘Dr Nathalie Tocci - Framing the EU's Global Strategy: A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World’, *YouTube* (2017) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deHcKj04pyk>] <consulted on 03-04-2019>.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁵ Morillas Bassedas, *Strategy-making in the EU*, 84–86.

explain the way in which this identity-building is shaped. Next, through an analysis of the articulation of the 2016 EUGS, it is necessary to examine the impact of this formulation process.

3.2 Articulation: Shared vision

On 23 June 2016, a small majority of the UK citizens voted in favour of leaving the EU. Would this so-called Brexit referendum further weaken the already divided continent? Namely, the UK has traditionally played an important role in EU defence. However, not only in the sense of a strong military but also because they keep opposing plans on defence coordination.¹⁰⁶ Paradoxically, the prospect of a Brexit will, therefore, create both new challenges and opportunities for EU defence and security cooperation. This is the main reason why the EUGS was welcomed by the European Council on 29 June 2016, only a couple of days after the Brexit referendum.¹⁰⁷ Mogherini did so to send a message of political unity. In addition, the EUGS presents a strategy of strategic autonomy.¹⁰⁸ According to Biscop, this “call for ‘strategic autonomy’ in the new EU Global Strategy [...] does not come a moment too soon.”¹⁰⁹ Namely, in contrast to the ESS, this hints at the creation of a grand strategy that is truly coherent. This is vital in these times of internal divisions and tensions in the transatlantic relationship with the US. However, does the EUGS merely represent a declaration of intent, or does it provide an actionable grand strategic framework?

The title of the EUGS, “*Shared Vision, Common Action*”, suggests the latter.¹¹⁰ It refers to the creation of internal coherence and the provision of a sense of purpose as the main goal of the document. In the light of the many crises that directly reveal weaknesses in EU’s defence and security cooperation, it should be no surprise that the EUGS presents a strategy that relates closely to their neighbourhood. Russia’s annexation of Crimea, terrorist attacks, and the migration crisis are only a few examples on which the EU, through cooperation, could have anticipated more. In relation to this, what does the EUGS say about its ends, ways, and means?

First, the EUGS exclusively identifies peacetime ends, such as promoting peace and guaranteeing security over its own citizens and territory. In addition, it aims to “advance the

¹⁰⁶ Federiga Bindi, ‘Why Trump and Brexit Will Lead to a Stronger EU Security’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2018) [<https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/11/26/why-trump-and-brexit-will-lead-to-stronger-eu-security-pub-77775>] <consulted on 11-04-2019>.

¹⁰⁷ Morillas Bassetas, *Strategy-making in the EU*, 155.

¹⁰⁸ Mogherini, ‘European Union Global Strategy’, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Sven Biscop, ‘All or nothing? The EU Global Strategy and defence policy after the Brexit’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 37 (2016) 431–445, 1.

¹¹⁰ Mogherini, ‘European Union Global Strategy’.

prosperity of its people” and “promote a rules-based global order”.¹¹¹ These ends will be met within the framework of principled pragmatism, which “implies that the EU should act in accordance with universal values, but then follow a pragmatic approach which denies the moral imperatives of those universal categories.”¹¹² This approach of advancing a better world is in line with Earle’s understanding of grand strategy that aims to render the decision to resort to war unnecessary. However, it is doubtful whether these grandiose terms contribute to effective strategy. Namely, it focuses on explaining big ideas in the form of statements of the obvious, which altogether represent a political consensus. Moreover, the ends presented in the EUGS seem to have no clear purpose. Hereby, they are seemingly set up for an indefinite period of time.

Second, the EUGS identifies priorities for external action. On first sight, these also seem to be ends, but on further glance they are building blocks or ways by which the ends should be met. They focus respectively on Europe’s own security, neighbourhood resilience, an integrated approach to conflicts, cooperative regional order, and global governance.¹¹³ The EUGS devotes a considerable number of pages to how the EU intends to pursue their ends. It fails, however, to make clear why they are mentioned, and what means should be employed to support these ways. For example, as aforementioned, the EUGS charges the EU with achieving strategic autonomy. The German scholar Annegret Bendiek rightly argues that the EUGS states this “without any convincing description of how this grand ambition is to be achieved under conditions of resource scarcity, strategic discord between the member states and continuing adherence to consensus in decision-making.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, it is highly doubtful whether the EUGS provides an actionable strategy.

Finally, the above-mentioned lack of direction is most apparent in an assessment of the allocation of means. This is best explained on the basis of the integrated approach to conflicts and crises that the EUGS introduces. This approach aims to implement “a multidimensional approach through the use of all available policies and instruments aimed at conflict prevention, management, and resolution.”¹¹⁵ In addition, this approach aims to deal with all levels of governance, and engage with all actors present in a conflict.¹¹⁶ This seems to address all aspects

¹¹¹ Ibidem, 8.

¹¹² Ana E. Juncos, ‘Resilience as the new EU foreign policy paradigm: a pragmatist turn?’, *European Security* 26 (2017) 1–18, 2.

¹¹³ Mogherini, ‘European Union Global Strategy’, 9–10.

¹¹⁴ Annegret Bendiek, ‘The Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy’, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* 34 (2016) 1–4, 3.

¹¹⁵ Mogherini, ‘European Union Global Strategy’, 28.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, 28–29.

required in a strategic framework. However, instead of allocating and explaining a development of means, the EUGS presents even more ways to achieve the ends. Even when it addresses diplomatic or economic means, it neither explains the connection amongst them nor balances the means to the ways and ends.

Furthermore, although the EUGS pays considerable attention to the development of military capabilities, it merely points out that ultimately, “to acquire and maintain many of these capabilities, member states will need to move towards defence cooperation as the norm.”¹¹⁷ Hereby, there is no clear assessment of how military means could help achieve the political ends that the EUGS identifies. On a side note, it is worth noting that the EUGS is clear on the fact that the EU will undertake an annual review, leaving room for adaptation and flexibility.¹¹⁸ So, altogether this indeed represents a shared vision, but it shows that there is still room for improvement on providing a clear strategic assessment of ends, ways, and means. The next section will elaborate on how this vision is implemented and translated to common action.

3.3 Implementation: Common action

Soon after the articulation of the EUGS, HR/VP Mogherini noted that it was vital for its implementation that “today we have to make sure that we use as Europeans all the instruments we have in a coherent and synchronised way.”¹¹⁹ To achieve this, the EUGS was accompanied by an implementation plan, the IPSD. The question is whether this plan complements the overarching strategic document in such a way that it elaborates on the connection between ends, ways, and means. The answer is no. Although it was presented as a document that represents a coherent whole, the IPSD provides nothing more than a list of thirteen priorities.¹²⁰ Hereby, both the EUGS and the IPSD are heavily focused on the ends of strategy.

Nonetheless, the Implementation Plan certainly provides actionable proposals that are aimed at laying a foundation for strategic autonomy and security and defence cooperation. The proposal on a so-called Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) offers a striking example. Building on obligations laid down in the Lisbon Treaty, this proposal sought to gather as much member states as possible “to generate a more binding commitment as regards capability

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, 45.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem, 51.

¹¹⁹ Federica Mogherini, ‘Speech by the High Representative / Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’, *EEAS* (2016) [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/fiji/7288/speech-high-representative-vice-president-federica-mogherini-carnegie-endowment-international_en] <consulted on 16-04-2019>.

¹²⁰ Mogherini, ‘Implementation Plan’, 4–6.

development, improving output and strengthening CSDP.”¹²¹ It successfully resulted in the establishment of PESCO on 8 December 2017. Hereby, 25 member states committed themselves to a list of capability projects to complement NATO by increasing EU cooperation and the competitiveness of the European defence industry. In addition, not to be confused with an EU army, PESCO sets up “strategic deployable formations”, which build on the existing EU Battlegroups.¹²² Thus, the EUGS ultimately proves to be successful in guiding policy initiatives. Interestingly, however, PESCO is an exception in CFSP and CSDP decision-making, because its establishment required a qualified majority vote, whereas all other decisions are made by unanimity. Hereby, sovereignty proves to be a lasting issue.

The EUGS created a shared vision, but only in the form of a common narrative. In practice, the principle of unanimity is a challenge to European integration. This integration is crucial if the EU wants to play a greater role in global affairs. Namely, a veto vote will not only prevent the EU from speaking with one voice, but it will also cause long debates and protracted bargaining that will ultimately lead to ineffective and slow reactions to emerging crises. Hereby, the EUGS may be grand strategic to some scholars, but it cannot efficiently anticipate and guide the EU through geopolitical storms. The EU could replace the principle of unanimity with a majority vote, but ironically, this would require unanimity. This may be the reason why the documents fail to deliver clarity on a balance of ends, ways, and means. Currently, the EU simply cannot go beyond the limitations of consensus-based decision-making. Therefore, as Biscop already pointed out in 2012, the EU still “is not very successful in prevention, despite its rhetoric, and to which it has not been able to prevent, it tends to react late.”¹²³

¹²¹ Ibidem, 29.

¹²² Sven Biscop, ‘European Defence: Give PESCO a Chance’, *Survival* 60 (2018) 161–180, 162.

¹²³ Sven Biscop, ‘Raiders of the Lost Art: Strategy-Making in Europe’, *Egmont* 40 (2012) 1–9, 2.

Comparison and Analysis: Beyond Grand Strategy

Strategically, it is almost right to speak of a transatlantic divide. On the one side of the Atlantic, the US is focused on great power competition, and its president hints at tossing aside alliances. On the other side, the EU seeks ways to achieve strategic autonomy by focusing on cooperation and unity. However, the way they approach the concept of grand strategy is strikingly similar. To elaborate on these similarities, and on the differences, this chapter will first compare the cases presented in the previous chapters. Subsequently, to go beyond the current literature on grand strategy, this chapter presents insights based on the results of the case studies that are relevant for future research.

4.1 Comparing US and EU grand strategy

As the American scholar Alan Stolberg points out, liberal democracies tend to articulate their grand strategies, because the documents serve as a broad construct for the entire government to ensure internal consensus, they function as a legitimisation tool for the legislative body of the polity, and they act as a communication tool for both domestic and foreign audiences.¹²⁴ This perfectly sums up the main reasons why the US and the EU published their grand strategies. It is, however, crucial to look further than just purpose. Comparing the two case studies will show that there is a disconnect between intentions and effects in the way both these democracies deal with grand strategy.

After a relatively long tradition of strategic secrecy, the US started to articulate its grand strategy in order to ensure coherence and inform related actors, such as departments and allies. This is supposedly done within a framework that identifies ends, provides ways, and addresses the short-term and long-term uses of all instruments of national power. The EU, on the other hand, only started this conduct at the beginning of the 21st century. Nonetheless, similar to the US strategic documents, the main purpose of the 2016 EUGS was to create a narrative where all related actors agreed on in order to ensure coherence. On the basis of the literature review and the presented cases, it is right to say that both the US and the EU mostly draw on the characteristics of the fundamental assumptions approach in dealing with their grand strategies. As one could expect, this means that both polities structure their strategic documents in a way in which there is one truly overarching document that guides all subordinate policy. In addition,

¹²⁴ Alan G. Stolberg, *How Nation-States Craft National Security Strategy Documents* (Carlisle 2012) 2.

both polities address a wide array of instruments of national power, and the documents are seemingly aimed at the long-term.

The question remains why the wider decision-making processes of both polities would not be in line with the other two approaches. First, following the line of reasoning of the generalship approach, the NSS and the EUGS would, on first sight, be identified as the foreign policies of the US and the EU. However, if this would be the case, the documents would only identify policy ends based on a threat assessment, and another document would specifically provide ways to connect military means to these ends. Instead, subordinate documents also stress the importance of integrating various means to achieve the objectives. Second, scholars who adhere to the holistic approach would probably set the articulation of the NSS and the EUGS aside as a vision, or as Gray defines it, a “desired condition that serves to inspire, and provide moral and political authority for, policy preferences and choices.”¹²⁵ However, the same applies here as with the generalship approach, the decision-making processes show that there is an approach in which the polities place their overarching document at the level of responsibility above policy. Therefore, it is right to speak of grand strategy if one relates to the fundamental assumptions approach.

Next, it is relevant to address the aforementioned disconnect between purpose and results. Both the US and the EU seem to be willing to structure their documents according to the strategic framework of ends, ways, and means. They both do this indeed, but they fail to properly balance between them. In addition, they neglect to explain why certain means are supposed to be put into use to reach a certain end. In the case of the US, as seen in the example provided on American strategic behaviour in the Middle East, this directly leads to confusion on how the NSS should be implemented. The EU faces a similar problem in implementing their grand strategy. Their focus on the ends of strategy results in the creation of a roadmap that lacks a detailed explanation on how to achieve the desired objectives.

Moreover, political and bureaucratic implications prevented the polities from developing and implementing an effective grand strategy, based on the purpose of the characteristics of the fundamental assumptions approach. First, both polities encountered difficulties through actors involved in their political systems. Although the EU enjoys the position of the HR/VP as a tool for coherence, its decision-making process is complex due to the diversity of actors involved. National interests of the member states could throw a spanner in the works of decision-making, since the principle of unanimity remains a challenge to

¹²⁵ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 20.

effective strategy implementation. US decision-making enjoys the persistence of the foreign policy establishment that allows consistency. However, the lack of an assessment of means, in combination with a transition of power from one presidential administration to the other could result in a president that, for example, sows doubt amongst allies. Hereby, an approach that favours ideology through the need of a political consensus ultimately results in a lack of effective strategic decision-making.

Second, the aforementioned consensus building leads to an ends-based grand strategy, which lacks purpose due to an undefined or long-term duration. US law prescribes that they should annually publish a new overarching strategy. Paradoxically, however, their documents identify ends that are aimed at the long-term. The EU, on the other side, does not have to stick to a rule that requires them to regularly publish a strategy. Instead, the EUGS itself allows for adaptation and flexibility. However, for both cases, this flexibility only leads to changes in the ends and ways of strategy. By taking the connection between the various means for granted, the strategy remains only partially actionable.

Finally, the articulation of a grand strategy leads to a democratisation of information access, which has both strengths and limitations. A published grand strategy directly becomes a public enterprise and a communication tool for domestic and foreign audiences. Hereby, as argued by the American scholar Travis Cram, it successfully allows for flexibility on foreign policy implementation through the engagement with scholars and policy experts.¹²⁶ This could result in a more nuanced view on strategy, and it allows scholars to evaluate decision-making over time. However, it also leads to an ideological debate that undermines the importance of effective strategy. After all, the documents are merely a political consensus.

4.2 The future of grand strategy

The disconnect between theory and practice as reflected in the case studies makes one wonder whether grand strategy has become a meaningless and useless concept. Has the evolution of the academic concept gone too far? The present thesis argues that the answer to this question is, to a certain extent, yes. The case studies confirm the findings in the literature review. Namely, the fundamental assumptions approach does not result in the creation of a strategic framework that effectively guides future action. The ever-expanding literature on the concept that seeks to ideologically prescribe strategies, or takes a connection between various means for granted,

¹²⁶ Cram, 'Rhetoric, World-View, and Strategy', 182.

cannot contribute to this practice either. Therefore, it is time to reappraise what really is at the core of the academic concept.

The case studies provide several important insights into the current state of grand strategic practice. In turn, these provide leads for future research. First, scholars should start to appreciate the political differences of various states and organisations in relation to their grand strategic decision-making processes. The present thesis presents the practice of two liberal democracies, which take the interaction between means for granted. However, the Russian annexation of Crimea is just one example that displays why scholars need to find out more about the logic behind the interaction between means, especially in relation to the connection between military and non-military instruments. Therefore, it is relevant to conduct research on the differences between, for example, Western democracies and non-Western democracies and even autocracies in their conduct of grand strategy.

Second, one should never examine grand strategy from only one perspective, whether this is from the perspective of a strategy's formulation, articulation, or implementation. The formulation processes of the NSS and EUGS are important in the sense that they bring together a wide variety of actors that are responsible for making policy. Although this process merely leads to the articulation of a vision or a declaration of intent, it helps to bring clarity and cohesion. However, as Gray points out: "the only difference between having and not having an explicit grand strategy, lies in the degree of cohesion among official behaviours and, naturally as a consequence of poor cohesion, in the likelihood of success."¹²⁷ The implementation phases of the NSS and the EUGS show that theorists and practitioners should not take the effects of strategy for granted. The strategic documents are no blueprints for foreign policy implementation. Despite the fact that the preceding processes ensure a certain level of cohesion, political circumstances and unprecedented events can get in the way. After all, there is no such thing as a foreseeable future.

Third, scholars and practitioners should focus less on the ends of strategy. Both the NSS and the EUGS aim to lay the foundation needed for coherent and effective strategic behaviour. In contrast, the case studies show that bureaucratic and political processes result in unexpected results and behaviour. In combination with approaching grand strategy as the provider of fundamental assumptions which guide policy, a grand strategic decision-making process in liberal democracies inevitably results in ideological and grandiose terms that neglect the purposive meaning of strategy. The scholar Jan Willem Honig summarises this perfectly: "The

¹²⁷ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 28.

malleability and necessary ambition of national political goals increased the complexity of designing a practical grand strategy to such an extent that it led to a gradual de-emphasis of the practical means and ways in political strategy documents and instead fostered a disproportionate focus on aspirational goals.”¹²⁸

In order to go beyond this shift to ideology, it is crucial to reappraise the balance between ends, ways, and means. Instead of simply resorting to a different approach, whether this is emergent strategy or a different alternative to grand strategy, one could welcome a focus on the effects of strategy. If theorists and practitioners would turn to questions about how and with what a polity should reach its goals, both the analytical and the practical relevance of grand strategy could be revived. However, scholars first need to recognise and appreciate the different purposes of the three approaches to grand strategy as identified in the present thesis. Ultimately, whether grand strategy focuses on the military instruments, on a variety of means of power, or on guiding policy, it remains essential to understand its complexity found in the instrumental logic, and perhaps even more so in the implications found in politics.

¹²⁸ Jan Willem Honig, ‘The 2016 EU ‘Global Strategy’: Consequences for European Force Structures’, *OMZ* (2017) [<https://www.oemz-online.at/display/ENSPACE/The+2016+EU+Global+Strategy>] <consulted on 02-05-2019>.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of any theory is to clarify concepts and ideas that have become, as it were, confused and entangled.¹²⁹

Scholars continue to be at cross purposes when it comes to the academic concept of grand strategy. The literature review of the present thesis conveys the impression that the above-mentioned conceptual call to arms, directed by the famous Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, unsuccessfully led to a three-sided response. Various historical contexts contributed to the divergent character of the evolution of the academic concept. As a result, the three approaches to grand strategy are, more or less, equally justifiable. Through the cases of how the transatlantic partners – the US and the EU – deal with their grand strategies, this thesis aimed to bridge the theory and practice of the divergent ideas of grand strategy. So, to what extent does the practice of the grand strategic decision-making processes in the cases of the 2017 NSS and the 2016 EUGS reflect any of the three academic approaches to grand strategy?

In short, this thesis concludes that the cases of the US and the EU are strikingly similar, in the sense that they both draw on the characteristics of the fundamental assumptions approach in their grand strategic decision-making processes. Namely, they assign grand strategy the role of a foreign policy director that should integrate multiple forms of power, both military and non-military, into a long-term strategy. This approach allows them to formulate a coherent political narrative aimed at informing their own governments and their allies. However, the case studies display a disconnect between intentions and results that is primarily caused by the lack of one factor that should bind everything together, and that is strategy.

The academic concept has lost its essential strategic core as a result of a turn to ideology. Moreover, the case studies show how political implications cause problems to strategy implementation. Namely, grand strategy became a political consensus, as displayed through the tension between the establishment and the US president on the one side of the Atlantic, and the tension between institutional cohesion and the sovereignty of the EU member states on the other side. These political implications led to an ends-focused approach, in which practitioners take the connection between the various means for granted. In turn, this downgrades scholars to a role in which they tend to evaluate current grand strategies and prescribe new ones.

Therefore, it is time for scholars to learn from practice, rather than to dictate policy. Scholars can effectively support policy-makers if they simply take a step back and reconsider

¹²⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Oxford 2007 [original edition: 1832]) 79.

what is at the core of the academic concept. Future research should thus focus on the following aspects. First, further research is needed on the effects of strategy. By explaining the underlying logic of the connection of military and non-military means, scholars can support practitioners in their incredible task of integrating these conditions. Subsequently, practitioners will be able to more effectively relate these means to the ends and ways of strategy. Second, it is essential to appreciate the concept's history. By learning from different historical approaches, which all have their own unique purpose, scholars can better relate to contemporary cases. Third, besides explaining which political implications affect decision-making in Western democracies, scholars should find out how various less consensus-based, non-Western polities approach the concept in theory and in practice. Finally, this thesis shows that the formulation, articulation, and implementation of a grand strategy are equally important. Scholars should thus begin to address all of these perspectives. Nothing is to be taken for granted in a revival of the academic concept. Only then will dreamers become true grand strategic visionaries.

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