

AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY AND THE FUTURE OF U.S. LANDPOWER

Joseph V. Da Silva
Hugh P. Liebert
Isaiah Wilson III
Editors

American Grand Strategy and the Future of U.S. Landpower consists of 23 essays from leading voices in ongoing debates over U.S. national security. Together, these essays represent an attempt to break free from the parochial preferences of each service by examining Landpower within the frame of American grand strategy. The guiding question of the volume is not how the Army can maximize its share of next year's budget, but what purpose, ultimately, any instrument of Landpower serves, and what particular purposes the U.S. Army is likely to serve in the medium to long term.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part I, "American Grand Strategy," asks what American grand strategy has been, is now, and is likely to be in the future. Part II, "Force Planning and the U.S. Army," considers how budget austerity is likely to affect the U.S. Army as a component of the joint force. Part III, "Future Missions," envisions what missions the U.S. Army is likely to undertake. Finally, Part IV, "Human Capital," asks who will be executing these missions and how the nation ought to relate to them once they have left the Army.

First, what is American grand strategy? The United States has traditionally aspired to prevent regional hegemony from emerging in Europe and Asia while assuring access to oil in the Middle East, John Mearsheimer argues. Since the focus of U.S. grand strategy is now shifting from Europe, where Landpower is decisive, to Asia, where U.S. involvement in a major land war is unlikely, the Army will become the least important of the three military services. According to Scott Silverstone, however,

American grand strategy historically has involved not only U.S. prevention of regional hegemony, but the promotion of "grand area access," or access to the markets and resources of the world's principle regions. It is this strategic objective that "anti-access/area-denial" (A2/AD) capabilities threaten. The U.S. Army should consider how it might deter China's denial of access to Asian markets and how it might help to assure allies of U.S. security commitments, Silverstone suggests. The U.S. Army should also consider how it might contribute to other strategic ends that have shaped and will continue to influence U.S. foreign policy: hemispheric policing, the containment and neutralization of remote projectable threats, and the containment and mitigation of humanitarian crises.

The means toward these ends are not only military, however. American strategists have tended to think all problems have military solutions, but this is to confuse "force" with real "power," Isaiah Wilson argues. In fact, military force is but one among many factors—such as diplomacy, economic engagement, and the ability to influence via ideals—that enables the United States to realize its goals in the larger world. When the application of military force causes humans to react as intended, Huba Wass de Czege continues, it is proper to describe it as "military power." But the nature of military power remains unclear when it is divided into domain-specific concepts, such as land, sea, and air power. It is better to understand military power according to its essential functions—to deter, defend, enforce, and pacify—each of which has its own logic. When we approach military power in this way, argues Wass de Czege, we can appreciate the

weakness of Air-Sea Battle as a strategic doctrine and the potential strength of U.S. military-backed defenses of U.S. Pacific allies.

The second part of this volume explores how budget austerity will impact the U.S. military, and the Army in particular. All federal government processes, including the military's strategic decision-making, work best when budgets are steadily increasing, writes Michael Meese. Long-term deficits and the recent recession, however, have ushered in an era of "decremental spending," in which conflicts over resources and strategic confusion are likely to increase. The U.S. military has so far failed to make a "strategic choice" between a small but technologically advanced force, on the one hand, and a large but technologically less-advanced force, on the other. Since the United States is unlikely to encounter technologically superior enemies in the near future, the optimal strategic choice entails focusing on research and development (but not procurement) while maintaining a force large enough to influence world events. Austerity and strategic uncertainty also offer an opportunity to undertake a fundamental reorganization of the U.S. military, Douglas Macgregor suggests. Within the newly organized force, the Army would move from a force organized around divisions to one organized according to combat groups of roughly 5,000–7,000 troops, commanded by brigadier generals, and thoroughly "joint" – i.e., joining the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, as well as strike, capabilities of the Navy and Air Force with the maneuver and ground capabilities of the Army and Marines. This force would be focused less on holding ground and more on victory through maneuver. It would also be well-suited to the conflicts that the United States is most likely to face in the near future: fights for regional influence overlapping with interstate competition for resources and the wealth they create. Since the U.S. military typically fights its wars alongside partner nations, burden-sharing with long-term allies would seem to offer potential savings while austerity lasts. Matt Cavanaugh examines the potential for coordination among the United States, United Kingdom, and Australian militaries. Among these states, Cavanaugh argues, co-production and joint-venture are likely to prove difficult, but enhanced communication and cultivation of the "human network" offer significant advantages. To realize these advantages, U.S. military leaders should pursue these goals: international staff organization; international doctrine, i.e., doctrine that addresses coordination among allied states; improved communications architecture, such as an integrated tactical-level common operating picture; and

defense diplomacy, e.g., travel for the sake of shared experience among officers of allied states, with a view to developing the trust that enables communication.

Turning from austerity's broad impact on the U.S. military to its specific impact on the Army, it is important to recognize that the current drawdown is not the first the Army has faced. Historically, Conrad Crane claims, the Army has maintained and modernized its force, even with decreased funding, by moving incrementally while preparing to take advantage of rare opportunities for more abundant funding. A review of the Army's history under austerity suggests three lessons for the present: the Army should (a) maintain robust educational and training programs, since adaptable leaders are ultimately more important than the most modern equipment; (b) recognize that tight budgets allow development of one or two relatively inexpensive "game-changers" like new infantry weapons or cyber capabilities; and (c) be ready to take advantage of the next period of increasing funds for a program of rapid modernization. Reviewing the same history, Michael Meese discerns a deeply ingrained Army approach to decisionmaking in peacetime. This approach is characterized by an emphasis on people, expansibility, and equitable allocation of cuts among the commands and branches, all under the guidance of inappropriate strategy. The Army should continue its focus on people, Meese suggests, by emphasizing quality and championing effective compensation reform; it should also be ready to accept a "golden handshake" – a definitive decision on end strength after the draw down – should one be offered. The Army should consider maintaining more forces in high readiness (as opposed to expansible forces) than it has previously, and it should be prepared to prioritize some commands and branches over others. The strategy orienting these decisions does not have to mimic national strategy, as it has in the past; it is preferable for the Army to focus on its role in the larger strategy, a role which may well involve preparation for low-intensity rather than high-technology conflicts. Expanding the regional alignment of Army units to include their "regional allocation" – i.e., assignment to specific commands in a manner analogous to the Navy's allocation of "steaming days" for carrier battle groups – would adapt the Army's historical preferences to present needs.

The choices facing today's Army have many elements that set them apart from historical cases. Today's choices occur within a force management system that constrains the ability of decisionmakers to implement changes, as Kerry Schindler relates.

Since strategic decisions translate into on-the-ground realities by means of specific (and often opaque) bureaucratic processes, it is important to understand these processes as best as one can. When one does, one is better able to appreciate the fundamental trade-offs facing Army force managers: with regard to manning, the Army must choose between expansibility and readiness, and must reevaluate its system of compensation; with regard to training, the Army might reduce the length of time officers spend in its schools or alter residency requirements; with regard to equipping the force, the Army should consider pre-positioning equipment overseas, reducing equipment within units to the minimum necessary for training, and favoring general-purpose over specialized equipment. In addition to facing these trade-offs squarely, David Barno and Nora Bensahel suggest, the Army should address six additional challenges:

1. The Army must redefine land warfare by developing a compelling narrative of Landpower's fundamental contribution to national security—an Air-Land Battle for the 21st century, or at least a place for the Army within Air-Sea Battle.

2. The Army should leverage technology for the close fight and pursue technological solutions to squad-level problems like land mine detection and robotic transport of Soldiers' equipment.

3. The Army should reshape the roles of active and reserve components by integrating the latter into the active force for a wide range of missions, particularly those that can leverage high-end civilian talents.

4. In order to make expansibility work, the Army should retain more mid-grade and noncommissioned officers than necessary for a small force.

5. The Army should focus on attracting and retaining talent by ensuring that necessary cuts do not deplete its most valuable human capital.

6. Finally, the Army should address the difficulty of its pending "homecoming" by working to reduce its isolation from civilian society; outreach efforts, welcoming civilians onto military bases, and taking cultural integration into account when making basing decisions will help to ease the Army's return into the society it serves.

Part III considers what future missions the U.S. Army is likely to undertake. This part begins in Europe, a region which has diminished in the eyes of American grand strategists as the significance of Asia has grown. The United States would do better, Richard Rosecrance argues, to maintain its traditional interest in "Eurasia" rather than pivoting from Europe to Asia. There are two main reasons why

reducing U.S. presence in Europe will weaken the United States: the rise of Asia has been exaggerated, since "Asia" is divided into rival nations, none of which are likely to wrest economic and military primacy from the West (i.e., the United States and Europe); in the same vein, the decline of Europe has been overstated, as Europe will continue to be an economic and military power in close cooperation with the United States. For the sake of maintaining this cooperation, securing democratization in Eastern Europe, facilitating the further expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and thus achieving an "overbalance of power" with respect to Asian rivals, U.S. land bases in Europe are crucial. Using states' voting patterns in the United Nations General Assembly as an empirical measure of their foreign policy orientation, Jordan Becker finds that U.S. troop presence is associated with broader strategic influence. There is a strong correlation between the number of U.S. troops stationed in a country and the alignment of a country's foreign policy with that of the United States. If the United States is interested in maintaining a strategically meaningful "Western" grouping, Becker concludes, troop presence matters. The historical reasons for strong U.S. engagement in NATO—keeping the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Europeans down (as Lord Ismay put it)—still remain relevant today, Seth Johnston claims. Since Russia has proven its willingness to use military force and economic coercion in Georgia and Ukraine, and the decades-long rapprochement between Germany and France is strategically crucial but not fated (if history is any guide), it is in America's interest to keep themselves "in." Given the continental geography of Europe, being "in"—meaningfully contributing to European pace and stability—means being present on land.

Landpower would appear to be as naturally dominant on the European continent as sea and air power among the islands and straits of Asia. But, there is nevertheless an important role for the Army to play in the Pacific, argues Al Willner. The Army can contribute to the deterrence of rising powers and the defense of U.S. allies via missile defense, strategic communications, and logistics infrastructure capabilities. The U.S. Army is also uniquely positioned to bring regional expertise and a decade of combat experience to bear in developing partner countries' capacities, particularly since so many Asian countries' top uniformed military leaders are Army officers. While the Army might not be the lead service in Asia, it nevertheless has a vital role to play, says Willner. Joseph Da Silva and Douglas Ollivant

discuss Air-Sea Battle, the operational concept that has relegated the Army to secondary status in Asia, and find that it suffers from numerous shortcomings. Air-Sea Battle fails to effectively deter China, because the United States is unlikely to enjoy a decisive technological advantage in any sea or air conflict; it does not reassure U.S. allies in the region, because it sets the stage for rapid escalation; it exacerbates the security dilemma and thereby hinders engagement; and it puts the United States on the wrong side of an economic cost equation, insofar as A2/AD capabilities are less expensive than the weapons systems required to overcome them. For all of these reasons, conclude Da Silva and Ollivant, Air-Sea Battle should not have the prominence that it currently enjoys in U.S. Pacific strategy. In fact, Robert Chamberlain argues, Landpower should be the centerpiece of U.S. forces in the Pacific, because Landpower is uniquely suited to decouple economic and military competition in Asia. The very same aspects of Asian geography that advocates of Air-Sea Battle highlight actually raise the strategic value of U.S. Landpower. Because Asia contains so many islands and peninsulas, buildups of U.S. air and sea power can only seem aggressive, whereas expansion of Landpower can signal commitment to regional security weighted more toward defense than offense. The Army should focus on deploying land-based theater missile defense systems, integrating contingency-planning with local allies, and developing a force suited to limited-aims war but not the occupation of China itself. In short, Landpower offers the ability to field a transparently defensive U.S. force in the Asia-Pacific—one well-suited to securing U.S. allies against the threat of China's rise without undermining China's ongoing economic development.

If Asia seems to be theater of the U.S. military's future and Europe the theatre of its past, the "Central Region"—stretching from Egypt across the Middle East into Central Asia—is the theater of its present. It is also, argues Isaiah Wilson, a theater which has demonstrated the utility of a range of "Prevent-Shape-Win" strategies, thus paving the way for Army leaders to address not only conventional war but other (often more efficient and effective) aspects of war. The key to preventing war on terms favorable to U.S. interests, shaping the strategic environment, and winning with or without actual combat, Wilson suggests, is presence. When U.S. forces are present in a region, they can build relationships that generate trust and promote U.S. influence over regional partners. So long as U.S. leaders demonstrate patience and the ability to tolerate ambiguity, uses of armed force short of

conventional war—beyond war—can prove effective, as U.S. Central Command has begun to demonstrate.

Apart from the regions—Europe, Asia, and the Middle East—that have traditionally most interested American strategists, looming budget cuts and the perception of diminished desire to engage in humanitarian intervention have forced U.S. military leaders to discover innovative ways to further U.S. interests. U.S. Africa Command has pioneered a number of low-cost, small-footprint approaches to regional security. Rather than thinking of asymmetric threats strictly during "conflict" and on the "battlefield," Army leaders have begun to apply the framework of prevention and shaping across both physical and cognitive domains. As a result, U.S. forces build partner capacity and empower African militaries to address African problems, where previously U.S. forces may have been more directly involved. U.S. forces are also more attentive to economic development, ideology, and other factors that undergird the appeal of violent extremist organizations. Measuring the success of these efforts in Africa, particularly in the short term, is difficult; nevertheless, early returns suggest that this approach will bear fruit. Sustaining this sort of an approach in the long term will require leaders as capable of empathy as cold calculation of national interests. The concept of "human security" (as distinct from the security of territory or nations), Cindy Jebb and Andy Gallo suggest, allows us to examine security from the bottom up rather than the top down, and thus to experience global challenges viscerally, as they are lived by individuals and local communities. Addressing human security often enables a more efficient and intelligent use of U.S. military resources—an important consideration under conditions of austerity. Attempting to improve human security also represents one of the most promising modes of countering a number of threats to U.S. national interests, especially terrorism.

A range of familiar and novel challenges confront the U.S. military in each of the world's regions, but today's military leaders also confront a fundamentally new domain: cyberspace. This domain and the consequences of military activity within it are so new, in fact, that many remain uncertain about the potential value added of cyber forces. As Suzanne Nielsen explains, cyber operations do not fit neatly in any of the existing services, nor in any of the branches within the services; also, since cyberspace is transnational, cyber forces do not naturally fall within the boundaries of regional combatant commands. While Army leaders have generally embraced the need to develop effective cyber forces, a new career pathway for specialists in cyber operations has yet to emerge, as has a single

organizational entity to integrate efforts in the cyber domain (though there has been progress here). It is not yet clear whether the Army will be able to recruit and reward the sorts of highly-specialized personnel that cyber operations will require. Nielsen concludes that the creation of a new service with cyber operations as its core task may be the only solution to the novel challenges of military operations in cyberspace.

Finally, Part IV, “Human Capital,” considers who will be executing the Army’s future missions. In light of its strategic ends and its diminishing means, how can the Army recruit and retain the best people, and best prepare them for life after the Army? Early challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan revealed that U.S. forces had not prepared adequately for the physical, cultural, and social environments they encountered; from this experience, Nadia Schadlow writes, emerged the concept of the “human domain.” This idea signified that not only the terrain on which battles occurred, but the social and cultural contexts within which U.S. forces attempted to accomplish their missions, were directly relevant to the achievement of strategic ends. On the strategic level, recognition of the “human domain” has generated the strategic Landpower initiative and the development of regionally aligned forces; on the tactical and operational levels, development of this concept has coincided with focus on mission command and wide area security. As a result of these efforts, there is renewed attention to the sort of human capital the Army requires—not only excellence in battlefield operations, narrowly understood, but in the cultural context which surrounds and often determines the success of these operations.

Since there is no Landpower without soldiers, one cannot consider the role of Landpower in American grand strategy without attending to soldiers at all stages of their service. Traditionally American society has focused more on the “strategic imperative” of making citizens into soldiers rather than the “moral imperative” of helping soldiers become productive citizens again, Daniel Gade argues. By encouraging nearly one of two retiring service members to call themselves disabled and compensating disabled Veterans with lifelong monthly checks, the current Veterans disability system creates a culture of dependency that impedes Veterans’ ability to thrive

in civilian society. As an alternative, Gade proposes a voluntary program—the recovery track—that would front-load Veterans’ benefits, with the goal of making Veterans independent and self-supporting. This program would not only better serve those Veterans who choose to enter into it, Gade concludes, but would reduce the cost of using Landpower for strategic engagement. Attending to Veterans’ issues is not ancillary to understanding the role of Landpower in American grand strategy, after all. Doing well by Veterans is both a strategic and a moral imperative.

The volume’s conclusions and recommendations are diverse and often mutually incompatible. Rather than a shared vision of the future, the volume offers a shared vision for how debates about the future should unfold—particularly as budget austerity empowers innovation. This vision entails putting the question of American grand strategy first, and only then asking how U.S. power as divided into military and nonmilitary means, diverse military services, and branches within those services, can better serve U.S. strategic ends.

More information about the programs of the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) and U.S. Army War College (USAWC) Press may be found on the Institute’s homepage at www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil.

Organizations interested in reprinting this or other SSI and USAWC Press executive summaries should contact the Editor for Production via e-mail at SSI_Publishing@conus.army.mil. All organizations granted this right must include the following statement: “Reprinted with permission of the Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, U.S. Army War College.”



This Publication



SSI Website



USAWC Website