

THE
NEXT
100
YEARS

A FORECAST FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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era: the U.S.-jihadist war. The jihadists could not win, if by winning we mean the re-creation of the Caliphate, an Islamic empire. Divisions in the Islamic world were too powerful to overcome, and the United States was too powerful to simply be defeated. The chaos could never have congealed into a jihadist victory.

This era is actually less a coherent movement than a regional spasm, the result of a force field being removed. Ethnic and religious divisions in the Islamic world mean that even if the United States is expelled from the region, no stable political base will emerge. The Islamic world has been divided and unstable for over a thousand years, and hardly looks to become more united anytime soon. At the same time, even an American defeat in the region would not undermine basic American global power. Like the Vietnam War, it would be merely a transitory event.

At the moment, the U.S.-jihadist conflict appears so powerful and of such overwhelming importance that it is difficult to imagine it simply fading away. Serious people talk about a century of such conflict dominating the world, but under the twenty-year perspective outlined in the early pages of this book, the prospect of a world still transfixed by a U.S.-jihadist war in 2020 is the least likely outcome. In fact, what is happening in the Islamic world ultimately will not matter a great deal. If we assume that the upward trajectory of U.S. power remains intact, then 2020 should find the United States facing very different challenges.

AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY AND THE ISLAMIC WARS

There is one more element of the American dynamic that we must cover: the grand strategy that drives American foreign policy. The American response to 9/11 seemed to make no sense, and on the surface it didn't. It looked chaotic and it looked random, but underneath, it was to be expected. When one steps back and takes stock, the seemingly random actions of the United States actually make a good deal of sense.

Grand strategy starts where policy making ends. Let's assume for a moment that Franklin Roosevelt had not run for a third term in 1940. Would

Japan and Germany have behaved differently? Could the United States have acquiesced to Japanese domination of the western Pacific? Would the United States have accepted the defeat of Britain and its fleet at German hands? The details might have changed, but it is hard to imagine the United States not getting into the war or the war not ending in an Allied victory. A thousand details might have changed, but the broadest outlines of this conflict as determined by grand strategy would have remained the same.

Could there have been an American strategy during the Cold War other than containment of the Soviet Union? The United States couldn't invade Eastern Europe. The Soviet army was simply too large and too strong. On the other hand, the United States couldn't allow the Soviet Union to seize Western Europe because if the Soviet Union controlled Western Europe's industrial plant, it would overwhelm the United States in the long run. Containment was not an optional policy; it was the only possible American response to the Soviet Union.

All nations have grand strategies, though this does not mean all nations can achieve their strategic goals. Lithuania's goal is to be free of foreign occupation. But its economy, demography, and geography make it unlikely that Lithuania will ever achieve its goal more than occasionally and temporarily. The United States, unlike most other countries in the world, has achieved most of its strategic goals, which I will outline in a moment. Its economy and society are both geared toward this effort.

A country's grand strategy is so deeply embedded in that nation's DNA, and appears so natural and obvious, that politicians and generals are not always aware of it. Their logic is so constrained by it that it is an almost unconscious reality. But from a geopolitical perspective, both the grand strategy of a country and the logic driving a country's leaders become obvious.

Grand strategy is not always about war. It is about all of the processes that constitute national power. But in the case of the United States, perhaps more than for other countries, grand strategy *is* about war, and the interaction between war and economic life. The United States is, historically, a warlike country.

The United States has been at war for about 10 percent of its existence. This statistic includes only major wars—the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, Viet-

nam. It does not include minor conflicts like the Spanish-American War or Desert Storm. During the twentieth century, the United States was at war 15 percent of the time. In the second half of the twentieth century, it was at war 22 percent of the time. And since the beginning of the twenty-first century, in 2001, the United States has been constantly at war. War is central to the American experience, and its frequency is constantly increasing. It is built into American culture and deeply rooted in American geopolitics. Its purpose must be clearly understood.

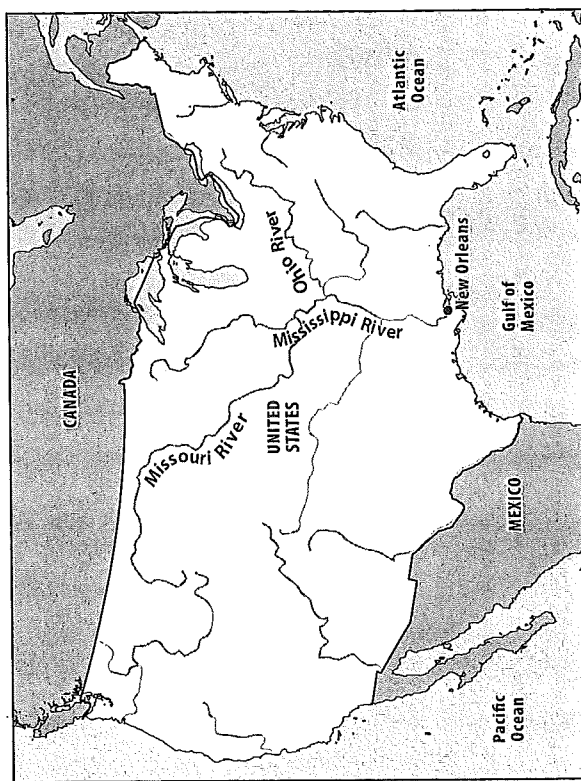
America was born out of war and has continued to fight to this day at an ever increasing pace. Norway's grand strategy might be more about economics than warfare, but U.S. strategic goals, and U.S. grand strategy, originate in fear. The same is true of many nations. Rome did not set out to conquer the world. It set out to defend itself, and in the course of that effort it became an empire. The United States would have been quite content at first not to have been attacked and defeated by the British, as it was in the War of 1812. Each fear, however, once alleviated, creates new vulnerabilities and new fears. Nations are driven by fear of losing what they have. Consider the following in terms of this fear.

The United States has five geopolitical goals that drive its grand strategy. Note that these goals increase in magnitude, ambition, and difficulty as you go down the list.

I: THE COMPLETE DOMINATION OF NORTH AMERICA BY THE UNITED STATES ARMY

Had the United States remained a nation of discrete states existing between the Atlantic coast and the Allegheny mountains, it is extremely unlikely that it would have survived. It not only had to unite but had to spread into the vast territory between the Alleghenies and the Rocky Mountains. This gave the United States not only strategic depth but also some of the richest agricultural land in the world. Even more important, it was land with a superb system of navigable rivers that allowed the country's agricultural surplus to be shipped to world markets, creating a class of businessmen-farmers that is unique in history.

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 gave the United States title to this land. But it was the Battle of New Orleans in 1814, in which Andrew Jackson defeated the British, that gave the nation real control of the region, since New Orleans was the single choke point of the entire river system. If Yorktown founded the nation, the Battle of New Orleans founded its economy. And what secured this in turn was the Battle of San Jacinto, a few hundred miles west of New Orleans, where the Mexican army was defeated by Texans and thus could never pose a threat to the Mississippi River basin again. The defeat of the Mexican army was not inevitable. Mexico was in many ways a more developed and powerful country than the United States. Its defeat made the U.S. Army the dominant power in North America and secured the continent for the United States—a vast and rich country that no one could challenge.



U.S. River System

2: THE ELIMINATION OF ANY THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES BY ANY POWER IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

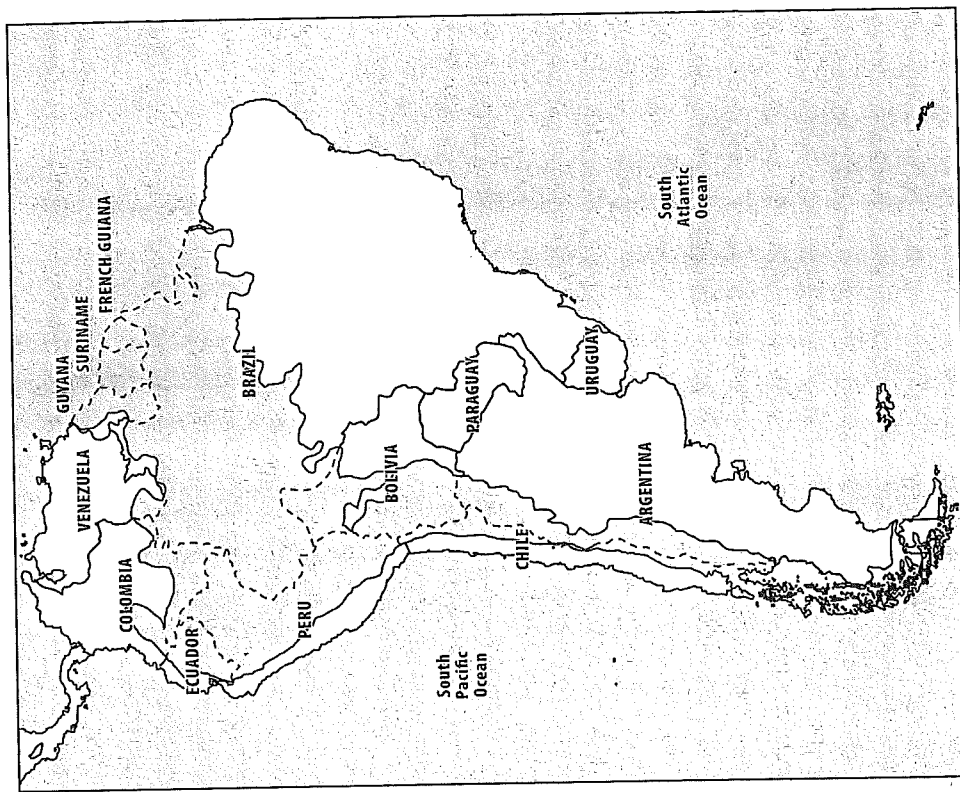
With North America secured, the only other immediate threat came from Latin America. In reality, North and South America are islands, not really connected: Panama and Central America are impassable by large armies. South America's unification into a single entity is remote. When you look at a map of South America, leaving out impassable terrain, you see that there can be no transcontinental power: the continent is sliced in two (see map, page 43). So there is no chance of a native threat to the United States emerging from South America.

The major threats in the hemisphere came from European powers with naval bases in South and Central America and the Caribbean, as well as land forces in Mexico. That is what the Monroe Doctrine was about—long before the United States had the ability to stop the Europeans from having bases there, it made blocking the Europeans a strategic imperative. The only time the United States really worries about Latin America is when a foreign power has bases there.

3: COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE MARITIME APPROACHES TO THE UNITED STATES BY THE NAVY IN ORDER TO PRECLUDE ANY POSSIBILITY OF INVASION

In 1812, the British navy sailed up the Chesapeake and burned Washington. Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States was terrified that the British, using their overwhelming control of the North Atlantic, would shut off its access to the ocean, strangling the United States. It was not always a paranoid fear: the British did consider this on more than one occasion. This general problem was, in other contexts, the origin of the American obsession with Cuba, from the Spanish-American War through the Cold War.

Having secured the hemisphere in the late nineteenth century, the



South America: Impassable Terrain

United States has an interest in keeping the sea lanes approaching its borders free of foreign naval power. The United States secured its Pacific approaches first. During the Civil War it acquired Alaska. In 1898 it annexed Hawaii. Those two actions taken together closed off the threat of any enemy fleet being able to approach the continent from the west, by eliminating any anchorage for supplying a fleet. The United States secured the Atlantic by using World War II to take advantage of British weakness, driving it from near the U.S. coast, and by the end of World War II had created a fleet of such enormous power that the British were unable to operate in the Atlantic without U.S. approval. This made the United States effectively invulnerable to invasion.

4: COMPLETE DOMINATION OF THE WORLD'S OCEANS TO FURTHER SECURE U.S. PHYSICAL SAFETY AND GUARANTEE CONTROL OVER THE INTERNATIONAL TRADING SYSTEM

The fact that the United States emerged from World War II not only with the world's largest navy but also with naval bases scattered around the world changed the way the world worked. As I mentioned previously, any seagoing vessel—commercial or military, from the Persian Gulf to the South China Sea to the Caribbean—could be monitored by the United States Navy, who could choose to watch it, stop it, or sink it. From the end of World War II onward, the combined weight of all of the world's existing fleets was insignificant compared to American naval power.

This highlights the single most important geopolitical fact in the world: the United States controls all of the oceans. No other power in history has been able to do this. And that control is not only the foundation of America's security but also the foundation of its ability to shape the international system. No one goes anywhere on the seas if the United States doesn't approve. At the end of the day, maintaining its control of the world's oceans is the single most important goal for the United States geopolitically.

5: THE PREVENTION OF ANY OTHER NATION FROM CHALLENGING U.S. GLOBAL NAVAL POWER

Having achieved the unprecedented feat of dominating all of the world's oceans, the United States obviously wanted to continue to hold them. The simplest way to do this was to prevent other nations from building navies, and this could be done by making certain that no one was motivated to build navies—or had the resources to do so. One strategy, "the carrot," is to make sure that everyone has access to the sea without needing to build a navy. The other strategy, "the stick," is to tie down potential enemies in land-based confrontations so that they are forced to exhaust their military dollars on troops and tanks, with little left over for navies.

The United States emerged from the Cold War with both an ongoing interest and a fixed strategy. The ongoing interest was preventing any Eurasian power from becoming sufficiently secure to divert resources to navy building. Since there was no longer a single threat of Eurasian hegemony, the United States focused on the emergence of secondary, regional hegemons who might develop enough regional security to allow them to begin probing out to sea. The United States therefore worked to create a continually shifting series of alliances designed to tie down any potential regional hegemon.

The United States had to be prepared for regular and unpredictable interventions throughout the Eurasian landmass. After the fall of the Soviet Union, it did engage in a series of operations designed to maintain the regional balance and block the emergence of a regional power. The first major intervention was in Kuwait, where the United States blocked Iraqi ambitions after the Soviets were dead but not yet buried. The next was in Yugoslavia, with the goal of blocking the emergence of Serbian hegemony over the Balkans. The third series of interventions was in the Islamic world, designed to block al Qaeda's (or anyone else's) desire to create a secure Islamic empire. The interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq were both a part of this effort.

For all the noise and fuss, these were minor affairs. In Iraq, the largest operation, the United States has used fewer than 200,000 troops and suffered fewer than 5,000 killed. This is about 6 to 8 percent of the casualties suffered in Vietnam, and about 1 percent of the casualties in World War II.

For a country of over a quarter billion people, an occupation force of this size is trivial. The tendency of the United States to overdramatize minor interventions derives from its relative immaturity as a nation (and I say this as a parent of someone who served two tours in Iraq).

The foregoing allows us to understand the American response to the Islamist attacks and much else that has happened. Having systematically achieved its strategic goals, the United States had the ultimate aim of preventing the emergence of any major power in Eurasia. The paradox, however, is as follows: the goal of these interventions was never to achieve something—whatever the political rhetoric might have said—but to prevent something. The United States wanted to prevent stability in areas where another power might emerge. Its goal was not to stabilize, but to destabilize. And that explains how the United States responded to the Islamic earthquake—it wanted to prevent a large, powerful Islamic state from emerging.

Rhetoric aside, the United States has no overriding interest in peace in Eurasia. The United States also has no interest in winning a war outright. As with Vietnam or Korea, the purpose of these conflicts is simply to block a power or destabilize the region, not to impose order. In due course, even outright American defeat is acceptable. However, the principle of using minimum force, when absolutely necessary, to maintain the Eurasian balance of power is—and will remain—the driving force of U.S. foreign policy throughout the twenty-first century. There will be numerous Kosovos and Iraqs in unanticipated places at unexpected times. U.S. actions will appear irrational, and would be if the primary goal is to stabilize the Balkans or the Middle East. But since the primary goal will more likely be simply to block or destabilize Serbia or al Qaeda, the interventions will be quite rational. They will never appear to really yield anything nearing a “solution,” and will always be done with insufficient force to be decisive.

AFTER THE AFTERSHOCKS

The international system is now badly out of balance. The United States is so powerful that it is almost impossible for the rest of the world to control

American behavior. The natural tendency of the international move to equilibrium. In an unbalanced world, smaller powers against larger, unchecked powers. They therefore tend to form coalitions against other countries to match the larger power in strength. After the United States was defeated in Vietnam, it joined with China to control the Soviets, who appeared to be getting too strong.

Creating coalitions to contain the United States in the twenty-first century will be extremely difficult. Weaker countries find it easier to reach an accommodation with the Americans than to join an anti-U.S. coalition—building a coalition and holding it together is an onerous task. And if the coalition falls apart, as coalitions tend to do, the United States can be an unforgiving giant.

As a result, we see this contradiction: on the one hand, the United States is deeply resented and feared; on the other hand, individual nations still try to find a way to get along with the United States. This disequilibrium will dominate the twenty-first century, as will efforts to contain the United States. It will be a dangerous century, particularly for the rest of the world.

In geopolitics there is a key measure known as the “margin of error.” It predicts how much room a country has for making mistakes. The margin of error consists of two parts: the types of danger faced by a nation and the amount of power it possesses. Some countries have very small margins of error. They tend to obsess over the smallest detail of foreign policy, aware that the slightest misstep can be catastrophic. Israel and Palestine do not have massive margins of error, because of their small size and their location. Iceland, on the other hand, has a lot of room for mistakes. It is small but lives in a roomy neighborhood.

The United States has a huge margin of error. It is safe in North America and has tremendous power. The United States therefore tends to be careless in how it exercises its power globally. It's not stupid. It simply doesn't need to be more careful—in fact, being more careful could often reduce its efficiency. Like a banker prepared to make bad loans in the expectation that he will do well in the long run, the United States has a policy of making moves that other countries see as reckless. The results would be painful or even devastating for other countries. The United States moves on and flourishes.