

The Challenge of the Sole Superpower in the Postmodern World Order

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Abstract: To pursue and support its strategic goals and interests, the United States as the sole superpower will require a complete reordering of its assessment of the post–Cold War strategic environment, which is now characterized by the postmodern condition. Recognizing the basic structure of postmodern thought that dominates much of global society and affects concepts of sovereignty, power, war, and peace is essential. Some states and nonstates have already employed a strategic approach that exploits the postmodern condition. Strategists and strategic leaders must now identify the contours of the postmodernist strategic environment to develop a strategic design that allows the superpower to pursue its interests and fulfill its role of order and balance by employing the very skills and precepts that the postmodernists have rejected.

Keywords: superpower, strategy, postmodernism, strategic design, strategic environment, war

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States remains the only superpower in that it has no potential strategic competitors and has significantly more capability than any other state to craft a strategy and employ the means of national power to maintain the existing order—support for international norms and the defense of liberal values and human rights. Although China and Russia also have the capability to exercise strategy and employ the elements of national power, each has significant limitations to do so. As a superpower, American economic and military power is sufficient to

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influence allies and partners as well as dissuade or deter rivals, and its security and other vital interests cannot be threatened or challenged by any single state or potential combination of states. The United States alone commands enough power to build coalitions and define the circumstances under which a coalition will commit armed force.¹

The 2017 U.S. *National Security Strategy* states unequivocally that the United States is “the world’s lone superpower,” whose “values and influence, underwritten by American power, make the world more free, secure, and prosperous.” The United States seeks “a fair and reciprocal international economic system [that] will enhance our security and advance prosperity and peace in the world.” The overall strategic goal is “a global order of peace, security, and prosperity” based on “strong, sovereign nations . . . grounded in the realization that American principles are a lasting force for good in the world.” More significantly, the sole superpower seeks to sustain “favorable balances of power” by summoning “the will and capabilities to compete and prevent unfavorable shifts in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East.”²

Despite American efforts to order the international environment in its favor by extending its influence in key regions and supporting global prosperity through economic integration and the spread of free markets, and despite its attempts to create an international system based on both a global and a regional balance of power of states that would support American security as well as reflect American values, the international system over which the United States’ currently presides is not operating in conjunction with its interests. The post–Cold War strategic environment has exposed regional and subregional antagonisms and nationalist ambitions. Although war is no longer the means for challenging or changing the international system, as was the case in the previous century, and challenges from state actors have diminished, nonstate and substate actors have filled the gap. States in the present international system have other security concerns and interests, often not in line with the United States, requiring them either to seek to influence the superpower or to act independently. Values and perspectives, as well as the involvement of other actors, have increasingly shaped the superpower’s interest in intervention, reinforcing a realization that it can no longer influence or control events at will.³

These conditions have shaped the way the United States assesses the post–Cold War security environment and influences its behavior as a strategic actor. The reaction appears to be an unsettling sense that the superpower is in danger of losing its status. The *National Security Strategy* reflects this point of view. “As we took our political, economic, and military advantages for granted,” the document asserts, “other actors steadily implemented their long-term plans to challenge America and to advance agendas opposed to the United States, our allies, and our partners.” The *National Security Strategy* then points to “the revi-

sionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and transnational threat organizations, particularly jihadist terrorist groups” as rivals who “compete across political, economic, and military arenas, and use technology and information to accelerate these contests in order to shift regional balances of power in their favor.”⁴

As expected of a superpower, the United States is consumed by concerns of a potential change in the balance of power, encompassing a strategy that views any state’s actions primarily in terms of the pursuit of power and influence contrary to the superpower’s interests. Thus, the United States describes Russia in the *National Security Strategy* as having the ambition to become a great power again, using growing military capabilities “to establish spheres of influence near its borders.” China is described as expanding its power at the expense of other states, while also “building the most capable and well-funded military in the world,” which clearly implies that the United States perceives an impending threat to its dominance.⁵

Assuming that its national interests and objectives are self-apparent and benign, the strategic leaders of the sole superpower form impressions and attitudes that can lead to oversimplification, while ignoring the conditions that are shaping strategic behavior. This viewpoint can lead to U.S. resistance to alternative perspectives regarding the nature of the strategic environment or resistance to accepting new information. The result is that strategic leaders are unable to assess risk or correctly identify threats.⁶ As its primary strategic document indicates, the United States is still coming to grips with what being a superpower currently means in the post–Cold War strategic environment. The forces of globalization and information technology are fracturing the structure of modern societies and have threatened the legitimacy of the state. More importantly, a new strategic environment based on a postmodern condition has emerged, one in which the United States still has not yet recognized or defined its role. U.S. strategic leaders must learn to recognize this postmodern condition, as it now defines the strategic environment and how this environment shapes the sole superpower’s employment of its elements of power in pursuit of its strategic interests.

Postmodernism has become part of a global cultural phenomenon in the post–Cold War period and is the defining condition of contemporary social and intellectual discourse, touching philosophy, history, politics, and theology. The death of Marxism as a viable ideological construct, combined with the failure of modernity to serve as the means of ordering the world, has created a vacuum into which the forces of globalization and information technology have filled and have fractured the structure of modern societies as well as threatened the legitimacy of the state. The entire world of ideas has shifted against traditional modernist claims to knowledge, truth, and reason as an inherent part of human

nature. In its place is nothing less than a redefinition of both knowledge and of reality itself. In broad, general terms, *postmodernism* is a form of theorizing about societies. Postmodernism represents a substantial reorganization of how people relate to their environment. It encourages different modalities of meaning, including the transformation of cognitive boundaries and the ways those boundaries are constituted. Postmodernists have established new images of society, language, and humanity, marked by a distrust of science and reason. Culture has been deconstructed as a set of myths produced within a communication system; the power of images and signs stands in for reality. Information is the central commodity that is consumed.⁷

Jean Baudrillard, a French postmodern theorist, whose philosophical and cultural analysis of media, information, and technologies in contemporary life led him to identify the emergence of a different social order. Reality exists in what he described as the simulacra of endlessly repeated signs, symbols, images, or representations that constitute the collective experience. Society functions as a model of itself, creating what Baudrillard calls *hyperreality*. In turn, the media serves to interpret the hyperreal as real for the consumer. In his essay “The Vanishing Point of Communication,” Baudrillard wrote,

we now live in the fantasy of the screen, of the interface, of contiguity, and networks . . . the interactivity of men has been turned into an interactivity of screens. We are images one to another, the only destiny of an image being the following image on the screen.⁸

The rise of the media-saturated society of the post–Cold War world has created a new structural grammar whose rules for the production of meaning, composed of a series of signs and images, are based on the logic of desire. Existing models based on the logic of reason no longer apply to the world of simulated reality that pervades the postmodern world. Signs no longer replicate reality. No basic foundation exists on which to engage in a systematic understanding of society. No one can be sure of what is known or what can even be considered correct. As Baudrillard again observed, “every event is virtually without consequences . . . open to all possible interpretations, none of which can fix meaning.”⁹

Postmodern theory has discredited two of the core assumptions of modern social theory: subject-centered reason and the stability of meaning.¹⁰ Postmodernism has offered new theories and conceptions of society, history, and politics, exploring the most basic questions: What passes for knowledge? What is the relationship between power, knowledge, and truth? Knowledge is no longer held to be inherently good, nor is it ever complete; reality is relative, indistinct, indeterminate, and communal. Human intellect alone is not the arbiter

of truth; truths of the past are no longer valid for the present. Truth, instead, is a social construction, existing only within a community. In the words of French postmodernist Michel Foucault, truth “is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption . . . it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (‘ideological’ struggle).”¹¹

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard asserted in his highly influential work *The Postmodern Condition* that to exercise political power, knowledge must be controlled. “Knowledge and power,” he wrote, “are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?” Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of authorities who attempt to provide a single dominant universal explanation for events; instead, knowledge “refines our sensitivities to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable.” Technological transformations will not allow the nature of knowledge to be unchanged, he argues; instead, it will be mercantiled. “It is conceivable,” Lyotard asserted, “that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor.”¹²

Lyotard asserted that, in a world in which reality is destabilized, the grand narrative, used to assert unifying authority and legitimizing power, is suffering:

an internal erosion of the legitimacy principle of knowledge.
 . . . Knowledge is no longer the subject . . . but in the service of
 the subject. . . . The growth of power, and its self-legitimation
 . . . are now taking the route of . . . the operativity of infor-
 mation.¹³

Thus, the superpower is less able to dictate, construct, or sustain a dominant worldview, as the United States and USSR did during the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, certainly, the United States has found it increasingly difficult to justify its actions or goals in terms that resonate with either a domestic or global population. Indeed, the nation’s current strategic documents reveal an underlying uncertainty that the 150-year-old American idea of self-existence and self-identity are no longer automatically inducible. The postmodern condition that Lyotard identified is that information alone is power: how information—not objective truth or knowledge—is used and whose interests it serves is the emerging reality of the strategic environment.

The U.S. population is rapidly drifting toward becoming a postmodern society—a culture of image and novelty, marked by an “endless supply of catchy phrases, slightly bizarre images, and stylish ideas” that break the link between

truth and politics.¹⁴ American strategy analyst Steven Metz has addressed the larger ramifications for strategic leaders. He notes that in an emerging era of “post-truth” (certainly a clear manifestation of the postmodern condition), there is the capability of combining words and images to create a manufactured world that replaces everyday reality, making it significantly more difficult for the public in the United States and in other countries to distinguish lies, half-truths, gossip, fantasy, code words, and phrases from reality. He warns this will destroy the traditional American notion of strategic communications, which is based on a basic trust in analysis to establish objective truth and the belief that this truth will ultimately win out.¹⁵

Russia has been the first country to adopt a strategy that combines realism with a thorough understanding of the postmodern condition. The appearance of armed, masked men in Crimea and eastern Ukraine; the downing of a commercial airliner; the use of nerve agents against Russian citizens abroad; and the attempted manipulation of public opinion to sway elections all exploit postmodern society’s lack of faith in truth; its notions of fungible reality; and its focus on multiple, equally valid narratives in a heavily layered simulacrum of images, words, and meanings. While not making the postmodern argument explicitly, Russia nonetheless confidently conveys a postmodernist meaning in its defense. In Russia, information is power. Satellite television and radio are integrated with the internet, social media, and contributions of professional and amateur journalists to manufacture information. Russia exploits national media outlets, as well as government and defense sources, shamelessly to present a version of postmodern truth intended at once to reinforce domestic support while simultaneously confounding international public opinion. One of Russia’s most influential multimedia news providers is RT, which broadcasts in dozens of languages throughout Europe, and is especially popular as an online news source. Along with Sputnik, a news agency, these media outlets provide a remarkable combination of infotainment and disinformation. While reports often have elements of truth, these elements are skillfully blended with manufactured information and manufactured sources.¹⁶ It is the perfect simulacra Jean Baudrillard would instantly recognize.

When confronted with evidence, the Kremlin blithely dismisses any charges or accusations, denying in essence the existence of objective truth, while also indirectly accepting yet rejecting indictments as an elitist narrative. In response, leaders and populations of the West have been thoroughly befuddled and paralyzed, claiming that Russia has embarked on a new form of warfare, when in fact, the postmodern society, when confronted with its own arguments and presented with its own rationale, cannot respond and its outrage quickly fades to mere concomitance.

Russian society itself has adopted the postmodern worldview, heightened

by a sense of isolation and insecurity, creating many layers of alternate realities in troll farms and absorbing and reflecting a state-sanctioned, media-driven narrative of Western hostility. Russia essentially discounts the West's claim to rules-based order as a modernist conceit that is nothing more than a narrative of power intended only to benefit the few at the expense of the many.

War itself, as Mary Kaldor and Herfried Münkler have argued, has changed. Arguably it has become a new kind of war because war is now fought by post-modern societies and has little resemblance to war fought by states for political ends. The state still exists, and therefore, the Clausewitzian trinity of the people (society), the government (politics), and the military may also still exist—but only symbolically. The military still functions as a traditional modernist institution, but it is largely divorced from the people. Politics is less concerned with state interests than the cosmopolitan demands of human security. Instead, what has replaced this trinity is an “intricate mix of physiological, psychological and sociological factors” related to the people and information that define the post-modern condition.¹⁷

New wars today are, in actuality, varying levels of disordering violence and instability in areas of weak or nonexistent government control involving exceptionally complex sectarian, ideological, tribal, and ethnic interactions of armed groups and warlords fed by the involvement of regional and international actors. The violence is postmodern: there are no rules, norms, or limitations. Violence is an end in itself rather than serving a specific strategic political end. Münkler defines *new war* as the “gun-fed rise of socially excluded layers, who take revenge for past humiliations by killing those with a regular livelihood or perhaps even modest prosperity.”¹⁸

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and NATO have attempted to subordinate the primordial violence, anarchy, and enmity they have encountered in Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan to a rational policy that conforms to the Clausewitzian dictum of war:

it is clear that war should never be thought of as something autonomous but always as an instrument of policy. . . . War is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means. . . . War cannot be divorced from political life.¹⁹

The subordination of war to politics is the heart of modern concept of sovereignty, and it is the guiding principle of the superpower.

In the postmodern strategic environment, an important question to ask is if this Clausewitzian relationship is still immutable. A multitude of nonstate and substate actors now possess the interests and motivations that drive the decision for war that were once solely the purview of the state. They are fueled by access

to both legal and illegal globalized networks for supplies and sustainment, serving their own interests.²⁰ The byproduct of this disordering violence is material and ideological conflict and humanitarian disaster.

The aims and objectives of these nonstate and substate actors relating to power relations could be understood as politics—the interaction of thinking and acting in an effort to exercise power and gain dominance against resistance. These power relations are often constituted as an ongoing struggle and contest of contending forces employing violence, coercion, and force and are understood as having tactical and strategic aspects.²¹

If politics in a postmodern context refers to calculations and practices based on interests of power that touch issues of identity, culture, and history, the Clausewitzian relationship between war and politics is inverted. Michel Foucault, in his analysis of power in terms of conflict, confrontation, and war, interpreted political struggles, clashes over or with power, or modifications of relations of force in a political system as a continuation of war. Thus, politics, practiced as conflict and confrontation, has become the continuation of war by other means.²² It is now possible to provide a general summary of the strategic landscape fabricated by postmodern thought.

The validity of large-scale political movements or ideologies is rejected in postmodern thought. Nationalism is suspect, giving way to localism, characterized by multiple centers of power and activity that are controlled by self-contained social groups, shaped by a global communication network, each with a distinct sense of identity, defined through culture, ethnicity, religion, ideology, and values and beliefs. Loyalty is given to the group, rather than to any central authority. Capable of interconnecting with a global audience almost at will, these groups exist in the perpetual present in online chat rooms, discussion forums, and comments sections on websites, where a recipient who belongs to a group trades information from another group perceived to be credible. In this constant trading and perpetuation of information, Lyotard's postmodern vision has become a popular cultural phenomenon, employing a common language and applying collective philosophical concepts.²³

Nearly everyone in postmodern society has an online persona (or personas), who functions in an alternative reality and can influence, or be influenced by (directly or indirectly), other contacts online. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a postmodern phenomenon, exploiting the simulacra of postmodern society to recruit young men and women to engage in a real-life version of the first-person shooter video games that they have made their personal version of reality.

In the postmodern strategic condition, culture and society both shape and create beliefs and values. People exist in a simulacrum of multilayered, continually changing background of social and psychological influences, composed

of images and signs that both shape reality and how it is perceived and understood. Media interprets the hyperreal as real for the consumer and dictates what is known. Because language is a form of privilege and authority, it is considered incapable of describing external realities, and therefore it is arbitrary and changeable. New realities are created through language, which offer continually changing meanings in relation to different times, or different conditions, or both.

The idea of extant truth is replaced by the idea that truth is constructed by people themselves, relative to environmental or social factors. Perspective is a matter of culture and environment and not gained by elitist metanarratives—defined as a particular worldview or ideology often reflected through a broad historical portrait intended to reflect reality. These metanarratives are inherently oppressive and deny marginalized groups in society a voice. All claims to authority or truth are disguised as claims to power. Faith in reason as a means of finding truth is questionable. Truth and reason themselves are outmoded concepts—reflecting nothing more than an accepted belief.²⁴

The ramifications of this new strategic landscape are that the postmodern sociocultural environment functions in direct opposition to a national strategic community with a strategic culture that depends upon historical patterns and customarily accepted traditions, values, and symbols to understand the environment and that approaches problems that involve either the threat of force or the actual use of force. Open markets and social identities “without universally acknowledged moral principles, international law norms, and accepted political practices” have created new power structures outside of the state.²⁵

This postmodern challenge to the superpower’s conceptualization of the relationship between war, conflict, and peace should lead to a reassessment of how the United States can influence and order the international system. Perhaps seeking to examine how strategies of power are influencing the strategic environment in terms of how threats are defined, understood, and resisted could be understood as war subordinated to politics.²⁶ Foucault provides a key insight for the superpower. He observed that power exercises, circulates, and forms networks and “mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed, organized, and put into circulation.”²⁷ General Sir Rupert Smith, recognizing the postmodern condition, calls the new phenomenon “war amongst the people,” and he states that “information, not firepower, is the currency upon which it is run.”²⁸

When diplomats, strategists, and military professionals attempt to define and frame complex international problems, formulate strategy to support policy to achieve national security goals, or make decisions about employing the elements of national power in pursuit of interests, they begin with a common approach and a basic set of assumptions. Yet, each one of these assumptions is invalidated

by the postmodern theories and conceptions of society, history, and politics.

As the sole superpower, the United States is defined by its sovereignty, territoriality, recognizable national identity, superior technology, military capability, and economic power. The postmodern strategic environment, however, places little importance on those defining elements of the nation-state as a strategic actor and indirectly imposes distinct limits on how national power is used. The traditional interests of states that serve as the source of competition and conflict hold little regard to a globalized, postmodern society where multiple identities and individualism are more important than appeals to a citizen's loyalty and obligations to the state. The small, professional military force is disassociated from the population and functions nearly invisibly, causing increasing divisions in the civil-military relationship.²⁹

By failing to understand the true structure of the post-Cold War strategic environment defined by the postmodern condition, the superpower can be strategically confounded. Strategies, grand or otherwise, are difficult, if not impossible, to devise and implement. The large-scale employment of military force becomes increasingly questionable to a global population.

Faced with such a daunting reality, how is the strategic leader to approach the maintenance of an international order that supports American security and a peaceful environment while also encouraging the protection of democracy and human rights? If postmodernism is becoming the new geostrategic frame, it is necessary to understand its forms and functions. Our very understanding of the relationship between policy and strategy is being challenged. Can any view of policy and strategy be valid? How can statecraft be practiced? How are the conditions that define peace and war to be understood? The postmodernists themselves may provide an answer. "The problem," as Michel Foucault wrote, "is at once to distinguish among events, to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another."³⁰ Thus, it is essential to structure the strategic design process in such a way that identifies networks of power and how knowledge functions within those networks, while also uncovering the multiple pathways that knowledge and power interconnect. The superpower can still employ its own significant network of power and knowledge to shape and influence events that favor its interests and goals, but it must recognize that this network of power and knowledge must now be employed in a postmodern context according to a different framework.

Policy is a function of strategy; strategy is a process of reasoning that implements a policy decision. Strategy applies the best methods available within the confines of the strategic environment to achieve the desired objectives. Distinguishing events, differentiating networks and levels associated with events, and reconstituting lines of connection is, in essence, a process of logic and reason,

which are the vital skills of the strategist. The strategist and strategic leader must be trenchant and perceptive observers of the postmodern condition in global society and define its essential nature in order to use a structured process based on logic, reason, and facts to allow strategy to function effectively to serve the superpower's interests.

The postmodern condition promotes diversity and relativism, along with multiple realities, each having its own unique discourse, and its essential characteristic is "emotivism," in which "judgments made by people are only expressions of feelings and personal preferences, and no longer carry any morally essential evidence."³¹ Thus, the salient importance of political psychology and appreciating the significant interaction between actors and observers in the postmodern strategic environment is central to sustaining the superpower's role, whose primary task is maintaining international stability, rather than enforcing it. This approach requires a level of intellectual discipline and a careful assessment of where, when, and how American power is employed and to what effect it has in shaping what is known.³²

Although the postmodern strategic environment imposes the same limitations on all state actors, the superpower alone has the ability to use its power to create the image and idea that it is providing security and stability, which may actually be more effective than traditional efforts to use the elements of national power to impose a particular desired set of conditions on the strategic environment. Rather than basing strategy on a belief that the United States alone must maintain security and stability, the potentially powerful strategic effects of using perception to shape behavior in the postmodern environment should not be ignored. Strategy's character must continually evolve with changes in society. For any strategy to be employed successfully, an interlocking process of reasoning will be necessary to identify the labyrinthine modes of thought in postmodern society for the strategist to link strategic effect to the goals of policy.

In the face of this consumer culture caught up in random change and saturated with information, strategy remains essential to maintain peace within an international order that adheres to humane, moral values. It provides a coherent outline that bridges the gap between current and desired future conditions. Government policy—the need to bring together all elements of power for the advancement of long-term interests—selects the strategic objectives and shapes the strategic approach; yet, it must be flexible enough to adapt to changes in technology, society, and political ideas. Strategists and military leaders must take on a culturalist perspective to function within the postmodern environment, examining the postmodern condition analytically to understand the beliefs and attitudes that reveal behavior and perceptions of realities.³³

This culturalist approach does not mean that the postmodern condition is to be accepted as a valid way of ordering or understanding the world. Ironically,

it should be just the opposite; the culturalist approach uses all of the traditional modernist intellectual skills that the postmodernists reject. Within this culturalist approach and analysis, strategists, diplomats, and military professionals must adhere to the verities of their professional development, education, and training, especially the essential idea of empirical research: social facts constitute an independently existing moral order. Civil society has a structure grounded in both an objective morality and an objective history that serve to explain humanity, progress, and power.

Rationality is manifested in the summation of theories, beliefs, principles, and facts that are used to understand the world. These basic principles for the strategist can be summarized as follows:

1. The strategist must have the ability to know and apprehend the external world through an objective and dispassionate examination of facts, while considering biases and assumptions.
2. Certain beliefs exist.
3. A confidence in human reason and the recognition of a proper method to acquire knowledge exists.
4. Objective reality exists; genuine knowledge is possible; objective truth is indispensable.
5. Language is essential to capture and mirror the real world accurately by putting thoughts into meaning for understanding; the full meaning of words is present in language.

Out of these principles come the following essential and enduring factors for the formulation and implementation of strategy: policy is a function of strategy; strategy is a process of reasoning that implements a policy decision. Strategy applies the best methods available within the confines of the strategic environment to achieve the desired objectives. For strategy to be employed successfully in the postmodern environment, an interlocking process of reasoning will be necessary to identify the complex and divergent modes of thought in postmodern society.

This means that a realist strategy as outlined in the current *National Security Strategy* can be implemented, but the goals and interests of that strategy must be pursued in an entirely new context. For the perceptive strategist, the inherent contradictions, skepticism, intellectual despair, rootlessness, and frustrations of postmodern society open innumerable opportunities for strategic initiative. The goal is to locate and identify the major forces and networks within postmodern society that can be exploited, particularly between the elite and the popular masses. Postmodern society is characterized by psychological instability—a fragmentation of will and intellect. As the sole superpower, the U.S. goal for policy and strategy in the twenty-first century will be to create a situation for

which the postmodern condition has no answer in response outside of pure nihilism.

The following is a proposed outline of action for the superpower in formulating and implementing strategy in the postmodern strategic environment:³⁴

1. Understand history—use the tools of historical inquiry—and the assessment of facts and logical conclusions derived from objective analysis to provide a historical perspective and assessment to explain contemporary events. Identify the causes of stability and instability and their influence from the postmodern perspective.
2. Using an objective, factual approach to characterize the present postmodern strategic environment and define the policy-strategy linkages (the policy object outlined in terms of desired strategic gain balanced by risk). Define how these linkages are going to be perceived within a postmodern construct.
3. Identify key strategic tendencies that are both helping and hindering and are shaping the choices of an actor (state or nonstate).
4. Identify and prioritize the threats to your interests and vulnerabilities to those threats.
5. Define the desired ends by identifying the desired future environment, with an understanding that it must conform to some postmodern perception of reality and explained within a frame that is at least compatible with postmodern thought.
6. Choose the means to achieve ends with recognition of ultimate consequences—define the change that will occur to the existing order and what will be necessary to adapt to those changes, recognizing that adjustments will have to be made continually—almost day-to-day, to conform to the postmodern strategic environment.
7. Assess the resources available during the time being considered. Can they be employed effectively in a media-saturated environment?
8. Define the various strategic lines of effort. These can be elements of national power at varying degrees of intensity, but far more likely will involve abstract psychological activities as well as a combination of limited overt violent actions to compel desired outcomes, or violent or nonviolent covert or clandestine actions. These will cause a set of events—intended to influence a friendly, enemy, neutral, as well as a domestic audience—to occur that work toward the desired end.
9. Seize and sustain the initiative in the argument—create and shape what is known within the simulacra. Create multilayered forms, signs, ideas, and images that are absorbed and accepted within the various social groups.

Strategists, diplomats, and military professionals must maintain an adherence to the modernist construct of reason and the validity of objective truth. However, they must be at the same time trenchant and perceptive observers of the postmodern condition in a global society to be able to define its essential nature in order to use a structured process based on logic, reason, and facts to allow strategy to function effectively for the United States, as the sole superpower, to preserve a structure of peace and security in the face of the daunting challenges to the post–Cold War world order.

Notes

1. See Robert Jervis, “Unipolarity: A Structural Perspective,” *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 191, 195, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887109000070>; and Christopher J. Fettweis, *Psychology of a Superpower: Security and Dominance in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 75–76. The term *superpower* implies a state’s overwhelming military, economic, and political-diplomatic dominance “that can impose its preferences by eliciting, either through coercion or consent, the cooperation of other states and actors.” Roger E. Kanet, “American Strategy for Global Order,” in *From Superpower to Besieged Global Power: Restoring World Order after the Failure of the Bush Doctrine*, ed. Edward A. Kolodziej and Roger E. Kanet (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 338.
2. Office of the President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1, 18, 41, 45, 55.
3. Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 3–4; and Jervis, “Unipolarity,” 195, 208.
4. Office of the President, *The National Security Strategy*, 2, 25–26.
5. Office of the President, *The National Security Strategy*, 25.
6. Fettweis, *Psychology of a Superpower*, 80, 83, 85, 92–95.
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8. David B. Clarke et al., eds., *Jean Baudrillard: Fatal Theories* (London: Routledge, 2009), 20.
9. Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Boston, MA: Polity Press, 1988), 193.
10. *Subject-centered reason* assumes an objective world of universal, intrinsic truth, in which the foundations of knowledge are definable and in which language plays a fundamental role.
11. Douglas Kellner, “Theorizing the Present Moment: Debates between Modern and Postmodern Theory,” *Theory and Society* 28, no. 4 (August 1999): 646, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:100704301>; Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 7; and Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabino (New York, Pantheon Books, 1984), 73.
12. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, vol. 10, *Theory and History of Literature*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xxv, 4–5, 8–9.
13. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 36, 38–39, 47.
14. Wolin, “Democracy in the Discourse of Postmodernism,” 313–14.
15. Steven Metz, “Strategic Insights: Revolutionary Change Is Coming to Strategic Leadership,” Strategic Studies Institute, 19 December 2017.

16. Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand), 2–3, 5, <https://doi.org/10.7249/PE198>.
17. BGen Edwin R. Micewski, Austrian Army, "Education of (Military) Leadership in a Postmodern World," *Connections* 3, no. 1 (March 2004): 73, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.03.1.06>.
18. Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 79.
19. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88, 605.
20. See, for example, Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, third ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 161–75.
21. Jason Edwards, "Foucault and the Continuation of War," in *The Metamorphosis of War*, ed. Avery Plew (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 26, 35.
22. "Politics, in other words, sanctions and reproduces the disequilibrium of forces manifested in war." Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, ed. Mario Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 15–16; Andrew W. Neal, "Cutting Off the King's Head: Foucault's Society Must Be Defended and the Problem of Sovereignty," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 4 (October 2004): 375, 383, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540402900401>; and see also Roger Deacon, "Clausewitz and Foucault: War and Power," *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 31, no. 1 (2003), 41, <https://doi.org/10.5787/31-1-142>. Deacon quotes Michel Foucault's observation that "[e]very power relationship implies, at least in potential, a strategy of struggle' or confrontation." These power relationships are continuously acting and reacting strategically and tactically, based on existing circumstances and conditions and operating in a realm of uncertainty.
23. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 35; and Sheldon S. Wolin, "Democracy in the Discourse of Postmodernism," in *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 301–4, 308–9, 311.
24. See Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 133–37; Pauline Marie Roseneau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3, 53–55, 119, 142, 147; and Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 7, 12, 35, 128, 149.
25. "The work of sociocultural theory is to explain how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context; hence, the focus of the sociocultural perspective is on the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities play in influencing psychological development." Sarah Scott and Annemarie Palincsar, "Sociocultural Theory," education.com, accessed 18 June 2018; Edward A. Kolodziej, "From Superpower to Besieged Global Power," in *From Superpower to Besieged Global Power*, 329, 334; and Brands, *American Grand Strategy*, 21.
26. Edwards, "Foucault and the Continuation of War," 37–38.
27. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 30, 33–34.
28. Gen Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 377.
29. Barry Buzan and Gerald Siegel, "The Rise of 'Lite' Powers: A Strategy for the Postmodern State," *World Policy Journal* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 3.
30. Foucault, "Truth and Power," 57.
31. Micewski, "Education of (Military) Leadership in a Postmodern World," 70. Micewski attributes "emotivism" to Alasdair MacIntyre, the British moral philosopher. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, third ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
32. Fettweis, *Psychology of a Superpower*, 25, 34, 36, 40.

33. Hew Strachan, "Strategy and Contingency," *International Affairs* 87, no. 6 (November 2011): 1282, 1296, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2011.01036.x>; Colin S. Gray, "In Praise of Strategy," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (April 2003): 292, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210503002857>; and Harry R. Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book for Big Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006), 5.
34. This outline reflects many of the concepts of strategy found in André Beaufré, *Strategy of Action*, trans. R. H. Barry (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 13, 15, 132.