The Strategic Environment, Time Horizons, and Grand Strategy: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Congress, and the American Public during the Second World War†

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Introduction

Existing conceptions of grand strategy, whether they define the term as the theoretical framework an actor uses for the pursuit of security or as the process of matching available means to chosen ends, may very well be sufficient for describing specific grand strategies, but have little analytical value.¹ The field as a whole, as Lukas Milevski justifiably critiques, “violates the fundamental purposes of theory—clarification and communication. Modern grand strategy has achieved the opposite, given that the same term may be used to describe significantly different activities, considerations, or attitudes and that some authors even feel that definition is counterproductive.”²

What is just as problematic – in fact, it appears to lie at the very root of the definitional conundrum

†I would like to thank Francis Gavin and Rachel Esplin Odell for their helpful feedback on this paper.
¹ Barry R. Posen and Hal Brands, for example, both define grand strategy as a theoretical framework: Posen writes that “[a] grand strategy is a nation-state’s theory about how to produce security for itself,” and Brands describes it as “the conceptual framework that helps nations determine where they want to go and how they ought to get there; it is the theory, or logic, that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world [emphasis in original].” Barry R. Posen, Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1; 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), 3.
– is the fact that works on grand strategy do not in any rigorous way address time horizons, the question of how heavily an actor weighs the short-term relative to the long-term.3

The lack of attention to time horizons appears to be one of the main obstacles, if not the main obstacle, to the creation of a coherent theory of grand strategy, as the explanation for how threats are assessed or how means are directed toward achieving specific ends depends greatly on what we take to be the appropriate temporal frame of reference. To avoid misconstruing actors’ thoughts and actions and prevent the concept of grand strategy from being used as a means for post-hoc justification, one must understand what those actors’ time horizons were and how they changed. A state’s grand strategy may change because of a shortening or lengthening of time horizons, and while the current literature can perhaps explain this on a case-by-case basis through process tracing, it does not provide the basis for a systematic approach to the phenomenon.

Grand strategy obviously does not exist in a vacuum. It is developed as a means for responding to the dynamics and trends operating within the international system. In other words, grand strategy is decisively molded by the strategic environment. But what happens when the strategic environment changes? How does that affect time horizons, which themselves exert an important influence on grand strategy? Do individual leaders’ time horizons react significantly differently than the average time horizons of domestic actors? This paper attempts to answer these questions by looking at the most significant periods of change in the strategic environment during the Second World War and analyzing how time horizons of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, on

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the one hand, and those of Congress and the American public, on the other, reacted to these changes. In ascertaining how average time horizons – those of Congress and the public – changed, I focus on debates about and attitudes toward U.S. aid to the Soviet Union and Britain under the Lend-Lease Act.4 Lend-Lease is a particularly good “fit” for the questions under analysis, as it is not only an aspect of grand strategy but also a prism through which grand strategy can be viewed; it brings together military strategy, economic statecraft, and alliance politics, the very foundations of grand strategy, and is thus uniquely reflective of the broader motivations that underlie it.

Due to the grand strategic literature’s inattention to time horizons, it is difficult to conduct a meaningful comparative analysis of grand strategies throughout history, and, consequently, to formulate criteria for assessing contemporary grand strategies. Admittedly, addressing the question of time horizons still might not make it possible to evaluate strategy; as Richard K. Betts notes, “[a]llmost any strategy can be rationalized and no rationale falsified at the time that a strategy must be chosen,”5 and this problem does not disappear if an actor’s time horizons are known to us. A more appropriate way of looking at this is that incorporating time horizons into grand strategic theory will enhance its explanatory power substantially and, despite not turning it into an instrument for evaluation, set it on the path toward that goal. After all, hindsight imposes our own temporal frame of reference on the strategic choice, but knowing how time horizons change will at least make it possible to consider actors’ options from their own perspective.


Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

While the grand strategy literature generally does not address states’ time horizons or does so in an atheoretical and nongeneralizable manner, it is not altogether aloof from the issue. Focusing on time horizons during the interwar period, David M. Edelstein notes that what is truly of consequence are “the ways in which the different time horizons of states interact and the incentives that interaction gives states to behave in certain ways.”6 He argues that rising powers are focused more on the long term, as opposed to “existing” powers, which generally have shorter time horizons. Since short time horizons are more conducive to cooperation, rising powers “aim to convince existing powers that their time horizons are, in fact, short.”7 In terms of James D. Fearon’s rationalist bargaining model, time horizons are therefore “private information” that states might want to “withhold or misrepresent.”8 Cast in this light, it is not entirely clear why only rising powers would be misrepresenting their time horizons. It seems equally logical that existing powers would want to present their time horizons as stretching far into the future, thereby forcing potential rising powers to be more cautious.

This issue aside, Edelstein’s framework appears to be a good basis for future work on analyzing dyadic interactions, but has limited value for grand strategic theory. The existing/rising power distinction fails to capture the dynamics of a balanced international system or even of a set of dyads within an unbalanced system, and because Edelstein treats time horizons as embedded in grand strategy rather than as a factor that can also have an independent effect, his framework cannot fully explain how and when grand strategies change.

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7 Ibid.
The literature has so far not addressed the question of changes in the strategic environment and their effect on time horizons. Jeffrey W. Taliaferro does distinguish between environments where constraints are “weak” and where constraints are “strong,” with time horizons being shorter in the latter case. While this distinction may be useful for systemic-level theory, it does not allow for exploration of the effects of change below the level of a complete systemic upheaval. That is, Taliaferro’s observation has little value for fine-grained analysis of the effects of change in the strategic environment on time horizons, especially insofar as individual events or smaller clusters of events are concerned.

IR has made several steps in the theory-crafting direction. For grand strategy, the most valuable contribution is that of Ronald R. Krebs and Aaron Rapport, who make a key theoretical point: Actors not only assign more value to proximate benefits, but also “think about far-off events in more abstract terms than they do about near-term events.” Incorporating construal level theory (CLT), a concept from psychology, into IR theory, they note that “greater temporal distance results in unwarranted optimism about the future effects of one’s actions. When actors contemplate the long term, they construe events abstractly, focusing on ‘superordinate’ goals at the expense of ‘subordinate’ processes – on ‘why’ rather than ‘how.’” Actors thus concentrate “on the desirability of their ends rather than the challenges entailed in reaching them, and on the benefits of distant action rather than the costs.” Krebs and Rapport limit the applicability of their theory to

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12 Ibid., 532.
individual level of analysis, but do not exclude the possibility that it might also hold true to group-level dynamics.\textsuperscript{13}

They also acknowledge that the causal arrow in the relationship between time horizons and construal likely points in both directions. “[I]n the ‘real world,’” Krebs and Rapport write, “the link between abstract construal and temporal distance is sufficiently tight that it is hard to find evidence of time horizons independent of their hypothesized effects on construal, raising the danger of tautology.”\textsuperscript{14} Although establishing which is the cause and which the consequence thus does not appear to be feasible through historical analysis, I examine changing strategic circumstances’ effect on both but simply treat them as one dependent variable.

**Case Selection**

I adopt the approach that Stephen Van Evera terms a “congruence procedure” – where “the investigator explores a case looking for within-case correlation between the study variable and other phenomena.”\textsuperscript{15} I start with the assumptions of Krebs and Rapport’s theoretical framework and aim to expand its explanatory power by developing an explanation for how changes in strategic circumstances, the study variable, impact time horizons, the dependent variable. As mentioned, it seems impossible to establish to what extent the level of construal itself alters time horizons, which is why the former will be treated as merely an indicator of short or long time horizons and not as a separate dependent variable. I analyze the SV/DV relationship on two different levels: the individual level and the domestic level. More concretely, on the individual level, I look at general

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 541.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 540.
changes in Roosevelt’s time horizons, and on the domestic level, look for corresponding changes in general public and Congressional attitudes toward Lend-Lease aid.

The United States during the Second World War is a strong test case.\textsuperscript{16} It is very data rich: Strategic circumstances during the Second World War, being the object of perhaps as much analysis as the origins of the First World War, have been analyzed in great detail by an army of historians. There is also no shortage of works about President Roosevelt, and his private correspondences with Winston S. Churchill and Joseph Stalin are documented in their entirety. The origins and development of the Lend-Lease program have also been thoroughly discussed.

The case has extreme values on and large within-case variance in the SV. By the summer to early autumn of 1941, Britain and especially the Soviet Union had taken quite a beating, and the Axis Powers had the upper hand. Although Germany lost the battle in the skies above Battle of Britain, it still seemed to be well on its way toward forcing the Soviets out of the war, and on December 7, the Japanese Navy added to the shock by carrying out a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Although it may in hindsight seem inevitable that the US would mobilize all the resources at its disposal and grind down Germany and Japan, the situation it found facing in the second half of 1941 seemed rather unfavorable. By the late summer of 1943, however, the Soviets had defeated the Germans at Kursk and turned the tide on the Eastern Front, and the US and Britain had successfully driven Axis forces from Sicily. The strategic situation had improved dramatically. Finally, by late 1944 to early 1945, it was clear that Germany and Japan would be defeated. Only the amount of time needed for that remained in question. From the US perspective, therefore, the strategic situation was never as dire as it was, for example, for the Soviet Union, but in 1941, it

\textsuperscript{16} For criteria, see ibid., 88.
appeared very unfavorable, which had been reversed by late summer of 1943, and finally, in late 1944 and early 1945, it was obvious that Germany and Japan were fighting a lost war.

The case admittedly does not fully match Van Evera’s other criteria for inferring theories – “resemblance to current policy-problem cases,” “prototypical case characteristics,” “matched for cross-case controlled comparison,” or “outcome unexplained by other theories”\(^{17}\) – but offsets this weakness at least in part by building on an already existing theoretical framework, and in part also by fulfilling the first three criteria extraordinarily well. It would be difficult to find a more data-rich case that also had such extreme values on and large within-case variance in the SV. Furthermore, Van Evera does not use what he deems “intrinsic importance” as a criterion for selecting a case for inferring theories\(^{18}\) but in the process of using Krebs and Rapport’s model to explain the case and gleaning further theoretical insights about the mechanism they start to develop, I also provide a new perspective on topic of intrinsic historical importance – the United States’ involvement in the most destructive war in human history.

**1940-1941**

Roosevelt’s time horizons may have started shortening after the Munich Conference in 1938, but the process reached its apex only in the second half of 1941. Krebs and Rapport note that after Munich, Roosevelt “not only became intensely concerned with the concrete ‘how’ of policy … but he approached … thorny problems with unusual method and discipline.”\(^{19}\) However, this was not an immediate and absolute shift. Rather, it was a process of gradual change, with Munich representing merely the beginning.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Krebs and Rapport, “International Relations and the Psychology of Time Horizons,” 533.
The above is not to say that Roosevelt was unconcerned with the concrete details of policy until the going got very tough indeed, but that long-term concerns did not suddenly cease to be important. For example, on May 15, 1940, Churchill contacted Roosevelt with a request for aid in the form of military equipment and raw materials, but the President’s response was, as Warren F. Kimball succinctly notes, “vague and unsatisfying.” What was to materialize as the “destroyers for bases” agreement later in the same year – the US loan of naval destroyers to Britain in exchange for the right to operate bases in British territory – was at this point shelved by Roosevelt: “As you know a step of that kind could not be taken except with the specific authorization of the Congress and I am not certain that it would be wise for that suggestion to be made to the Congress at this moment. Furthermore, it seems to be doubtful, from the standpoint of our own defense requirements … whether we could dispose even temporarily of these destroyers.” Admittedly, Roosevelt did address the specific policy proposal, but with no more than an ounce of concreteness, if with any at all. He was also, in terms of Krebs and Rapport’s framework, “focusing … on the desirability of … ends rather than the challenges entailed in reaching them.” That aid would be provided to Britain was far from being a foregone conclusion. Certain characteristics of long time horizons were therefore still present in Roosevelt’s thinking.

As the strategic situation deteriorated, the salience of short-term considerations increased. The battle for France took a turn for the worse, and Roosevelt began to express concern about specific operational aspects; hinting, for example, at the undesirability of the prospect of the British

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21 Kimball, Churchill & Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 38.
22 Roosevelt to Churchill, May 16, 1940 (R-4x), in Churchill & Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 38.
fleets being surrendered to Germany in case of an armistice.\textsuperscript{24} This lack of optimism or, rather, veiled pessimism suggests that Roosevelt’s time horizons had shortened further in the month after the May 16 telegram.\textsuperscript{25} After the fall of France, Roosevelt became notably more concerned with the implementation of policy. He wrote to Churchill with a concrete outline of the terms under which the fifty destroyers and other forms of requested aid would be provided to Britain,\textsuperscript{26} inquired directly as to what exactly would become of the British fleet in case of German victory,\textsuperscript{27} and even sent a message just to inform Churchill that the 250,000 rifles requested by the latter’s government were being prepared for transport to Britain.\textsuperscript{28} This trend of focusing on operational concerns continued, with telegrams dealing with topics ranging from the fate of the French battleships Jean-Bart and Richelieu\textsuperscript{29} and humanitarian relief for France\textsuperscript{30} to Lend-Lease aid\textsuperscript{31} and tank design and production.\textsuperscript{32} In August 1941, the Atlantic Conference took place in Newfoundland, and as Kimball notes, “the talks were general and non-committal,”\textsuperscript{33} but as the foregoing analysis of Roosevelt’s private messages to Churchill would indicate, this was not so much a reflection of the former’s time horizons as a consequence of the exigencies of the situation.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{24} Roosevelt to Churchill, June 14, 1940 (R-7x), in Churchil and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 48.
\textsuperscript{25} A focus on the long-term prompts “wishful thinking.” Krebs and Rapport, “International Relations and the Psychology of Time Horizons,” 532.
\textsuperscript{26} Roosevelt to Churchill, August 13, 1940 (R-8x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 58-59.
\textsuperscript{27} Roosevelt to Churchill, August 30, 1940 (R-10x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 69.
\textsuperscript{28} Roosevelt to Churchill, September 24, 1940 (R-12x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 72.
\textsuperscript{29} Roosevelt to Churchill, November 13, 1940 (R-15x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 82-83; Roosevelt to Churchill, November 18, 1940 (R-16x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 84; Roosevelt to Churchill, November 23, 1940 (R-17x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 85.
\textsuperscript{30} Roosevelt to Churchill, December 31, 1940 (R-19x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 117-118; Roosevelt to Churchill, March 19, 1941 (R-27x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 148-149.
\textsuperscript{31} Roosevelt to Churchill, March 29, 1941 (R-30x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 154; Roosevelt to Churchill, May 28, 1941 (R-43x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 197.
\textsuperscript{32} Roosevelt to Churchill, July 10, 1941 (R-48x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 220; Roosevelt to Churchill, July 12, 1941 (R-49x), in Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 220.
\textsuperscript{33} Kimball, Churchill and Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 227.
\textsuperscript{34} As Kimball prefaces his observation about the nature of the talks: “[T]he United States [was] still out of the war, and Roosevelt [was] ever cautious about moving too fast for congressional and public opinion.” Ibid.
Correspondence with Stalin lends additional credence to the observations made so far. In a joint declaration to Stalin dated August 14, 1941, Roosevelt and Churchill together displayed cognizance of the importance of “more long-term policy,” but otherwise devoted considerable attention to the question of how exactly to proceed with regard to supply of the Soviet Union with materiel:

The needs and demands of your and our armed services can only be determined in the light of the full knowledge of the many facts which must be taken into consideration in the decisions that we make. In order that all of us may be in a position to arrive at speedy decisions as to the apportionment of our joint resources, we suggest that we prepare a meeting … If this conference appeals to you, we want you to know that pending the decisions of that conference we shall continue to send supplies and material as rapidly as possible.35

The focal point therefore rested overwhelmingly on resources, which is as close one gets to the essence of the “how” aspect of policy.

Finally, it seems that operational concerns fully captured and dominated Roosevelt’s attention after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The ARCADIA Conference in Washington, which ran from December 22, 1941 to January 14, 1942, was thus almost exclusively about the ways and means for winning the war. As Kimball explains, the two statesmen’s “main concern … was the conduct of the war.”36 The conference led directly to, among other things, the adoption of the Unity Plan, which provided for joint command of forces in different theaters of operation. The shortening of Roosevelt’s time horizons and the reorientation of his attention towards operational needs may have begun in 1938, but it fully came to pass only after the strategic setbacks in 1940 and 1941.

35 Roosevelt and Churchill to Joseph V. Stalin, August 14, 1941 (no. 4), in My Dear Mr. Stalin: The Complete Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph V. Stalin, ed. Susan Butler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 42.
36 Kimball, Churchill & Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 292.
The nature of the debate about Lend-Lease, which went on for quite some time even after Roosevelt had concluded that the survival of Britain was crucial for the United States, suggests that average time horizons lag somewhat behind those of individual leaders. A mere day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt in very direct terms expressed to Churchill his belief that the fates of Britain and the United States had become inextricably linked. “Today all of us are in the same boat with you and the people of the Empire” the President wrote, “and it is a ship which will not and cannot be sunk.”37 Congress, however, was still very much occupied with questions of desirability, the “why” of policy. As Kimball observes, one of main arguments against the bill was that “the Lend-Lease Act would involve the United States in the war. The arguments given for avoiding such involvement differed but agreed that entry into the European War would not be in America’s long-term interests.”38 Furthermore, during the debates, “substantial sentiment had developed for some sort of amendment that would prevent the Soviet Union from becoming a recipient of Lend-Lease aid.”39 Albeit the latter point stemmed from general opposition to the bill and not so much from hostility to the Soviets,40 both this and the mode of questioning of US involvement in Europe do indicate that many were still looking at issues through a long-term frame of reference.

Nonetheless, neither initial resistance nor the eventual adoption of Lend-Lease can be ascribed entirely to long or short time horizons, respectively. As Kimball also notes, “[t]he battle over the Lend-Lease Act can generally be characterized as a partisan one, although party lines were crossed, particularly in the Senate.”41 Tracing opinions of individual Congressmen and

37 Roosevelt to Churchill, December 8, 1941 (R-72x), in Churchill & Roosevelt, Vol. 1, Alliance Emerging, 283
39 Ibid., 200.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 193.
accounting for how their opinions changed, if at all, and why they voted as they did is beyond the scope of this paper and generally does not seem feasible. Partisanship could very well have and likely did play a more important role and is difficult to disaggregate completely from time horizons, especially in terms of effects. The latter cannot be used to explain how the specific policy preferences of actors were formed, but only to link temporal focus with general approaches to issues. The passage of Lend-Lease was therefore the product of a combination of factors. Short or long time horizons did not necessarily lead to support for or opposition to the bill.

The wording of the provisions of the Lend-Lease Act shows that at least some of the focus had shifted to how the war would be fought and that a number of long-term concerns that had permeated the debate in the end failed to convince. Clause (b) of Section 3 of the Act states: “The terms and conditions upon which any foreign government receives any aid … shall be those which the President deems satisfactory, and the benefit to the United States may be payment or repayment in kind or property, or any other direct or indirect benefit which the President deems satisfactory.”\(^42\) This is especially significant in light of the concern raised by opponents of the bill regarding the purported “dictatorial powers the bill bestowed upon the President.”\(^43\) The question of reimbursement, the kind of quid-pro-quo framing that was needed to justify the “destroyers for bases” agreement,\(^44\) and even domestic long-term political concerns, had all taken a back seat to satisfying as expeditiously and effectively as possible Britain’s needs in the fight against Germany.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 244.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 194.

\(^{44}\) As Alan P. Dobson writes, the deal was formalized on September 2, 1940 and “[i]n Washington, it was presented as a single quid-pro-quo business agreement, which greatly benefited the US.” This was only part of the picture. As Dobson further notes, “[n]o matter how good the bargain was for the US this could not disguise the facts that the agreement was one which could only have been reached between close friends and that it was not a straightforward commercial agreement. It pointed the way for Lend-Lease.” Alan P. Dobson, *US Wartime Aid to Britain 1940-1946* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 23.
The record of the initial debate and passage of the Lend-Lease Act provides mixed evidence for how time horizons were changing, apart from the indication from the wording of the act that operational concerns were, if not a dominant, at least a salient concern. Extension of Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union and the various domestic hurdles that had to be cleared are a much better indicator of how average time horizons changed.

In the early-war period, the United States was highly skeptical of the value of attempting to cooperate with the Soviet Union, as the latter’s motivations and interests were seen as highly suspect. For example, during the First Winter War, the Soviet invasion of Finland launched at the end of 1939, “the valorous Finns commanded American sympathy as they skillfully defended their homeland,” remarks Robert Huhn Jones. The US responded by imposing what was in effect an embargo on the Soviet Union. Attitudes continued to be explicitly anti-Soviet. As Raymond H. Dawson notes, a January 3, 1941 report of the House Committee on Un-American Activities “assailed Stalin as ‘no better than Hitler’ . . . More pointedly, the Dies Committee charged that the Soviet Union was acting as the ‘financial front’ in the U.S. for the Axis, using its position as a neutral to help the Axis win the war.” Even the Los Angeles Times and the New York Herald-Tribune, otherwise in favor of Lend-Lease, questioned or even argued against the maintenance of economic relations with the Soviet Union. Roosevelt and Churchill had both come to the conclusion that there was a need to support the Soviet Union in case of a German attack, but, in Jones’ words, “Anglo-American agreement over Russia existed only at the top.”

45 Jones, The Roads to Russia, 4.
46 Dawson, The Decision to Aid Russia, 1941, 19.
48 Jones, The Roads to Russia, 31.
Even after the Germans had unleashed Operation Barbarossa, the time horizons indicated by public opinion and general attitudes within the US government did not change immediately. State Department officials were worried about Soviet intentions in surrounding territories, most prominently in the Baltics, and Congress was contemplating options for heading off any kind of aid to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{49} Polling paints a similar picture of how public opinion changed rather slowly: In July of 1941, 54 percent still opposed giving aid to the Soviet Union, with this number diving to 44 percent and support climbing to 49 percent only by September.\textsuperscript{50} The issue for the President in making official moves had been these slowly changing attitudes, and “the United States depended upon the catch-as-catch-can financing for Russia at least until Congress cooperated with funds and public opinion supported Russia’s inclusion in Lend-Lease.”\textsuperscript{51} Finally, Congress agreed to finance the Soviets, and on November 7, the Soviet Union officially became a beneficiary of the Lend-Lease program.

This indicates that Roosevelt’s time horizons had shortened much more rapidly than average time horizons, as questions about ends for a long time continued to feature much more prominently in the public discussion than questions about means. Overall, the focus shifted from the question of desirability of providing aid to Britain and of having anything to do at all with the Soviet Union to only figuring out how to provide aid to the two hard-pressed nations. The passage of Lend-Lease must not be misunderstood as inevitably proceeding from shortening time-horizons, as that would amount to a kind of historical determinism completely unsupported by evidence, but the debate around Lend-Lease does show that a worsening strategic situation leads to shorter time horizons and thinking about more concrete aspects of policy. The United States could very well

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 38-40.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 55.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 63.
have gone a different route and chosen to not provide aid, but whatever the chosen policy would have been in that case, more attention would still have been devoted to the means rather than to the desirability of the chosen end.

1943

The greater emphasis on concrete aspects of policy and the accompanying shorter time horizons in 1940-1941 may appear to have been the result not of deteriorating strategic circumstances but of the fact that the United States got closer and closer to involvement in the war, which by itself necessitated putting operational concerns first. Wartime per se is most certainly correlated with the increasing salience of operational concerns and shortening time horizons, but they vary much more closely with strategic circumstances. If it were wartime itself that produced this effect, then not much would have changed by 1943. The following section hence analyzes both Roosevelt’s changing mindset and public and governmental attitudes in mid to late 1943, when fortunes began to change and time horizons started to lengthen.

The German surrender at Stalingrad heralded a wave of successes for the Allies. In John Erickson’s striking turn of phrase: “Victory at Stalingrad was immediately and perceptibly decisive in terms of the survivability of the Soviet Union.”\(^52\) “It was now Stalin’s turn,” he continues, “to capitalize upon disaster, to seek decisive strategic success.”\(^53\) The last surrenders at Stalingrad were followed by American victory at Guadalcanal, which can similarly be thought of as a turning point. Gerhard L. Weinberg thus writes that “[t]he denial to Japan of opportunity in the Indian Ocean by the Solomons campaign could not be reversed.”\(^54\) Albeit usually not seen as


\(^{53}\) Ibid., 44.

quite as dramatic, the surrender of the last remaining Axis forces in Tunisia on May 13 further built on these successes. Anglo-American forces capitalized on this and continued on to Sicily, the liberation of which coincided with the Soviet triumph at Kursk. These Allied successes did not lead directly to victory, as many a battle would still have to be won, but did bring it into view. As R. A. C. Parker writes: “Until the summer of 1943 Hitler could still reasonably hope to win: victory at Kursk would force the Soviet leadership to compromise, victory in the Atlantic would compel British surrender and keep the United States on the other side of the ocean. After the summer of 1943 he could only hope to delay defeat until the allies fell apart.”

Roosevelt’s time horizons lengthened as the strategic situation improved. The first hint of lengthening time horizons came with the Casablanca conference in mid-January, when Roosevelt and Churchill proclaimed that only unconditional surrender would be accepted from the Axis Powers. There would be no negotiations. Nevertheless, much of the discussion at the conference revolved around military planning. Had it not been for the announcement about unconditional surrender, Casablanca “would, and properly, be regarded in retrospect merely as an interim determination of military measures,” remarks Herbert Feis. It was military planning for both the shorter and longer term – the invasion of Sicily as well as initial arrangements for what was to become Operation Overlord – but military planning nonetheless. Operational concerns still dominated, but it was no longer just a question of plugging the holes as they sprang up.

The substantially improved strategic situation in the spring opened the door to political issues. “From the outset of the war Roosevelt had resisted British and Soviet attempts to make

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postwar political arrangements,” observes Kimball, but the question of Polish-Soviet relations resurfaced in April 1943. The President nonetheless did not look far beyond finding the most efficient path to victory. In an April 30 telegram intended for, but ultimately not sent to Churchill, Roosevelt wrote of the imperative “of creating the most favorable conditions for bringing the full weight of the armed forces of all the United Nations to bear upon the common enemy” and that “[o]ur efforts to heal the present breach [between the Poles and the Soviets] will of course continue to be of a friendly nature and void of partisanship towards either side.”

Waging the war, in other words, was still by far the top concern for Roosevelt:

The winning of the war is the paramount objective for all of us. For this unity is necessary. All individualistic and nationalistic ambitions in the meantime must be held in abeyance. We must close our ranks on every front for the prosecution of the war. This is the only road to freedom. Thus both the Russians and the Poles and all United Nations alike during the period of the war must subordinate factional differences to the common struggle for victory. Each government has obligations not only to its own people but to the friends of freedom throughout the world.

Roosevelt’s thoughts indicate that he was very much aware of the potential for problems arising in the long term, but was construing them abstractly and was still predominantly concerned with the short-to-medium term, the end of the war.

This is perhaps best framed, in terms of Krebs and Rapport’s framework, as an instance where certain issues are construed abstractly and others concretely. Roosevelt’s thinking about the war was still marked by concrete construal, but insofar as Russo-Polish matters are concerned, he clearly exhibited the unwarranted optimism and abstract construal characteristic of long time

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59 Ibid., 204.
60 “[P]olicymakers are not presented with a single temporal frame [emphasis in original].” Krebs and Rapport, “International Relations and the Psychology of Time Horizons,” 541.
horizons. While he did propose an option for action – “the Poles … agree[ing] to permit relief and welfare work to be carried on by Soviet organizations”\(^{61}\) and “the Russians and the Poles … permit[ting] the non-racial Poles to opt for Polish or Soviet citizenship”\(^{62}\) – he completely ignores the broader underlying tensions and centuries-long history of Russo-Polish animosity. The only obstacle he addresses is “the problem of evacuating from the Soviet Union Polish citizens who have close relatives abroad especially those who are members of the immediate families of men in the Polish armed forces.”\(^{63}\) This fits well into the long time horizons category – as Krebs and Rapport remark, “when presented with distant threats and opportunities, individuals are disposed to (vaguely considered) action, because they fear errors of omission more than errors of commission.”\(^{64}\) Roosevelt’s answer to the Polish question could hardly have been more vaguely considered, as it proposed a course of action without at all attempting to tackle deep-rooted underlying issues.

By June, Roosevelt’s perspective on discussing political issues had performed an about-face. He recognized the need for engaging the Soviet Union in a discussion about what would come after the war. On June 22, he made an oblique reference to that need in a message to Stalin, writing that “the spirit of unity and sacrifice necessary for our ultimate victory” will also “animate us in approaching the challenging tasks of peace which victory will present to the world.”\(^{65}\) The President had incomparably closer ties with Churchill, but was not much more specific when he addressed the same topic in a telegram to the Prime Minister on June 28. Roosevelt wrote of arrangements for a meeting with Stalin, but with the military staffs absent, so that there would be

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\(^{61}\) Roosevelt to Churchill, April 30, 1943 (R-274/1, not sent), in Churchill & Roosevelt, Vol. 2, Alliance Forged, 204.
\(^{62}\) Ibid., 205.
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
\(^{64}\) Krebs and Rapport, “International Relations and the Psychology of Time Horizons,” 533.
\(^{65}\) Roosevelt to Stalin, June 22, 1943 (no. 106), in My Dear Mr. Stalin, 144.
Roosevelt’s thoughts about and expectations for the postwar were clearly not well developed yet, as he mentioned only that meeting would allow him “to explore his [Stalin’s] thinking as fully as possible concerning Russia’s post-war hopes and ambitions.” Operational concerns were no longer the only topic. The above evidence shows that Roosevelt’s time horizons were lengthening, and as CLT would predict, that prompted abstract construal.

The nature of the QUADRANT Conference in Quebec reflects both the still-prominent status of military strategy but also the movement of political issues to the fore. It is best understood as the midpoint in the shift from short to long time horizons. As Kimball puts it, “[t]he discussions centered on future military operations, although postwar political considerations began to command considerable attention.” Anglo-American discussions about the atomic bomb show that Roosevelt’s time horizons had indeed lengthened, but also that he was thinking rather abstractly about the issue of Soviet intentions. Churchill and Roosevelt concluded an agreement on August 19 under which cooperation on atomic matters would deepen. Robert Dallek insightfully notes that “[w]hile Roosevelt made this agreement partly to help safeguard wartime harmony with Britain, he was also mindful of the fact that it might help check postwar Soviet power.” He continues: “At the same time, however, Roosevelt continued to hope and work for a friendly accommodation with the U.S.S.R.” Although having alternatives is per se by no means a sign of abstract construal, Roosevelt appears not to have had too clear of an idea of how exactly the United States would confront Soviet intentions, if at all.

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By the late summer of 1943, the Allies’ strategic situation had improved dramatically and Roosevelt’s time horizons had lengthened, meaning that he began to think about postwar arrangements, only not very methodically. For him, the postwar was still sufficiently far away to not receive the kind of attention he devoted to operational concerns, namely military planning in Europe and coordination of strategy with Britain. His time horizons were overall longer in 1943 than they had been in 1940-41. Since he simultaneously conceived of wartime needs and military operations in very concrete terms and of postwar political question in much more abstract terms, it is likely that two different sets of time horizons/levels of construal were in operation; short and concrete for wartime questions and long and abstract for postwar concerns.

Average time horizons were, same as in 1940-41, slow to change. As discussed above, Roosevelt had begun to worry about larger postwar political questions, but construed them very abstractly and continued to be occupied more with military strategy. Public and governmental attitudes in the United States in 1943 mirrored that rather closely, but long time horizons were even less prominent than in Roosevelt’s case. A number of voices cried out in alarm and warned against cooperating with the Soviet threat, but did not make much of an impact.

Perhaps the most resonating such warning came from William H. Standley, the US Ambassador to the Soviet Union. Albeit refraining from naming Soviet political objectives, he pointed at them with clear disgruntlement in a March 8, 1943 statement: “The Russian authorities seem to want to cover up the fact that they are receiving outside help. Apparently they want their people to believe that the Red Army is fighting this war alone.”69 Standley by no means wished to sabotage Lend-Lease – as George C. Herring notes, the ambassador was “[a]n ardent advocate of

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full cooperation with Russia during wartime and after”70 – but nonetheless set the stage for a skirmish between the long-term and the short-term view.

Those who were skeptical of the wisdom of aiding the Soviets or worried about the impact diverting supplies away from the US military saw Standley’s challenge as an opening. “Isolationists and Russophobes,” remarks Herring, “attempted to arouse latent American suspicions of the Soviet Union.”71 Voices from the military highlighted how Lend-Lease was taking equipment away from US fighting forces, thereby not only hampering efforts to open a second front but also weakening the country’s postwar bargaining position.72 Implicit in this argument was the notion that the Soviets could not be moved by anything but hard power. As Jones explains, these military voices argued that “America should be strong enough at the peace table ‘to cause our demands to be respected.’”73 For a number of observers, therefore, Standley’s having questioned the policies of the administration served as a springboard for launching long-term concerns back into the debate.

These attacks, however, proved to be no more than a pinprick. They sparked debate, but failed to put even the slightest dent in Lend-Lease, as average time horizons were still predominantly short and Congress was above all committed to the most expedient path to victory. In the initial vote on Lend-Lease in 1941, the bill passed with a comfortable margin of votes. Nonetheless, the vote was a far cry from being an expression of steadfast fixity of purpose. In the House of Representatives, it passed with 260 votes for and 165 against,74 and in the Senate, with

70 Ibid., 81.
71 Ibid., 92.
72 Jones, The Roads to Russia, 167-168.
73 Ibid., 168.
74 Kimball, The Most Unsordid Act, 207.
62 votes for and 33 against.\textsuperscript{75} In 1943, Lend-Lease was renewed with near unanimous backing of both chambers. Herring explains: “Congressmen of all political persuasions agreed that lend-lease was an essential instrument of war and that delay of its renewal could have serious military and political consequences [emphasis mine].”\textsuperscript{76} Whereas time horizons were still shortening in 1941, the process had reached its apex by 1943, as evidenced by the fact that the salience of the “how” of policy, the dominance of means, cut across political lines.

The contours of public opinion also reflected the dominance of short time horizons. Suspicion of Soviet intentions had given way to an overriding emphasis on winning the war. In Herring’s words: “[I]n 1943 most Americans were not inclined to be distracted from the task at hand. … Concerned primarily with defeating the Axis and impressed by the Red Army’s recent triumphs, Americans were not overly perturbed about Russia’s alleged ingratitude or lack of cooperation [emphasis mine].”\textsuperscript{77} The public as well as Congress had predominantly short time horizons and accordingly construed the question of victory in the war as a very concrete issue, and did not seem to worry too much about the long term.

This analysis of how time horizons and foci shifted with the dramatically improving strategic circumstances yields several important insights. First, it shows that the shortening time horizons in 1940-41 could not have been brought on solely by the United States getting closer and closer to war. Were that the case, time horizons in 1943 would not have started to shift. Second, whereas the apparently declining odds of victory in 1940 and especially 1941 prompted a shortening of time horizons, the improving strategic circumstances in 1943 prompted them a renewed lengthening thereof, at least for Roosevelt. While not proof of causality, this suggests a

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 217.
\textsuperscript{76} Herring, \textit{Aid to Russia}, 93.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 94-95.
solid correlation between changes in the strategic environment and shifting time horizons. Third, the occurrence whereby short time horizons lengthen or long time horizons shorten is a process, not an immediate shift. It is best described as a continuous interaction between the strategic circumstances and time horizons, where the latter apparently start to shorten when the former worsen, and lengthen when the former improve. Fourth, time horizons of individuals should be treated separately from average time horizons. Namely, the 1940-41 and 1943 cases both strongly suggest that average time horizons react much more slowly to changing strategic circumstances than individual leaders’ time horizons. In 1940-41, Roosevelt transitioned significantly more rapidly to thinking concretely about operational concerns than various governmental actors and the public did. Similarly, in 1943, his time horizons started lengthening, but average time horizons had just finished shortening. This does not necessarily mean that individual and effective time horizons have different rates of change, but that the two are not synchronized with regard to when the process of change begins.

1945

In 1943, the prospect of victory came into sight, but by early 1945, it had become only a matter of time. In the Pacific Theater, the Battle of Leyte Gulf in late October of 1944 was decisive – the Japanese fleet was devastated. It could no longer play a significant role. As Parker writes: “Japanese failure to defeat the Americans at sea and in the air made it impossible for them to prevent amphibious assaults … and the advance of American forces to bases from which air attack and, if necessary, invasion could be unleashed on the Japanese home islands.”\textsuperscript{78} The Japanese could slow down the Americans, but could no longer stop them.

\textsuperscript{78} Parker, \textit{The Second World War}, 230.
In Europe, the second half of 1944 brought disaster for Germany. On June 6, 1944, Anglo-American forces launched Operation Overlord, the invasion of German-occupied France, and successfully established a bridgehead in Normandy. This would be followed by breakout operations and the advance through France and toward Germany. With the exception of Operation Market Garden, the failed Allied attempt to capture key bridges in the Netherlands through airborne assault and thus expedite the drive toward Germany, the Germans suffered defeat upon defeat on the Western Front. On the Eastern Front, the Soviets dealt a heavy blow to the Wehrmacht with Operation Bagration, which was launched on June 22 and led to the encirclement and destruction of the Germans’ Army Group Center. Exploiting this victory, Soviet armies continued to advance rapidly through Eastern Europe. On December 16, Germany made a final desperate effort to reverse the strategic situation on the Western Front and launched an offensive against Allied forces in the Ardennes. The British and the Americans recovered from the initial shock and eliminated the salient, the so-called “Bulge,” that the Germans had created in the Allied lines. As Peter Caddick-Adams succinctly puts it: “Although defeat lay four months away, the men and matériel thrown away in the Ardennes meant that Germany had already lost the Second World War in Europe by the end of the Bulge.”

Victory was assured.

The events of late 1944 and early 1945 are best understood as the conclusion of the strategic reversal that had begun in 1943. The period thus did not witness such dramatic change as 1943 – there was no strategic reversal. However, it did bring about significant change in that it replaced the question of whether and how the war would be won with the question of when exactly victory would come.

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Roosevelt’s time horizons had lengthened considerably by late 1944. At the OCTAGON Conference in Quebec in mid-September of 1944, Churchill and Roosevelt discussed postwar political questions. Kimball observes that “[t]he President departed from his usual habit of postponing such issues until a postwar peace conference, although procrastination still remained his instinctive response to acrimony.”\textsuperscript{80} It is not clear whether Roosevelt intended to address postwar matters at the conference.\textsuperscript{81} He had most certainly been thinking about them; indeed, he had started to devote attention to questions of this caliber in 1943, as already noted. In any case, the fact that he did allow the focus of the conference to settle on political questions – questions of “why” – indicates that Roosevelt’s time horizons were relatively long.

That Roosevelt’s time horizons were long is corroborated by evidence of how he approached long-term issues. A September 28 telegram to Churchill – drafted by Admiral William Leahy, Roosevelt’s Chief of Staff – underscored the importance of having the Soviet Union be “a fully accepted and equal member” of what was to become the United Nations. The telegram further read that “[i]t should be possible to accomplish this by adjusting our differences through compromise by all the parties concerned.” Roosevelt was construing postwar politics rather abstractly and with more than a pinch of optimism. He thus evidently felt compelled to add that “this ought to tide things over for a few years until the child learns how to toddle.”\textsuperscript{82} This harkens back to the pre-Munich period, when Roosevelt’s time horizons were also long and he, per Krebs and Rapport’s analysis, consequently engaged in “[e]nthusiastic experimentation.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 315-316.
\textsuperscript{83} Krebs and Rapport, “International Relations and the Psychology of Time Horizons,” 533.
Roosevelt’s approach to handling issues at the Yalta Conference in February of 1945 perhaps most clearly indicates abstract construal. Dallek argues that “Roosevelt … had a complicated strategy for dealing with the Russians at Yalta.” Viewed in light of CLT, it instead appears that Roosevelt’s strategy, being characterized by contradiction and non-specificity, was a consequence of long time horizons and not merely “complicated.” On the one hand, Roosevelt planned on remaining quiet about the atomic bomb “until the Soviets effectively demonstrated their sincere interest in postwar cooperation,” writes Dallek. He also wished to reach some sort of deal with the Soviets regarding the Far East and the United Nations, but on the other hand, “in Eastern Europe generally, and Poland in particular, he had little hope of deflecting Stalin from his course and was prepared to settle for agreements aimed more at satisfying American opinion than at rescuing the area from Soviet control.” It is difficult to square these two competing notions. Roosevelt hoped for “sincere” Soviet cooperation, but simultaneously believed that cooperation with the Soviets on certain matters would be impossible.

Roosevelt’s short and long time horizons interacted in an interesting manner. As Dallek further notes, “FDR candidly said that spheres of influence were a reality which America lacked the power to abolish,” but “[i]n the long run, he hoped this could be done through the United Nations.” Thinking about Poland in concrete terms and having weighed the alternatives, he acknowledged that not much could be done. Conceiving of postwar arrangements fairly abstractly, however, he was, in CLT terms, “evaluating[ng] … future plans based on desirability of ends” and operating with a “substantial optimism bias.” Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why Roosevelt

84 Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 507.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid, 508.
saw certain short-term problems as insoluble but was optimistic about the general future situation, even though those same problems would have to figure into it. The obstacles that appeared when the “how” was considered disappeared when the focus switched to the question of “why.”

Early 1945 represents not a reversal of the strategic situation but the completion of the process that had begun in 1943, and overall time horizons no longer lagged behind those of Roosevelt. In other words, overall time horizons had “caught up” in the time between the late summer of 1943 and early 1945. The primary concern was no longer how to win the war, as victory had become a foregone conclusion as early as in the fall of 1944. “In the United States,” explains Weinberg, “there was now a somewhat unrealistic expectation that the war in Europe had been practically won.”

As the debate about Lend-Lease in early 1945 shows, average time horizons were now long. In fact, from 1943 onward, thinking about Lend-Lease as leverage gained prominence. It is difficult to say that this was accompanied by abstract construal, as Lend-Lease after all combined only the most concrete aspects of policy, but unwarranted optimism about what could be achieved by keeping the program in reserve as a bargaining tool colored the discussion. Jones writes that “[t]hrough the remainder of 1943 and into 1944, the United States military planners became ever more alert to the possibility of politico-economic bargaining but continued to be faced with the constant policy, still handed down from the White House, that no political strings could be attached to Lend-Lease.” By 1945, this had changed, as the gravity of postwar questions had increased considerably. As Herring writes: “By January, 1945, … most of Roosevelt’s top advisors shared [Averell] Harriman’s alarm about Soviet policies in Eastern Europe. They also agreed with the

89 Weinberg, A World at Arms, 752.
90 Jones, The Roads to Russia, 175.
ambassador that economic assistance provided one of the few instruments available to the United States to influence the direction of Stalin’s foreign policy and felt it should be used carefully to promote the postwar objectives of the United States.”

Granted, economic assistance would help the United States stabilize Western Europe, but the threat of it being withheld would not be enough to divert the Soviets away from their goals. The dependence of the Soviets on Lend-Lease was being overestimated.

Domestic audiences’ support for aid to Russia had also waned by early 1945. Before, in Herring’s words, “Americans accepted lend-lease as a necessity required by the exigencies of war.” However, that changed as the strategic situation improved and as the end of the war became visible. “In 1944 and 1945,” continues Herring, “… that keen appreciation of self-interest which had provided the underpinning for domestic support of lend-lease began to erode.”

Time horizons, in other words, had lengthened and thus brought about a return to the question of the desirability of providing aid. Practical imperatives no longer played a crucial role.

Implications for Theory

The foregoing analysis, using Krebs and Rapport’s application of CLT to the international relations context as the theoretical basis, shows that the length of actors’ time horizons changes gradually with the favorability of the strategic environment. More specifically, in the case of the United States immediately before entrance into and during the Second World War, time horizons shortened as the strategic situation worsened in 1940-41, and started lengthening with the strategic reversals of 1943. Finally, by early 1945, time horizons had lengthened considerably.

91 Herring, Aid to Russia, 145.
92 Ibid., 144.
93 Ibid., 145.
Furthermore, the studied case indicates that individual leaders’ time horizons do not start changing at the same point in time as the average time horizons of domestic actors. In 1940-41, Roosevelt’s time horizons started shortening before those of Congress and the public did, and he accordingly started construing wartime needs concretely sooner than average time horizons of domestic actors would suggest. Similarly, in 1943, Roosevelt’s time horizons started lengthening before average time horizons did, but appear to have become synchronized with the latter by early 1945. In other words, there appears to be a lag between when time horizons of individual leaders and of domestic actors start changing.

The findings show strong correlation, but not causation. First, they cannot be interpreted as revealing a direct causal link between change in the strategic environment to the varying length of time horizons. It could very well be the case that strategic change translates into change in time horizons only through intermediate-level variables which happen to covary with the SV and DV perfectly in this case and thus do not produce a discernible effect but otherwise behave differently. However, it seems unlikely that there would be neither a direct nor an indirect link between the SV and DV. Second, the variation in the SV within the case eliminates the possibility that wartime per se, the other high-order condition besides strategic circumstances, is the IV. Third, initial change in both the SV and the DV – at least insofar as the latter pertains to individual leaders – appears to begin at roughly the same time. The fact that average time horizons lag behind those of individual leaders indicates that an intervening variable is at play. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, covariation in the SV and DV does not occur only at individual points; rather, they covary consistently over longer periods of time. That is, not only do time horizons start to change at the same time as strategic circumstances, but they also continue to lengthen and shorten as the latter continue improve and worsen, respectively.
These conclusions are important for grand strategic theory because they provide a foundation upon which its explanatory power can be expanded. Time horizons explain why states would make short-term as opposed to long-term calculations, and these findings thus provide a basis for understanding not only why, but also how and when grand strategies change; i.e. that as a state finds itself in a less and less favorable situation, it will focus increasingly on the “how” of short-term policy. The discovered lag between change in individual leaders’ time horizons and average time horizons also evinces the need to make a conceptual distinction between the formulation and implementation of grand strategy, as the mechanism responsible for the translation of the prescribed course into action is likely to operate within a different temporal frame of reference precisely when the strategic environment changes.

One of the stronger arguments “against” grand strategy is that it is inherently difficult. As Amy Zegart writes: “In the post-9/11 world, forging a successful grand strategy is unlikely and dangerous.” In Zegart’s view, one of the principal issues is “the strategic interaction part of grand strategy, which requires predicting, evading, blocking, and otherwise adjusting to the countermoves of principal adversaries.”94 Furthermore, “[t]oday, the number, identity, and magnitude of dangers threatening American interests are all wildly uncertain [emphasis in original].”95 With regard to grand strategic theory, my findings refute the notion that it is something about the post-September 11 period specifically that makes grand strategy difficult. The fact that threats are more immediate and that the strategic situation can consequently change more quickly does prompt more frequent changes in time horizons and may result in grand strategic “confusion,”

95 Ibid., 2.
but my findings also suggest that a different and perhaps even more troubling contradiction is at work in the realm of grand strategy.

The manner in which the strategic environment interacts with time horizons yields the observation that the search for an “ideal” grand strategy will not bear fruit, even in theory. When the strategic environment is favorable, actors will think much less about how they are going to achieve something than about whether it is desirable, and will be unwarrantedly optimistic in doing so. When the strategic circumstances are unfavorable, however, and when the need for strategizing is perhaps even more pressing, a myopia of sorts will take hold of actors. As Krebs and Rapport note, “[r]edoubling efforts at the operational level” – which is, per the findings of this case study, what actors in a tight spot will likely do – “can lead actors to lose sight of their strategic goals—to the confusion of priorities and the misallocation of scarce resources.”\textsuperscript{96} Naturally, there are exceptions to this, but actors will generally forget about grand strategy precisely when they need it most, and will formulate it imperfectly at best when they have the opportunity to do so. The baseline assumption should therefore be that states are bad at formulating grand strategy.

The above insights are generalizable to a certain extent, but more research would be required to construct a theory. Given that average time horizons responded to changes in the SV in the same manner as Roosevelt’s time horizons – only with a delay – the sample size is large enough for it to be safe to say that it is overwhelmingly likely that time horizons shorten and lengthen as the strategic circumstances worsen and improve, regardless of personal characteristics of the actors under analysis. The question of when exactly an actor’s time horizons will react to changes in the strategic environment might, however, depend on his personal traits, especially

\textsuperscript{96} Krebs and Rapport, “International Relations and the Psychology of Time Horizons,” 532-533.
pathologies related to processing of information and preexisting mental constructs. It is possible that Roosevelt’s time horizons started shifting sooner than average time horizons because of how he processed information and that the time horizons of a different President would have, ceteris paribus, shifted in sync with or even lagged behind average time horizons. They could also have changed at a different rate. On the other hand, if the key intervening variable is an actor’s access to information about the strategic circumstances, individual leaders’ time horizons should always “stay ahead” of average time horizons.

The findings of the present case study are also likely not extrapolable to peacetime without additional qualification. The United States was technically not at war until the very end of the first analyzed period of change in strategic circumstances, but that is not enough to make the findings generalizable to peacetime. What is likely crucial is not so much whether a state is a belligerent in a war or not but rather the qualitative and quantitative differences between peacetime information and wartime information.

In his work on how organizational culture has influenced the development of counterinsurgency doctrine, Austin Long addresses a similar question, albeit in a different context. He writes that the influence of culture will depend on the ambiguity of information that is available. “When information is relatively unambiguous, culture plays less of a role, as what is important is clear. However, when information is ambiguous, culture is very important in filtering the information ‘signal’ from the overall ‘noise’ of the information environment.” Hence, “For military organizations, peacetime information is probably the most ambiguous, whereas major conflict is probably the least ambiguous source of information.”

Additional research would be

needed to confirm this, but it seems possible that a similar pattern exists for strategic circumstances and time horizons. In that case, if changes in strategic circumstances are clearer and more abrupt, and consequently also easier to interpret – like in wartime – the role of individual traits and pathologies would be diminished. If changes in strategic circumstances are more gradual and more ambiguous – like in peacetime – the role of said traits and pathologies is accentuated.

Finally, how swiftly and how strongly time horizons react to changes in the strategic environment likely depends on the overall vulnerability of an individual state. The United States was, after all, relatively well insulated from the effects of events in Europe. In light of the fact that time horizons in the United States nonetheless responded fairly promptly to early-war developments, time horizons in states like Britain and the Soviet Union probably covary with changes in the strategic environment even more closely.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this case study show that there is a very close link – possibly causal – between changes in the strategic environment and domestic actors’ time horizons. In the case of the United States during the Second World War, average time horizons lagged behind those of the individual leader, but in general, the rate at which they change and when exactly they start changing is likely influenced primarily by as yet uninvestigated intervening variables. This paper offers several suggestions as to what those intervening variables might be, but, due to its necessarily limited length and scope, does not test them.

Additional research within psychology would be beneficial for shedding more light on the relationships discussed in this paper, but there might not exist a satisfactory proxy for changing strategic circumstances. As Krebs and Rapport write, “laboratory settings cannot fully simulate
the pressure or stakes of strategic decision-making environments.” Nonetheless, the field could reveal – perhaps more accurately than historical research can – how personal traits and information processing pathologies interact with the patterns analyzed by CLT. The path forward must combine historical research with additional experimentation in psychology, and not rely too much on one or the other, lest it lead to misleading conclusions or findings with limited applicability.

Grand strategy may appear to be a rather amorphous and slippery concept, but that should not dissuade us from attempting to theorize it. In fact, breaking it down into more manageable chunks – i.e. analyzing different aspects of grand strategy separately – is the only way for writing about grand strategy to be analytical useful. Rather than attempting to construct a grand theory of grand strategy, one must begin by expanding understanding of the underlying mechanisms and relationships, but more research will have to be conducted before different strands can be pulled together and an overarching theory developed.

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