

REVIEW ESSAY

American Grand Strategy in the Indo Pacific: Plus ça change?

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BY MORE THAN PROVIDENCE: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783. *Nancy Bernkopf Tucker and Warren I. Cohen Books on American-East Asian Relations.* By Michael J. Green. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. xvi, 725 pp. (Illustrations.) US\$45.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-231-18042-9.

THE PIVOT: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia. By Kurt M. Campbell. New York: Twelve Books [imprint of Grand Central Publishing], 2016. xxiii, 399 pp. (Tables, graphs, illustrations.) US\$30.00, cloth. ISBN 978-1-4555-6895-6.

AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY AND EAST ASIAN SECURITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. By David C. Kang. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xv, 212 pp. (Tables, figures.) US\$29.99, paper. ISBN 978-1-316-61640-6.

ABSTRACT

In an era of heightened great power competition, debates about American grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific region have returned to the fore. This review essay looks at three recent volumes that directly address such debates. After introducing the concept of grand strategy, Part I reviews each of the books individually in sequence, outlining their scope, contents, and contributions. Part II then integrates the contributions of each of the volumes into a broader discussion relating to four pertinent issues: American perspectives on “Asia”; international relations (IR) theory; American strategic culture; and the rise of China, before concluding. The books under review are to differing degrees orientated toward one of the core IR theory paradigms: realism (Green), liberalism (Campbell), and constructivism/critical approaches (Kang). As such, read together, they contribute to a multi-faceted theoretical understanding of US grand strategy in the Indo Pacific that will be of significant value to both scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: grand strategy, US foreign policy, Indo Pacific, American diplomacy, the Pivot

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The Return of “Grand Strategy” to the Policy Discourse

Each of the volumes under review here to differing degrees interfaces with the notion of “grand strategy” in American statecraft (it appears in two of the titles), hence this essay adopts the concept as an overall framing device through which to present and appraise them. Indeed, these volumes form part of a wider discourse that is reengaging with the notion of grand strategy in an age where great power competition and geopolitics are returning to the forefront of international politics. Despite the vacuum in American grand strategic thinking left by the incoming Trump Administration’s precipitous abandonment of the Obama-era Pivot strategy,¹ and the current disarray in the White House, the Pentagon, Department of Defense (DOD), and related stakeholders in the military and policy worlds of the DC Beltway have been hard at work to formulate and implement a revised grand strategy. Washington released its *National Security Strategy* in 2017 and *National Defense Strategy* in 2018, and these have now been capped with the release of the DOD’s long-awaited *Indo Pacific Strategy Report* (IPSR) in 2019.² The concept therefore now features prominently in policy discourses and accompanying literature among the American strategic community.³

The notion of grand strategy also appears prominently in the strategic discourse surrounding other major states in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴ For example, specialists in Japanese foreign policy have also embraced the term to capture Tokyo’s new proactive security posture (including one of the author’s under review here).⁵ Additionally, eminent Asia historian S.C.M. Paine has also charted the antecedents of Japanese grand strategy in her

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¹ Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” 17 November 2011, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia.

² White House, *2017 National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017); United States Department of Defense, *2018 National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (United States Department of Defense, 2018); United States Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (United States Department of Defense, 2019).

³ Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018); Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski, *The End of Grand Strategy: US Maritime Operations in the Twenty-First Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

⁴ Allan Gyngell, “To Each Their Own ‘Indo-Pacific,’” *East Asia Forum*, 23 May 2018, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/05/23/to-each-their-own-indo-pacific/>

⁵ Michael Green, “Japan Is Back: Unbundling Abe’s Grand Strategy,” *Analysis*, Lowy Institute, 17 December 2013; Christopher Hughes, “The Democratic Party of Japan’s New (but Failing) Grand Security Strategy: From ‘Reluctant Realism’ to ‘Resentful Realism’?” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012): 109–140.

recent work *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War*.⁶ Likewise, many analysts and scholars have also been working overtime on parsing together Chinese and Indian grand strategies in both their historical and contemporary manifestations.⁷ Thus, there is no shortage of literature engaging with the concept of grand strategy in state policy, looking at both historical and contemporary case studies, or the theory and practice of grand strategy as a tool of statecraft, and toward which each of the volumes reviewed here makes a significant contribution in the case of the United States.⁸ As Green notes: “Americans are engaging in a lively debate about America’s grand strategy toward Asia” (1). Whilst in juxtaposition, Kang reminds us that “[a]ccurately understanding East Asian regional perceptions and their grand strategies is central to US policy in East Asia” (7).

This review essay first provides a brief introduction to the concept of Grand Strategy as an element of international statecraft for readers outside of the Strategic Studies community. The main review is then divided into two parts. Part I (American grand strategy) provides a sequence of three book reviews, including comparative comments, relating to their individual content and contributions. Part II (debating US grand strategy) then integrates each of the reviewed books into a broader discussion on four key themes, which they all address in different ways: perspectives on Asia; IR theory; American strategic culture; and the rise of China, before concluding.

What Is Grand Strategy?

Like the word “strategy” itself, “grand strategy” is often employed unreflectively to a wide range of inappropriate instances, perhaps more so, when the prefix “grand” is applied.⁹ Furthermore, the concept itself is not without its sceptics and critics.¹⁰ According to the classic definition by eminent strategic theorist Colin Gray, it is “the direction and use made of any or all the assets of a security community, including its military instrument, for the purposes of policy as decided by politics.”¹¹ Notably, grand strategy is pursued in times of *peace* as much as times of *war*. For example, after the Allied powers

⁶ S.C.M. Paine, *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁷ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Kanti Bajpai, Saira Basit, and V. Krishnappa, *India’s Grand Strategy: History, Theory, Cases* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014).

⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin, 2018); Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century’s Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁹ Edward Mead Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

¹⁰ Lukas Milevski, *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

¹¹ Colin Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28.

prosecuted a supremely effective grand strategy to vanquish the Axis powers during World War II, in the Cold War they went on to develop a NATO-based grand strategy for the deterrence, and if necessary, defeat, of the Warsaw Pact.¹² Whilst today the US and other great powers seek to advance their national grand strategies in time of overt peace (and through covert “hybrid” conflict).¹³ In other words, the need for grand strategy never ends, and according to Kennedy is “about the balancing of ends and means in [both] peacetime and in wartime.”¹⁴ Ultimately, an effective grand strategy in both instances, per Sun Zi, can make the difference between victory or triumph and defeat and ruin.¹⁵

Essentially, Martel affirms that “grand strategy provides a framework for outlining what kind of world the state seeks to build.”¹⁶ But because of its multidimensional nature (Green compares it to playing chess on three interacting multi-level chessboards [543]), it will be harder to achieve synergistic effects than with more narrowly defined “military strategy,” though the majority of core strategic axioms will still apply (Clausewitz, Sun Zi. etc.).¹⁷ Grand strategy is generally confined to state-actors, as only they possess the full spectrum of interests to motivate it, and the resources to support it (can we speak of a terrorist/Jihadi grand strategy?).¹⁸ It is also usually considered to be the prerogative of the *great powers* in the international system (though Kang applies it to *all* regional states; a proposition I would find debatable), since Paul van Hoofft notes that “middle or smaller powers are often implicitly or explicitly assumed to be too constrained to pursue grand strategies.”¹⁹ In sum, grand strategy requires “the measured application of ways and means to achieve national objectives in reference to ... threats and opportunities” (Green 2). Thus, the making and implementation of grand strategy through well-defined and executed statecraft is therefore an exceeding fraught and complex process requiring constant adaptations, and the volumes under review here do much to shed light on the record of the US itself in these respects.

¹² Mark Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); John Duffield, *Power Rules: The Evolution of NATO's Conventional Force Posture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

¹³ Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Paul M. Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 4.

¹⁵ Sunzi et al., *Sun Zi – the Art of War and Sun Bin – the Art of War* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2007).

¹⁶ William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5.

¹⁷ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁸ Paul Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy: Islamist Militancy, National Security, and the Pakistani State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁹ Paul van Hoofft, “Grand Strategy,” in *Oxford Bibliographies*, 2017.

Part I: American Grand Strategy: Three Reviews

Having defined the term grand strategy from a conceptual and practical standpoint and cautioned the reader to its caveats and frequent misuse, this review now considers the specific content of three major works investigating grand strategy in the American case. This part of the review initially presents the books in sequence with the following justification. Though the temporal focus of the three books reviewed here overlaps in parts—Green’s volume covers the historical *longue durée* of American policy; Campbell’s looks at a specific recent historical period: the Obama Administration, (although contains some historical material); whilst Kang’s addresses largely ongoing contemporary concerns—this represents no order of priority in any other respect. Additionally, the three books loosely cohere with the three main traditions of international relations (IR) theory respectively: realism (Green), liberalism (Campbell) and constructivism/critical approaches (Kang), as will be reinvestigated in the second part of this review essay.

By More than Providence

Michael Green’s work, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific since 1783*, is an epic account of US statecraft from American independence to the present and represents a considerable scholarly achievement. This long volume (at 548 pages of text) charts the spectacular rise to preeminence of the former British colonies to the superpower of today as it played out upon the Asia-Pacific stage.²⁰ After a brief introduction, in which the author lays out his argument and employment of the concept of “grand strategy,” it is divided into four parts, namely: 1) the rise of the United States; 2) the rise of Japan; 3) the rise of the Soviets; and 4) the rise of China. Through this structuring Green is able to indicate firstly how the US transformed itself into a great power and major actor in the Asia Pacific (the “seeds of strategy” [12]), then in the latter three parts examine how US Administrations saw off challenges to US predominance one-by-one from the mid-twentieth century, to the present struggle for mastery of the region with the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In this sense it is not only a historical record of American statecraft/diplomacy, but also emphasizes the lessons of history, going forward. He argues that the US has been consistently sensitive to the balance of power in Asia as much as it has been in its facing-down of hegemonic challenges from Asian powers (5) (or protective of its *own* regional hegemony?; see Kang below). Thus, according to Green, “pre-eminence in Asia as a core interest” has become firmly established as a guiding principle from the post-war period onward to the present day (245).

²⁰ Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Though the material presented is not totally new per se, its recapitulation through the lens of *grand strategy*—as conceptual and organizational scaffold—is a relatively novel approach that certainly does much to provide “a comprehensive historical study of American statecraft to Asia as a whole” (xiii), heretofore a relative lacuna in the extant literature.²¹ In addition, the book’s aim is to chart the history of American statecraft in the Asia Pacific with a view to informing the construction of “an enduring American grand strategy for the Asian Century and the rise of China” (1). It seeks to disprove the occasional doubts about “the ability of the United States to formulate or implement a grand strategy of any kind” (2). Green argues that “[o]ver the course of two hundred years, the United States has in fact developed a distinctive approach toward Asia and the Pacific” (4), and the contents adequately support this claim.

In brief, Green identifies five tensions that characterize American grand strategy: Europe vs. Asia; continental vs. maritime/China vs. Japan; defining the forward defense line; self-determination vs. universal values; and protectionism vs. free trade (6–12). Space limitations in this review essay cannot do full justice to the extensive content of the book, but the framework offered by Green artfully juxtaposes strategic thinkers that have actuated policymakers across the span of two hundred years, such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, Nicholas Spykman, Halford Mackinder, and George Kennan, to name but a sample, and their enduring influence upon American strategic culture. The reviewer found the first part on the “rise of the United States” especially interesting (the “seeds of strategy”) from the strategic thought of the founding fathers (John Quincy Adams in particular: “the nation’s first notable grand strategist” [27]), through to the establishment of Pacific and East Asia squadrons that were first created to protect American trade in tea (and opium). Through the course of the four historical periods enumerated above, Green reaches the conclusion that “American grand strategy has been episodic and inefficient, but in aggregate it has been effective” (541). In sum, he argues that a relatively consistent picture of American strategic culture, and hence the wellsprings of grand strategy, can thus be traced from independence to the present.

More than Providence benefits from the author’s spanning the bridge between academia and the policy world (ensuring policy relevance as well as academic rigour). Though Green is not currently in government, judging from anecdotal evidence contained in the IPSR and in the speeches of strategic commentators in the US, Green’s work has been read and absorbed by the policy establishment, and rightly so, as it contains much pertinent insight. The book is a well presented and written volume, with an eye for evocative anecdotes and is based upon a formidable array of sources and

²¹ Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice*.

interviews (though a dedicated bibliography would have been a useful addition). Nevertheless, at the risk of being captious, the reviewer occasionally noted some regrettable omissions, such as the essential work by Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, in the chapter on the Pacific War, to give one egregious example.²² The conclusion is surprisingly succinct in light of the vast historical scope of the volume, though this is not necessarily a bad thing.

The Pivot

Kurt Campbell's *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* concentrates primarily upon the Obama Administration's response to the rise of China (where it intersects with and expands upon Green's primarily historical account (chapter 15: "The Pivot"). "The Pivot" was designed to substantiate the grand strategy undertaken in the second half of the Obama administration, for which Campbell, as Assistant Secretary for Asian Affairs under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ("America's Pacific Century") was largely charged with defining and operationalizing.²³ In effect, this is a book that directly articulates government grand strategy as a supplement to other relevant official policy documents, most appropriately since Campbell was the "intellectual godfather of the Pivot" according to Gideon Rachman.²⁴ But it is more than this, as Campbell offers a much wider sweeping account of US motivations and interests in Asia set against a broad perspective on the current state of the region itself. The book is thus divided into eight lengthy chapters that set the various contexts for the Pivot (he prefers to retain the original "Pivot" label despite the later "rebalance" moniker adopted subsequently by the US DOD [29]).

As the author explains, the book advances "two overarching arguments," first: that "Asia should be placed more centrally in the formulation and execution of American foreign policy," and, second, to this end: "the United States should pursue a comprehensive and flexible strategy in Asia" (7). These prescriptions, especially in light of evolving events and policies, are hardly revolutionary now, if they were at the time of writing. To this purpose, chapter 1 defines and outlines the Pivot policy, for this was a "sometimes confounding and misunderstood policy initiative" (11), and he also addresses critiques of the Pivot here. Chapter 2 outlines the context and contours of a rising Asia in which US grand strategy must unfold. In line with some the tensions in US grand strategy elaborated by Green's work, chapter 3 provides his own conception of "eight enduring trends" that form the antecedents to the Pivot. These are: "the tyranny of distance; the danger of misunderstanding; the pursuit of commerce; the importance of faith [i.e.,

²² Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War against Japan, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

²³ Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy* 189 (November 2011): 56–63.

²⁴ Gideon Rachman, *Easternization: Asia's Rise and America's Decline from Obama to Trump and Beyond* (London: Penguin Random House, 2016), 73.

missionaries/freedom of religion]; the costs of war; the recurrence of distraction, the dearth of resources; and the pursuit of democracy,” all of which capture well American motivations and constraints in making grand strategy. Chapter 4 provides a historical review of US grand strategy in the region, and notes again the cardinal American imperative to “prevent the emergence of a dominating hegemon in Asia” (8) (as per Green above). Chapters 5 and 6 provide detailed policy prescriptions to support the Pivot strategy, whilst chapter 7 looks at the challenges, both internal and external, that may hinder its implementation. As a policy practitioner, Campbell embellishes his account (especially the preface and a dedicated chapter 8, subtitled “lessons from modern diplomacy”) with observations and anecdotes from his long government service, which offer interesting insights into the world of diplomacy.

Overall, Campbell’s book provides frameworks for understanding the US worldview and means of engagement with Asia, a review of historical interaction, and what basically amounts to a policy blueprint for current and future grand strategy (through the Pivot itself). The Pivot, he argues, is “the first major step down what remains a long and winding road to significantly reapportion US attention and resources toward Asia” (13); and “a work in progress” (26)—claims that cannot be gainsaid. An especially pertinent observation is Campbell’s identification of an “Asian operating system”; “The complex legal, security, and practical arrangements that have underscored four decades of Asian prosperity and security and provide the scaffolding for common efforts to solve transnational challenges” (345). Throughout the volume Campbell provides a wealth of information based upon his experience in the US and Asia, and a great many insights into American statecraft both in the past and going forward. Particularly interesting are his observations across the economic, defense, and even cultural trends of the region (chapter 2), which gives an illuminating exposition of this now pivotal, no pun intended, region *in toto*.

He is also strong on the “lessons of history” advising that “[i]f policy makers are to succeed today, they must better understand the origins and biases of yesterday’s policies and discern the ways in which their own plans fit into the rich fabric of yesteryear” (83). In respect to American historical engagement, as expected, he takes a largely positive view, and naturally supports the mainstream narrative that “[t]o this day the American forward deployed presence in Asia has brought peace and stability and underwritten Asia’s dizzying economic ascent (116). And while, like Green, he does not completely eschew mention of some of the more damaging and controversial episodes of US-Asia relations (the overthrow of governments in Hawai‘i and the Philippines, the Vietnam debacle), they tend to be relatively relegated to details. In line with Howard Zinn’s observation—that to mention as a detail/footnote atrocities or unforeseen calamities is to normalize them in a diminished aspect—more critical scholarship would necessarily accord

them greater attention.²⁵ In this vein, we now turn to the work of David Kang, who, though in a different way, provides a more critical account of US policy in the region of East Asia.

American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century

USC scholar David Kang provides a contrasting, even controversial, approach to the two more mainstream/establishment works of Green and Campbell in *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century*. This work is framed around the concept of “comprehensive security,” which arguably straddles the liberalist/constructivist/critical approaches to IR theory, and which maintains that security is better achieved through *cooperation* rather than *competition*. It includes, per Kang: “a wide range of diplomatic, institutional, and economic strategies—as well as military strategies” (4). Thus, Kang posits that this dynamic has taken hold among Asian states themselves, if not the United States, citing the following reasons: a lack of existential threat to national survival (Taiwan and North/South Korea excepted), and indicates a lack of clear internal and external balancing policies (costly arms-build ups or new military alliance formations) as evidence to support this claim. The absence of such costly signals among Asian states shows that they are not actively preparing for war/conflict, but are actually seeking cooperative security, a fact lost upon many Western analysts and US policy-makers. To wit, he argues that the “East Asian reality runs counter to a largely Western narrative that views China’s rise as a threat and the region as increasingly unstable” (3).

The arguments and supporting data (including extensive use of statistical data) unfold across ten chapters. The first two outline the book’s thesis: “comprehensive East Asian Security” and “costly signals in International bargaining.” The third chapter then provides an initial comparative case study with Latin America to set the context for the following five chapters which supply capsule case studies of countries including North Korea, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, and a combined chapter on Japan/Indonesia/Australia. In light of this, the last two chapters look at “America’s changing relations with East Asia,” concluding with a prescription for a “minimalist American grand strategy toward Asia,” and examining the implications for US regional statecraft going forward.

Kang’s scholarship has always taken a more controversial approach than the mainstream writing, such as the seminal article: “Getting Asia Wrong,” in which he challenges Western-centric views of Asia and its history; a project further advanced in his later book *East Asia Before the West*.²⁶ Kang’s work also underlines the importance of history, but does so from a contrary *Asian*

²⁵ Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2015).

²⁶ David Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 57–85.

perspective, that reverses the subject/object (US/Asia) approach of the former authors in large part (restoring agency to Asian actors). Thus, he maintains that one cannot “truly explain contemporary East Asia without reference to its own culture and history” (81). Though there is no space here to go into theoretical details, his combination of the “comprehensive security” concept with “bargaining theory” based upon the measurement of state (balancing) policy through the implementation of “costly signals” (per James Fearon’s work),²⁷ is a persuasive antidote to the assumptions that underly much of the (realist) mainstream strategic narrative about Asian security dynamics. Kang’s prescription for a minimalist grand strategy is novel in that: “It argues against the mainstream American view of liberal hegemony that sees America as an indispensable element of regional stability, pointing out that intrusive American attempts at a military-first leadership often makes things worse, not better” (15). The thumbnail sketches of the various east Asian countries are evidenced to support the book’s core thesis, whilst each chapter contains an interesting twist of its own, highlighting for example, particularly notable issues such as Japan’s crippling military personnel costs, Vietnam’s pattern of high-level visits and myth of historical animosity toward China, the ROK’s unfathomable historical mindset, and unspoken Australian ambivalence toward a US-China rivalry. Nevertheless, on account of the short length of the volume and individual country chapters, deep analysis of each case is precluded (the compression of Japan, Australia, and Indonesia into a combined chapter is problematic on this score).

However, while a compelling case is made in Kang’s book, it does tend to exclude some of the below-the-radar conflictual dynamics and signals occurring in the region. Though he posits that territorial brinksmanship (except in the case of Taiwan) is overstated by mainstream analysts, he largely ignores the fierce competition in the information/cybersphere and the use of “hybrid warfare” and “influence operations” that have come to light in recent years.²⁸ Thus, he reads the “marked absence of costly signals” (in military expenditure) and “almost no evidence of anything approaching an arms race in East Asia (10) from a traditionalist point of view, one that has become superseded by technological and tactical developments. Also, since the book was published in 2017, contra Kang’s prescriptions, the US under Trump has taken an explicitly competitive or combative stance versus China, including damaging trade wars, and this does some violence to his prior argument, if not his dire warnings of just such an eventuality.

²⁷ James Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379–414.

²⁸ Jon R. Lindsay, Tai Ming Cheung, and Derek S. Reveron, *China and Cybersecurity: Espionage, Strategy, and Politics in the Digital Domain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Part II: Discussion: Debating US Grand Strategy

This part of the review now draws together several prominent themes that appear in the volumes under review to form an aggregate picture of American grand strategy as it relates to the Asian region.

What Is “Asia” (from the American Perspective)?

One of the perennial problems for scholars as well as policymakers is how to define the Asian region as referent for the study or practice of grand strategy. Reflecting the lack of clarity and consensus upon this vital and unavoidable question the three authors use the terms “Asia Pacific” (Green), “Asia” (Campbell), and “East Asia” (Kang), respectively in their titles, though not always consistently in their texts (a practically unavoidable pitfall it must be noted). All are agreed that, as Campbell puts it, “the lion’s share of the history of the twenty-first century will be written in the Asia Pacific region” (1). But, how are these regions demarcated, who belongs to these different conceptions of region? Moreover, does the term “Indo Pacific,” as an expansion or alteration of the prior “Asia Pacific” definition, change the scope of grand strategy,²⁹ as seen from the Asia-Pacific-focused pivot to the Indo-Pacific focused IPSR? When Green wrote his book, he assumed that US and Australia preferred “Asia Pacific” region and (only) India the “Indo Pacific” (14), but this has of course now changed. In Kang’s case, Australia is included as an “East Asian” state, an assumption that many in Canberra would be gratified with, whilst many (such as Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamed) would contest.

This is important since each of the books talk of grand strategy but as applied to the Asian region. Nevertheless, “regional strategies cannot be detached from global strategy” according to Green (427), thus raising the question of the nature of interaction between *global* grand strategy and *regional* grand strategy. As Ortmann and Whittaker argue, “grand strategy has to be geographically specific.”³⁰ Thus, is it apposite to talk of the IPSR as a *regional component* of a global grand strategy (which would also include North Atlantic and Middle Eastern components)? Do the supposed grand strategies of East Asian powers (as per Kang) have *global* dimensions as well, or should they be demarcated as “theatre” (i.e., regional) strategies? Moreover, one of the running themes in the books is the sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, tension between US grand strategy and its preferred alliance architecture with local attempts to move toward regionalism, through the creation of multilateral regional organizations, such as ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Naturally, for reasons discussed

²⁹ Rory Medcalf, “The Indo-Pacific: What’s in a Name?” *The American Interest* 9, no. 2: 58–66.

³⁰ Stefanie Ortmann and Nick Whittaker, “Geopolitics and Grand Strategy” in *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, eds. John Baylis, James J. Wirtz, and Colin S. Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 321.

in this review and the books themselves, Washington not only prefers broader conceptions of the region (Asia Pacific, Indo Pacific) rather than East Asia, but this also defines its approach to regional organization preferences—for example APEC and East Asia Summit (EAS) in preference to ASEAN+3. In other words, “open” (inclusive of the US) against “closed” (exclusive) regionalism, with the latter typically seen as prejudicial to American strategic interests.

American Grand Strategy through the Lens of IR Theory

Juxtaposing the three different accounts of American grand strategy is also instructive from the point of view of how IR theories (and the political worldviews within which they are often embedded) are put into the service of policy analysis. Though of course, scholarly works will frequently defy definitive categorization, it could be claimed that Green’s work is emblematic of the realist tradition of IR, Campbell’s a carefully-measured liberalism (or at least “liberal internationalism”), and Kang’s a more critical/constructivist perspective. In the first case, as an establishment figure that worked for a Republican administration and has published leading works on the realist aspects of Japanese foreign policy it is unsurprising that the core precepts of the realist worldview find expression through this current work.³¹ Thus, in Green’s estimation the hard-headed realism of the Theodore Roosevelt and Nixon/Kissinger Administrations are contrasted favourably with some of their Democratic Party counterparts (Clinton: “constantly changing definitions of US interest” (458) and Obama “contradicted himself constantly” [533]). Campbell’s Pivot policy contains a strong liberalist element, with economic and diplomatic instruments of the Pivot supposed to have been co-equal with military aspects, as he was at pains to make clear (which places him closer to Kang’s “comprehensive security” approach enumerated above).

Kang, as it has been noted, rejects some of the mainstream assumptions taken for granted by establishment figures of the right and left and the dominant tradition of IR realism. Thus, the three works considered here each seek to present their preferred narratives of American grand strategy in line with their world views, and contrasting these makes for a stimulating intellectual exercise. It also reinvestigates the earlier debate about whether the region is still “ripe for rivalry” (realism) or “set for stability” (liberalism/constructivism) initiated in the 1990s.³² Naturally, Green’s perspective portends—and US policies appear to currently bear out—a more competitive arena in Asia, whilst Kang posits that this is a false (artificial) narrative, and

³¹ Michael Green, *Japan’s Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³² Aaron Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia,” *International Security* 18, no. 3 (Winter 1993–1994): 5–33; Thomas Berger, “Set for Stability? Prospects for Conflict and Cooperation in East Asia,” *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 3 (2000): 405–428.

Campbell seems to be attempting to “hedge his bets” between hoping for the best, whilst preparing for the worst.

American Strategic Culture: Primacy under Threat?

This brings us to the question of American strategic culture, which is expounded in extensive detail in the works under review. Green’s work meticulously charts the reference points of American strategic culture in respect to the Asia-Pacific region to indicate how it acquired its current shape, noting how: “For over two centuries, Americans have been tied to the Pacific by commerce, faith geography, and self-defense” (1). On the basis of this historical tradition he claims that Theodore “Roosevelt’s grand strategy deserves ... accolades, and his administration merits a central place—perhaps the central place—in establishing the core tenets that guide American strategy toward Asia today” (104). But Roosevelt’s grand strategy was hard-headed *Realpolitik* in the imperialist mould (no matter how much American writers attempt to occlude this, or painfully distinguish it from European perfidy in the Far East), so this assertion is telling as to what still apparently motivates US grand strategy today. Rachman concurs that “[m]ost of the US foreign policy establishment—in both parties—still holds fast to the idea that the United States can and should remain the dominant power in the twenty-first century.”³³ And Kang agrees that “there is a long running and consistent view about American grand strategy toward the world in general, and East Asia in particular” (192), though with changing post-imperial/colonial times it is dubbed “liberal hegemony” (or “Pax Americana”), though it is now firmly anchored in US military primacy in the region (arguably for waning lack of primacy in other spheres such as economics and soft power).³⁴ Thus, as Ortmann and Whittaker caution us: “In an evolving international environment, it is dangerous to continue implementing policies and approaches that no longer fit the times.”³⁵

This liberal hegemony and the military supremacy that underwrites it is a common good for Asia is an article of faith among many US policy makers. And yet Kang gives us cause for doubt on several counts. First, this primacy is not an unalloyed public good: “Logically the US military presence is clearly not a public good that is available to all” (167). Secondly, this primacy is eroding, so that hypothetically a further chapter in Green’s history (written in 2025 or 2050) might be the “eclipse of American power in Asia”—there are hints at this already in alternative literatures.³⁶ As Kang argues: “The

³³ Gideon Rachman, *Easternization: Asia’s Rise and America’s Decline from Obama to Trump and Beyond* (London: The Penguin Random House, 2016), 19.

³⁴ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

³⁵ Ortmann and Whittaker, “Geopolitics and Grand Strategy,” 324.

³⁶ Hugh White, *Without America: Australia in the New Asia* (Carlton: Black Inc., 2017); Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018).

United States used to be the sole social and economic focus, but now it is only first among equals” (183). Thus, despite the huge investment America has made in the liberal order, not only are challenges by other states emerging (sometimes dubbed “revisionist” powers), but the US itself under Trump’s mantra of “America First,” appears to be walking back from it, meaning “US leadership can no longer be taken for granted” (184). Third, despite the totemic status that primacy has assumed in the Washington mindset, Kang asserts that “primacy has no intrinsic value” (162). The country would therefore be better served by a minimalist, rather than a maximalist or military-first US grand strategy: “one that emphasizes diplomacy and economic relations, and that avoids entangling the United States in regional issues to the extent that is possible” (14–15). And lastly, that the assumption that Asia would collapse into anarchy without such a hegemonic role is false, since the “American presence, while welcomed, is not nearly as central to the functioning of the region as might be believed. The US is a powerful patron, but it is not indispensable to the region” (14). It may also perpetuate regional conflicts “frozen in place” as legacies of the San Francisco System.³⁷ He thereby concludes that “[t]he implications for the United States are direct and clear: get out of the way ... But America blunders in anyway” (205). Thus, these volumes also add to ongoing debates on US decline and the continuation or collapse of the US-led liberal international order and which brings us to the final theme: Chinese challenges to that order.³⁸

American Grand Strategy and the Rise of China

This brings us to the last point for consideration, what do these volumes contribute to our understanding of the American grand strategic approach to the central question: the rise of China? Kang, who also authored *China Rising*, squarely faces the fact that the PRC will certainly be the region’s and world’s largest economy in the future, and then fill out all other aspects of its power (contra to David Shambaugh’s *China: The Partial Power*): “the only question in the region is how big the gap between China and its neighbours will become” (32).³⁹ Certainly Chinese strategists have squarely taken aim at America’s lingering primacy, and have developed their own plans to gradually supplant it.⁴⁰ The other authors, instinctively believe, or wish to believe, that the US will still remain dominant (and there is an extensive literature already

³⁷ Kimie Hara, *The San Francisco System and Its Legacies: Continuation, Transformation and Historical Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

³⁸ G. John Ikenberry, “The End of Liberal International Order?” *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 7–23.

³⁹ David Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Mingfu Liu, *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era* (New York: CN Times Books, 2015).

debating the merits of both sides).⁴¹ Yet, all of the authors note the centrality of China to questions of regional order, and to differing degrees as the focal point of US grand strategy. For Campbell, the Pivot “is about increasing ties with Asia, not containing China” (22), and he “rejects the ‘China first’ approach to Asian diplomacy” (23), rather preferring one that “embeds China policy within the much wider and more inclusive regional framework” (23). The Pivot of course came at a time where the Obama Administration was still hopeful that China would conform the “responsible stakeholder” role that Robert Zoellick had assigned for it. Indeed, Campbell empathizes the need for a balance in engagement and firmness, arguing that “The United States must balance between clear demonstrations of positive engagement with Beijing where possible and firm displays of preparation and vigilance when necessary” (321).

Though neither Campbell or Green at the time of writing could foresee the recent developments in US policy toward China—the end of “strategic partnership” (an Obama era plan now considered hollow), and the explicit identification of the PRC as a “strategic competitor” and “revisionist power.” The “engage and balance” mantra of the Pivot-era is now over, with Washington throwing down the gauntlet of strategic rivalry with trade wars and other “costly” signals it is ready to compete head-on with Beijing.⁴² Nevertheless, both Campbell and Green predicted that the more China flexed its muscle regionally, the more indispensable the US would become as a patron to threatened states. Campbell argues that “China’s neighbours are moving to embrace US presence to counterbalance China’s improving capabilities” (68). While Green adds that “[t]hough China is attempting to combine attraction and coercion toward neighbouring states, the net effect of Chinese policies has thus far been to push most governments closer to the United States” (543). These views have now gained traction as an axiom of regional security dynamics upon which the US has founded its IPSR, in which it makes great play of all its regional allies and partnerships emphasised as “networked security architecture” and “intra-Asian relationships.”⁴³

But Kang begs to differ, arguing that the rise of China needs to be seriously rethought by policy makers: “China is not a problem to be solved, but rather an immense, complex, and rapidly changing country that has to be lived with” (14). He also sees the implications differently, rather than following Campbell’s conventional assertion that “China’s neighbours are moving to

⁴¹ Joseph Nye, *Is the American Century Over?* (Malden: Polity Press, 2015); Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).

⁴² Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

⁴³ United States Department of Defense, “Introduction,” in *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (United States Department of Defense, 2019).

embrace US presence to counterbalance China's improving capabilities" (68). Kang says otherwise, arguing that Asian states prefer good relations with both superpowers, have no inclination to choose sides, and that "East Asian leaders and peoples share some, but not all American priorities" (6). Thus, in contradistinction to the exact policy now being pursued by the current US administration, and which finds wholehearted support among realists, "an American grand strategy that emphasizes a confrontational approach to China is unlikely to attract many Asian participants ... [rather they] will back away slowly" (189). While this view has clearly lost the battle for policy influence, he may yet be proved right from an analytical point of view. Indeed, the absence of "costly signals" from most regional states in "hard-balancing" China supports this view: shouldn't we see greater defense expenditure by Japan, India, and Southeast Asia regional states, and new military alliances between them? Instead, we are seeing more "hedging activity" among such states, and the substitution of formal military alliance pacts with looser "strategic partnerships"—more low-key, versatile, but less committed security alignments that are the consequence of uncertainty as to how the future power balance will play out.⁴⁴

Conclusions

An effective grand strategy that matches objectives and allocation of resources (means and ends) has always presented a formidable challenge to the best policymakers leading the great powers. Sometimes they have measured up, other times they have been found wanting, as these books clearly illustrate. The practice of grand strategy will only get harder in the twenty-first century due to the complexities wrought by the rise of unqualified/populist leaders, the condition of economic interdependence, and the expansion of strategic competition into the realms of cyber space/information warfare. This means that "the margin of error in American statecraft toward Asia is narrowing, and the costs of inconsistent stewardship of US policy will rise," according to Green (428). The three books reviewed here make significant contributions to the debate over American grand strategy and contain many prescriptive elements. All three will be indispensable to analysts, students, and scholars not only of grand strategy, but of American diplomacy and the Indo Pacific region more generally.

Together they represent an interesting spectrum of thought across the nexus of academia and policymaking. Above all, they shed a great deal of light on questions of regional security order including: the nature of the region itself, the differing perspectives of IR theory, US strategic culture, and the rise of China. Green and Campbell offer more mainstream accounts

⁴⁴ Van Jackson, "Power, Trust, and Network Complexity: Three Logics of Hedging in Asian Security," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 14, no. 3 (2014): 331–356.

of the conventional strategic thinking in the US and how it informs grand strategy, but Kang calls for a rethink of these cardinal strategic assumptions. He argues that “[w]hile security scholars naturally tend to focus on the military aspects of American grand strategy, the reality is that economic and social relations are perhaps more consequential on a daily basis than are military ones” (186). At present, there is recognition that the US should use all instruments of its power at its disposal to secure its interests in the Asian century, but events that have partially overtaken the accounts given here (which were published 2016–2018). We have now entered a new era of great power strategic rivalry, and perhaps a new “Cold War.” As indicated throughout this essay, the books reviewed here are strong on the “lessons of history” (for Green and Campbell, *American* history, and for Kang, *Asian* history). Time will tell if these lessons have been learned. Since, after all as Martel reminds us “the historical dimension is critical to developing the analytic foundations of grand strategy.”⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice*, 3.