

GRAND STRATEGY, ARMED INTERVENTION, AND WAR TERMINATION

The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War

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Are you thirsting to find evidence that Otto von Bismarck is the greatest master of state power politics of all time, and Neville Chamberlain the worst? You'll find that and more in this rich anthology providing seven case studies on the forging—successful and unsuccessful—of grand strategy by statesmen over the ages.

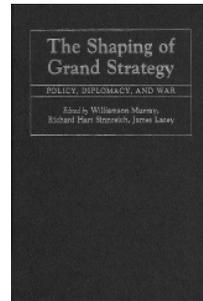
Beginning with some “Thoughts on Grand Strategy” and how the phrase may be understood—the “intertwining of political, social, and economic realities with military power as well as a recognition that politics must, in nearly all cases, drive military necessity”—the collection of insightful essays first leads us to explore historical examples of ineffective strategic approaches.

Interestingly, an analysis of Louis XIV is the first such study, and it largely focuses on Louis's strategic failure in abandoning alliances in favor of unilateral actions that overstretched his state's resources and military, bearing striking resemblance to current US travails. “British Grand Strategy, 1933-1942” is another provocative case study underscoring what not to do, as it details Neville Chamberlain's strategic blunder in focusing on preventing war even as Germany rearmed, ignored the Munich Conference, and marched on and occupied Czechoslovakia. Both are great lessons underscoring the importance of matching strategy with reality, and describing what happens when that does not occur.

Reversing course and providing examples in effective grand strategy, the authors then take us on a journey detailing the strategic acumen of Bismarck, Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Harry Truman. From Bismarck's diplomatic and military genius in establishing Prussia's dominant power status in Europe, to Roosevelt's decision in prioritizing the European theater over the Pacific, and finally to Truman's containment policy, there is much to learn from what they got right, making this a valuable tome in the professional libraries of scholars and statesmen alike.

The authors, who comprise university professors and scholars alike, are compelling and thoughtful in their detailed analyses, and the implications for US grand strategy are clear, if not explicit. In the chapters detailing the reign of Louis XIV and the British strategic shift prior to World War I, references to US overstretch are plainly stated and mostly convincing. Also implied in the effective strategies of Roosevelt and Truman is the importance of prioritizing world challenges, though there are no notable recommendations given for US policymakers and thinkers today.

The authors are also careful to point out that grand strategy is largely determined by uncertainty, such that, in the words of Bismarck, “man



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cannot create the current of events. He can only float with it and steer.” This is an important point that gains attention throughout the work. It is certainly nice to see an acknowledgement of the lack of control world leaders may have over their states’ affairs and the unpredictable dynamics of the international system, but if there is a shortcoming in this collection, it is in its almost apologetic tone for the predictive value of its own case studies.

For example, one editor observes that “conditions encouraging even the formulation, let alone the prolonged execution, of grand strategy as deliberate method seem to be uncommon at best, and even then impermanent.” The reader is first led to believe in the political talent of Bismarck only to be let down when he later learns that the Prussian leader’s artfully-constructed European balance of power was uniformly and unabashedly dismantled by Kaiser Wilhelm II. In the book’s summarizing chapter, we are told that only two of the seven cases—both involving the United States—suggest a deliberate, preconceived strategy that resulted from analysis of the challenge in question. The lesson all too frequently seems to be that successful grand strategy resides at the intersection of chance and luck, with intellectual prowess, vision, and leadership playing only a combined secondary role. This is a bitter pill to swallow for earnest visionaries.

Although it is quite evident the editors intended each chapter to be a stand-alone study in grand strategy (the book is wonderful for the university professor or military instructor in this regard), the organization of the anthology would likely benefit from smoother transitions. It is quite an intellectual jump from “The Grand Strategy of the *Grand Siècle*: Learning from the Wars of Louis XIV” at the beginning to “Harry S. Truman and the Forming of American Grand Strategy in the Cold War, 1945-1953” at the end. This is a lot of ground to cover in 269 pages, and it requires some mental agility from the reader, particularly with the rich and dense nature of each chapter. As Lieutenant Colonel Frank Slade, played by Al Pacino, says in *Scent of a Woman*, “Too big a leap for me right now, Charlie.”

All told, *The Shaping of Grand Strategy* is a worthwhile read, for both the historian and the strategist. Strong in theory and concrete in its examples, the work serves as a practical guide for avoiding the pitfalls of some and seizing on the attributes of others. It would be desirable to find a second volume of this work, perhaps with case studies examining the grand strategy—or lack thereof—of world players in the post-Cold War era. The authors have done a nice job of setting the conditions for such a follow-on work that could connect the dots between Bismarck and statesmen and women today who must strategize in a modern era when the nation-state lines are not as clear, and the role of nonstate actors is more prominent.