SS457: Introduction to Grand Strategy  
United States Military Academy  
Department of Social Sciences  
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OVERVIEW

With the dawn of a new era of Great Power competition, there has been a resurgence of interest in grand strategy. The purpose of this course is to explore its fundamentals in theory – what do we think we know about grand strategy? – and in practice, how does grand strategy actually work? We will ask (and attempt to answer) big questions: what is grand strategy? Where does the concept come from? Which states (or other global actors) are pursuing grand strategies today? How do we know a grand strategy when we see one? Which actors are the “grand strategists”?  

This course is designed for cadets representing all academic backgrounds, professional interests, and intellectual persuasions seeking to gain exposure to a domain of thought and action that all Army officers encounter in their careers but that few have the opportunity to explore or understand in depth, especially early in their training. The course equips cadets with the intellectual tools necessary to make sense of the grand strategic landscape today, grounding their present-day understanding in a strong foundation in the history and evolution of the concept of grand strategy.  

The course is divided into three blocks. Block I, Foundations, examines the historical moment in which the modern concept of grand strategy was born; explores the ways in which contemporary scholars and practitioners have built upon the original concept; and highlights key ongoing debates.  

Block II, Elements, explores grand strategy’s components. What are the elements of national power that are available to be coordinated and applied across policy contexts?  

Block III, Applications, explores grand strategy “in action.” Before embarking on our case study analysis, we briefly survey classic theories of policy-making. By considering some of the constraints restricting policymakers’ freedom of action and shaping their ability to effectively pursue the coordinated application of all the elements of national power, these theories serve as our “on-ramp” to analyzing grand strategy in the real world.  

Then, Block III turns to case studies, asking core questions introduced in Blocks I and II. In a given case, what evidence is there of a grand strategy? Which elements of power were aligned and coordinated, and by whom? Which actor or group of actors behaved as the grand strategist(s)? Was the grand strategy fully conceptualized and articulated in advance? What is enduring about grand strategy across contexts as diverse as the Roman Empire of antiquity and China of today?  

OBJECTIVES

Cadets will become conversant in how the concept of grand strategy has been defined (and re-defined) since the interwar period. They will become fluent in the various elements of national
power that states deploy to advance their grand strategies. Through analysis of case studies they will gain an understanding of how the concept of grand strategy can be applied retrospectively to assess states’ behavior across time. Cadets also will become adept at applying concepts from the school of grand strategy to analyze complex problem sets in the contemporary international environment.

On the practical side, cadets will hone the Army life skill of communicating complex ideas succinctly by writing executive summaries (EXSUMs) and situation reports (SITREPs). They also will gain confidence in their ability to evaluate the contemporary landscape and produce clear, thoughtful, and compelling analysis by writing a strategic assessment and communicating their recommendations in both short- and long-form documents.

**REQUIREMENTS**

Grades will be based on the following:

- Reading analysis: 100 points
- SITREPs (x5): 100 points
- Class participation: 100 points
- EXSUMs (x3): 150 points
- Strategic assessment: 250 points

Participation will be self-assessed on a regular basis.

You will choose 5 weeks in which you submit a SITREP (worth 20 points each). The purpose of the SITREP is to summarize in 1-3 sentences each of the week’s readings and to provide a 1-3 sentence “commander’s comment” on the major takeaway for the week. In a week when you choose to write a SITREP, it is due **NLT 1630 on Friday**.

You will submit an EXSUM for each of the three blocks (worth 50 points each). The purpose of the one-page EXSUM is to provide a concise overview at the executive level of what we have covered in the block. You will address what you have learned and outline the key takeaways.

There is no conventional TEE. Instead, assuming the role of a member of the J5 (plans) team for INDOPACOM, each cadet will produce a strategic assessment of China (3,500 +/- 500 words plus a one-page executive summary), assessing changes in Chinese military policy and analyzing aspects that provide insight into its grand strategy and that may affect the INDOPACOM commander’s priorities for a free and open Indo-Pacific. The strategic assessment will be due prior to the beginning of the TEE period. Details will be provided in Block II.

All assignments must be submitted in hard-copy format, except for SITREPs.

**Preparation** – There are no required textbooks. Readings will be posted online as PDFs, which you should print and bring to class. Reading for this advanced, discussion-based elective should be a priority for all cadets. Reading analysis assignments will be announced on a regular basis and due **NLT 1159 the night before class**.

**Absences** – You are required to provide advance notice if you cannot attend class.
Assignments – Extensions for assignments are granted in exceptional circumstances. Otherwise, the grade for an assignment turned in after the due date will be reduced 10% for each part of a 24-hour period that it is late.

Multiple submission of academic work – You may not submit your own work that has been submitted for credit in another course. Building on ideas that you have developed in other classes is another matter; please talk with me if you would like to pursue this route for any written assignment.

Documentation of sources – Any idea that is not yours and not common knowledge (not just direct quotes) must be cited through footnotes and a works cited page. Common knowledge includes in-class discussion, lectures, conversations with/information provided by the instructor, and information that the average well-informed person would know without needing to look it up.

Additional policies – To support fun and memorable classroom discussions for all, the use of laptops is not permitted. You should bring a notebook, pen, and printed readings to class every day.

LESSON SCHEDULE
Note that it may be useful to read the readings for each lesson in the order in which they are listed.

Block I: Foundations

1. The intellectual lineage of grand strategy (5 JAN)
What was the historical backdrop in which the modern concept of “strategy” emerged? How did military theorists Jomini and Clausewitz understand strategy? How did Napoleon shape their understandings?

Readings:
--- Reading teams will be assigned one of the following:
Freedman, “Clausewitz,” 82-95.

2. Origins of the concept of grand strategy (7 JAN)
In what historical context did the modern concept of grand strategy emerge? Why did grand strategy’s founding fathers – military theorists like Mahan, Corbett, Fuller, and Liddell Hart – perceive mere “strategy” to be inadequate?

Readings:
--- Reading teams will be assigned one of the following:
3. **Strategy and grand strategy (11 JAN)**
   How did the field’s founding fathers understand the meaning of grand strategy—and to what extent do prominent modern definitions depart from or align with their understanding? What is the relationship between strategy and grand strategy?

**Readings:**
   *Read I-1 → part e. on I-3 and “grand strategy” on I-4.*

**We will analyze the following together during class:**

4. **Applied Grand Strategy: guest lecture by BG(R) Kim Field (14 JAN)**
   BG(R) Kim Field, Director of Strategy for US Special Operations Command, will share her expertise on topics including whether Vladimir Putin is a grand strategist or a master tactician; the extent to which the US political system hinders it from thinking and acting in a grand strategic fashion compared to other Great Powers; and China’s grand strategy.

5. **Definitional debates (19 JAN)**
   What is the “fundamentalist” approach to defining grand strategy, and what are the key alternatives? How do we know a grand strategy when we see one?

**Reading:**
--Reading teams will be assigned sections of the following:

6. **Staking out the field of play, Part I (21 JAN)**
   Is grand strategy exclusively the province of Great Powers? Do all Great Powers inevitably have grand strategies?

**Readings:**
7. Staking out the field of play, Part II (25 JAN)
   What are the essential attributes of grand strategic thought and action? How do we know a grand strategist when we see one?

Readings:
---Reading teams will be assigned one of the following chapters:

All read the following case study:

We will analyze the following together during class:

***On the horizon: EXSUM for BLOCK I due 31 JAN, NLT 1630***

Block II: Elements

8. An introduction to power and the DIME paradigm (28 JAN)
   What is power? What makes a “Great Power”? Which elements of national power are relevant for grand strategy?

Readings:
Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine Note 1-18.

9. Diplomacy and Information (1 FEB)
   What is diplomatic power? What are the challenges of defining and deploying information power compared to the other parts of DIME? What are the diplomatic and information tools in the US toolkit and to what extent have they evolved post-WWII?

Readings (continued on next page):

**Skim the following prior to class:**

10. **Military (3 FEB)**
What are the uses of military force? What is the role of military power in grand strategy?

**Readings:**
---Reading teams will be assigned one of the following chapters:

11. **Economic (8 FEB)**
What do states, especially aspiring Great Powers, tend to assume about what it means to be powerful? How does this assumption influence their approach to economic power? As states become more powerful, what tends to happen to their economic resources?

**Readings:**

12. **“FIL”: Financial, Intelligence, and Law Enforcement (10 FEB)**
*Guest lecture by Sam Hussain, veteran of the US intelligence community,* who will address issues including the role of 9/11 in galvanizing US policymakers to look beyond the DIME paradigm and the intelligence community’s unique role in grand strategy.

**Readings:**

13. **Soft power (16 FEB)**
What is soft power, and what is its relationship to hard power? Given its nature, to what extent can soft power be a deliberate element of grand strategy?
Readings:

***On the horizon: EXSUM for BLOCK II due 24 FEB, NLT 1630***

Block III: Applications

14. Explaining the Grand Strategies States Pursue, Part I (18 FEB)  
Are states’ grand strategies primarily a product of the pressures of the international environment or a function of domestic politics? To what extent do individual leaders influence grand strategy?

Readings:

15. Explaining the Grand Strategies States Pursue, Part II (23 FEB)  
What does it mean to say that “the United States” is pursuing a certain policy or strategy? Which organizations and individuals shape conceptions of “the national interest” and constrain presidents’ menu of options when making decisions?

Readings:

What can the Roman Empire, the likes of whose dominance in a unipolar world would not be seen again until after the Cold War, teach us about grand strategy as a system—a “whole” greater than the sum of its parts?

No advance reading required! We will analyze selections from the following during class:  
17. **Grand Strategy as a System, Part II: The British Empire (1 MAR)**
What explains the creation and endurance of the largest empire in history, and what can this case study teach us about aligning the elements of power systematically across different contexts, encompassing and advancing a truly global scope of interests?

**Reading:**

Why is World War II considered a crucible of US grand strategy? What changed in terms of the United States’ willingness and ability to pursue the coordinated application of all the elements of national power on the battlefield and beyond? How did the United States articulate and advance a post-war grand strategy?

**Readings:**

19. **Grand Strategic Continuity: The Cold War, Part I (15 MAR)**
What was the grand strategy of containment? What does it illustrate about how states can achieve consistency and continuity in their grand strategies across changes in policies and leadership?

**Readings:**
(This book is available online, as well as in hard-copy, through the USMA Library.)

Cadets will be divided into reading teams and be assigned 2 of the following chapters:
- “George F. Kennan and the Strategy of Containment.”
- “NSC-68 and the Korean War.”
- “Eisenhower, Dulles, and the New Look.”
- “Kennedy, Johnson, and Flexible Response.”

20. **Grand Strategic Victory: The Cold War, Part II (17 MAR)**
How and why did the United States win the Cold War at the grand strategic level despite significant losses on the battlefield? What does this case study reveal about successfully formulating, articulating, and executing grand strategy?

**Reading:**
21. **Post-Cold War US Grand Strategy (21 MAR)**

Has the United States had a post-Cold War grand strategy? Was 9/11 a catalytic moment for “grand strategizing” in Washington? What should be the criteria for judging the success of a grand strategy, and how is bad grand strategy different than no grand strategy?

**Readings:**

22. **Can the United States Do Grand Strategy? (24 MAR)**

Does the United States face unique constraints in thinking and acting in a grand strategic fashion?

**Readings:**

23. **Chinese Grand Strategy, Part I (29 MAR)**

What is China’s grand strategy? What are its key characteristics and how is it executed?

**Readings:**

24. **CLASS DROP (31 MAR)**

25. **Chinese Grand Strategy, Part II (5 APR)**

Guest lecture by LTC Tom Visel, Chief of Deliberate Plans, Special Operations Command-INDOPACOM (2020-21). LTC Visel will discuss Gray Zone competition in the Taiwan Straits, China’s “unrestricted warfare” doctrine, and the changing face of Great Power competition in the 21st century.

***On the horizon: EXSUM for BLOCK III due 17 APR, NLT 1630***


Does Russia have a grand strategy? Which features of Russia’s behavior make this question a matter of debate for some scholars? For scholars who argue that Russia does have a grand strategy, how do they define its key characteristics?
**Readings:**

27. **Russian Grand Strategy, Part II (14 APR)**
To what extent does Russian “hybrid warfare” illustrate change in when, how, and where military power can be applied in the contemporary international environment?

**Readings:**

28. **RESEARCH DROP (18 APR)**
Designated time to work on strategic assessment project.

29. **TRIP SECTION DROP (21 APR)**
We will have a trip section to Vassar on 22 APR to explore grand strategy in the Middle East. Dr. Steven Cook, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, will discuss the future of the Middle East in US grand strategy and the grand strategies (or lack thereof) of regional heavyweights like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey.

**On the horizon: Projects Day, April 28**

30. **Applied grand strategy: Ukraine summit meeting (3 MAY)**

**STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT DUE.**

“Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”
—Winston Churchill.