

辩证法与大战略研究:一种中国观点

DIALECTICS AND THE STUDY OF GRAND STRATEGY : A CHINESE VIEW

By Prof. Wu Chunqiu

内容提要:大战略作为知识体系,是国家最高决策集团的一种战略思维模式,也可以说是国家级战略管理的学问。把辩证方法引入大战略研究,可以使之更加科学,并且具有鲜明的中国特色。本文在辩证法指导下,吸收中国传统战略理论和实践经验,结合国外新的研究成果,提出大战略的七条基本原则。这些原则既可用以观察分析其他国家的大战略实践,也可供思考我国自己的总体战略问题参考。

关键词:战略研究 大战略 原则 辩证法

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作者:吴春秋,军事科学院外国军事研究部研究员,著有《论大战略和世界战争史》等

GRAND STRATEGY IN A BROAD SENSE

The concept of grand strategy is prevalent in political literatures of certain western countries, especially the United States and Great Britain. It is generally defined as an art (or art and science) of developing and employing political, economic, technological as well as military forces to attain the national objective. For many decades, the United States and some other western powers have been pursuing different grand strategies to promote their national interests around the world.

China is a country rich in strategic theories and practices. As is well known, Chinese national leaders tended to think state and world affairs in a long-term strategic and macroscopic way, but they had never used the term "grand strategy" officially so far. Nevertheless, it is frequently used in Chinese academic circles since 1980s. In many cases it is used to analyze the grand strategies of western powers in action, just as the way by which the American researchers recently approached China's "grand strategy" in their perception. Meanwhile, quite a few Chinese scholars found that the concept of grand strategy is useful for thinking over the problems about China's domestic and foreign policies in responding to the challenges it is facing or will be facing in the new century. In this sense, the concept of grand strategy is inter-

preted in China as a system of knowledge, a special mode of thinking for top decision-makers and their brain trusts and advisory bodies. It is tantamount to the technique of national strategic management.

Although Chinese scholars are basically identified with the prevailing western definition of grand strategy mentioned above, there remained, however, two points to be further developed:

For the first, the means of grand strategy to attain the national objective must not be confined to the aforementioned forces; they must be extended to include all the elements of "comprehensive national strength".

For the second, two different interpretations about the substance of national objective of grand strategy must be clarified. Traditionally, the United States and some other western powers tended to understand it as national security alone, hence the national security strategy, or "grand strategy in a narrow sense", as referred to it by this author. On the other hand, some Chinese scholars (this author included) inclined to interpret the national objective as a combination of both national security and national development. This is a concept of grand strategy in a broad sense. Such kind of grand strategy is applicable to either wartime or peacetime, and it should be a guide to both domestic as well as foreign affairs. It is significant to point out that this is in line with the de facto overall strategy pursuing by China.

The concept of grand strategy in a broad sense is particularly suitable to a great developing socialist country as China, especially in an age with peace and development as its main theme. It is not by coincidence that some of the western scholars also argue in favor of the concept of grand strategy in a broad sense after the Cold War was over. For examples, Professor Neville Brown of Birmingham University advanced a new idea in his work Strategic Revolution: Thoughts for the Twenty-first Century that the development problems and that of security should be taken into consideration as a whole in strategic studies. And so did Professor Paul Kennedy of Yale University. There are indications that most western grand strategists do not identify with their innovative ideas. But their ideas are shared by their Chinese counterparts.

Therefore, the western concept of grand strategy has been revised, broadened and transformed into a new framework of strategic studies in China.

One point is in common: grand strategy, no matter in a narrow or in a broad sense, is the overall strategy of a state, and is consequently, above the traditional military strategy. The latter must be guided by the former, and ready to accomplish tasks assigned by it. In return, grand strategy must take into consideration of what tasks the military is able to accomplish, and never ask it to do anything beyond its capability. Military strategists and commanders of armed forces should be good at thinking in terms of grand strategy, freeing from the narrow militarist view.

One of the unique contributions to the grand strategic studies by Chinese scholars is perhaps the introduction of the methodology of dialectics into it. In this way, the concept of grand strategy becomes even more characteristic of Chinese feature.

THE OBJECTIVE REALITY AND SUBJECTIVE INITIATIVE

From the viewpoint of philosophy, or exactly, dialectics, the essence of all strategies is made up of a pair of basic contradictions, i.e., objective reality and subjective initiative. This is also true for grand strategy. The only difference is that objective reality and subjective initiative involved in a grand strategy are both at a higher level and in a wider scope.

By objective reality we mean the objective world which exists independently of man's will and has its own law of development. By subjective initiative we mean man's ability to comprehend the objective world and consciously transform it to achieve certain purpose. The two constitute the unity of opposites. Fundamentally speaking, objective reality as material base is first and primary, whereas subjective initiative is secondary but the most active of the two. Subjective initiative separated from objective reality will inevitably lead to the theory that man's will alone decides everything. However, if one is only confined to the objective reality and does not bring subjective initiative into full play he will become a fatalist.

Thus an intelligent director of strategy must respect objective reality and proceed in all cases from it. On no account must he divorce himself from objective reality to act rashly. On the other hand, he must be good at making use of the conditions provided by the objective reality to achieve his goals. In no case must he serve as a slave of objective reality and accomplish nothing. This is the true meaning in studying the relationship between objective reality and subjective initiative.

What is the objective reality when a researcher or a director of grand strategy considers his strategy? It is the state of the nation, the world situation, the globe as a whole, and even the cosmic space. Or, in other words, it is the context within which the grand strategy decision-makers operate. We call it the strategic environment. It is the basis and starting point of working out a grand strategy. Therefore, the first thing to do in thinking over a grand strategy is to analyze the strategic environment. However, the purpose of analyzing the strategic environment is to bring the conscious initiative into full play. The concrete expression of this initiative is in the formulation and implementation of a correct grand strategy.

An intelligent grand strategy used for directing war often achieves astonishing results. The outcome of a war depends not only on the balance of the objective material strength of the belligerents, but also the subjective ability to employ it. Why could one side defeat the other in the history of wars even though both were roughly matched in strength? Why could a small nation defeat a big and an inferior force defeat a superior one? It relates to the art of subjective guidance. For this there are many convincing examples, such as China's War of Resistance against Japan, the Chinese People's Liberation War, and the war to Resist U.S. Aggression

by the Vietnamese People, etc.

The same is true for the grand strategy in peacetime. Japan, the defeated nation of World War II, though in very difficult conditions, leaped to the second economic power in the world within several decades and was regarded as a miracle. Its success consisted in adopting and pursuing a realistic grand strategy: while taking advantage of the U.S. military protection, it puts emphasis on the development of education, trade and technology.

Whereas Japan is one of the world's major powers, Switzerland, a landlocked small country of Europe, enabled itself to rank among the world's developed countries even before World War II and has had a long state of stability and security for more than one hundred years. This relates to the correct grand strategy it takes: despite of the unfavorable conditions of small territory, insignificant population and scarce resources, it developed mainly the products with distinctive national features, such as low material consumption and high technical standards, in order to win in the international competition. Meanwhile, it also vigorously developed tourism and foreign trade. In national defense, it pursued a policy of "everybody a soldier" and "armed neutrality". In this regard, Israel and the city-state Singapore have a lot of worth studying, too.

There is something in common in the above mentioned examples: Although these countries have very unfavorable conditions, they are good at proceeding from actual conditions and bringing subjective initiative into full play. Therefore they succeeded.

We can also give some negative examples. The most glaring one is the former Soviet Union, a superpower that used to be a match for the United States. The objective conditions of the former Soviet Union were quite favorable. Unexpectedly, however, it declined and disintegrated rapidly. There is no doubt that many factors account for this event, but one of the decisive factors is the fatal mistake made by Gorbachev in his strategic directing.

The United States, as the only superpower of the world today, is at the zenith of its national power. This, to a certain extent, is related to the successful grand strategy it had pursued in confrontation with the Soviet Union. However, just as the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Zi preaches: "O Happiness! Misery lurks beneath it." If the political and military leaders of the United States are misled by its present posture, persist in embracing a grand strategy of unilateralism, seeking to dominate the world affairs with preponderance of military power, then, it will trigger a global backlash for sure. Sooner or later it will find itself in an awkward situation: alienated by its allies, resented and opposed by increasingly more and more people across the world.

To put it in a nutshell, under some given objective conditions, the right and wrong directing of a grand strategy will decide the success and failure of a cause, the victory and defeat of a war, the rise and fall of a country, and the prosperity and decline of a nation. In this sense, we may say that a wise grand strategy is a science to win and an art to create miracles.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GRAND STRATEGY

Grand strategy, like other branch of knowledge, contains a series of basic principles with some regularity. However, there has not been so far a consensus of the basic principles of grand strategy and it seems that neither will there be one in the future. This author is trying to sum up seven basic principles of grand strategy as follows.

1. Principle of Overall Situation

The objective conditions, e.g., a country or the whole world, on which a director of grand strategy depends, are a big system. It is an integration of numerous components. Therefore, to bring the subjective initiative of the director of a grand strategy into play must reflect and suit this integration. Integration is an overall situation, or a situation as a whole. All strategies emphasize overall situation. The overall situation of grand strategy is at a higher level since a grand strategy is the overall strategy above all other strategies.

To understand the situation as a whole, one must get rid of the usual habit of thinking and follow the three principles of overall thinking: The first principle is continuity, i.e., the principle of time, which means that the subject of thinking must reflect the object in a vertical way. The second principle is stereo, i.e., the principle of space, which means the subject of thinking must reflect the object in a horizontal and multi-dimensional way. The third principle is system i.e., the structure-function principle, which requires the subject of thinking to understand the object from the unity of structure (the internal relations of a system) and function (the external relations of a system).

More specifically, according to the principle of time the director of a grand strategy must pay attention to the overall situation of the past, the present and the future. If the future is a concept of a relatively long period, he must pay attention to the overall situation of its various stages (near-term, mid-term and long-term). According to the principle of space, the director of a grand strategy must pay attention to the overall situation of various parts (issues, areas, departments, aspects, fronts, etc.). According to the principle of system, the director of a grand strategy must link up the two big systems, i.e., the country and the whole world, with each other and study their interactions. Meanwhile, he must do his best to seek the effect of "one plus one is greater than two", as the people often say. The principle of system is the most critical point in studying grand strategy.

To implement the principle of overall situation, one must collect a vast amount of information sufficient enough to reflect the overall situation. A scientific forecast must be made on this basis. Besides, an overall verification must be made for all major strategic decisions and a total design must be formulated. One cannot be satisfied only with the verification of each individual project. A director of grand strategy must pay his attention mainly to the total design, and should not take on all the details. Obviously, to deviate from the principle of overall situation will lead to a short-term act, which only considers the immediate interests and does not take the long-term interests into account. It will lead to a situation in which one only shows concern at the parts without considering the whole; thus the internal conflicts will never cease. It will lead to a result of losing more resources input and gaining little benefits. The director of grand strategy should do his utmost to avoid all of this.

2. Principle of Goals serving Politics

The subjective initiative of a director of grand strategy is a conscious struggle with specific goals. Therefore, a grand strategy, like other strategies, must have a clear strategic goal that can be achieved through efforts. The goal of a grand strategy must determined directly on the basis of the political goal of the subject of act and must serve the political goal to ensure its realization.

The political goal of the subject of act of a grand strategy is, in the final analysis, the concentrated reflection of the basic interests and orientation of a nation in a certain historic periods. In the Western countries, it is reflected in the "national goals" and "national policies". In China, it is reflected in the general line or basic line of the Chinese Communist Party.

Politics can be just or unjust. Therefore, whether or not a political goal is just will determine the just or unjust nature of the goal of a grand strategy. In different times, different subjects of act have different views on the just or unjust nature of the goals of grand strategies. However, there are certain common criteria after all to make judgement. Generally speaking, internally a just goal of grand strategy in modern times must contribute to the defense of national existence, independence and sovereignty, to the liberation of productive forces and to the promotion of the progress of society. It must be in keeping with the interests and demands of the majority of the domestic masses. Externally, it must contribute to the defense of a fair international order and peace. It must be against the war of aggression, hegemony and power politics. It must be in keeping with the interests and demands of the majority of the world people. Otherwise, it is unjust. Although we can use these criteria to judge the just and unjust nature of the goal of grand strategy, there are lots of complicated situations in practice including the situation in which just and unjust mingle with each other. Therefore, we should make a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, without any prejudice.

Whether a grand strategy will succeed or fail depends on many factors. Though adhering to a just goal cannot fully ensure the success of a grand strategy, it contributes to winning the support of the domestic people, as well as the understanding and sympathy of the international society. Consequently, it will create favorable conditions, both internal and external, for grand strategy.

3. Principle of Comprehensive National Strength

Developing and employing comprehensive national strength to achieve the goal of grand

strategy is the most important key content, as well as one of the basic features to distinguish grand strategy from other strategies. The grand strategy of a subject of act, whether a political group, a state or an alliance of states, must rely on the comprehensive national strength.

Comprehensive national strength is a big system. The factors of comprehensive national strength are interdependent. They condition each other and benefit each other. Each country has its own favorable and unfavorable, strong and weak factors of national strength. However, if we can handle them intelligently, we can make full use of the favorable factors, avoid the unfavorable ones and bring the overall might of comprehensive national strength into play. This is the significance of the principle of comprehensive national strength.

In the fierce international competition and struggle, comprehensive national strength is a major balancing weight. In order to achieve the goal of grand strategy by employing comprehensive national strength, we must develop comprehensive strength. This needs a long period of tremendous efforts.

The build-up of comprehensive national strength can only be based on the strengthening of the overall might of all the factors of national strength. Therefore, we must correctly adjust the structure of the national strength system, coordinate the development of all the factors. If we only develop one factor in a one-sided way, the result will be either a failure to develop it or a disruption of the entire system of national strength. The lopsided development of military forces can be a good example. In a large-scale war, military force is of special importance. However, it must be rooted in the soil of a powerful comprehensive national strength. Otherwise it is weak in essence. Even such important factors of national strength as economy, science and technology, can not be developed in an isolated and one-sided way.

The coordination of the development of all the national strength factors includes setting priorities. In today's world, the practice of countries is generally like this: They take economy as the foundation or priority. Science and technology, especially high technology, is the precursor. Education is the precursor's precursor. Defense is the backing, whereas politics (government) plays a role of unification and coordination. Thus all the factors of national strength can be brought into play through these links of chain. Many factors should be considered in the feasibility verification of various strategic decisions, however, special attention should be paid to their contribution to the buildup of the overall comprehensive national strength.

4. Principle of Strategic Focal Points

By strategic focal points we mean the vital parts, directions, key points or issues which have decisive impacts on the overall situation.

The focal points of a grand strategy for directing war are often the areas where the basic interests of one or both parties of the war lie. They are the places that must be defended tenaciously or seized by fierce fight. In determining these strategic focal points, we must scientifically analyze the situation of both the enemy and ourselves. We must also take the situation of

all the aspects - politics, economy, geography, defense, etc. - into consideration to make a comprehensive judgement. Especially when there are two or more than two enemies or threatened directions, it is even more important to distinguish primary enemy or direction from the secondary ones. Thus the primary and secondary strategic directions can be determined. The strategic concept of "Europe First" pursued by the United States during WW11 is a classic example. If the strategic focal point is properly selected in war, usually the total situation will be activated and probably the fate of war will be decided.

In the case of grand strategy for directing peacetime development, the focal points can be either the weak links or superiority in national development. If we can grasp these strategic focal points, usually we can bring along a new situation in the economic and social development. In China we take economic development as the core at the present time. "Core" means the strategic focal point at the highest level. In economic area we take agriculture, energy, transport, education, science and technology as the focal points. This is a typical example in determining the strategic focal points of peacetime development.

Strategic focal points determine the strategic deployment which includes the division of strategic stages and the deployment of resources such as human resources, material resources, financial resources, etc. If the focal points are not clear, there will be no basis for the entire strategic deployment. If wrong focal points are selected, the total situation will be in confusion. Therefore, the director of grand strategy should relatively concentrate force to give priority to the guarantee of the needs of strategic focal points. Absolutely he can not put aside the focal points to immerse himself in the minor issues of no importance. On the other hand, he should not isolate the focal points, either. He should take the focal and non-focal points into overall consideration in a macroscopic way. He should correctly handle the relation between the "points" and the "surface". Furthermore, it must be emphasized that focal and non-focal points are exchangeable under given conditions.

5. Principle of Victory without War

To achieve the goal of grand strategy will usually encounter resistance, both domestic and foreign. The resistance reflects the conflict of interests among different subjects of act. Under given conditions, it may trigger a war. To achieve the goal of grand strategy without a war is obviously the best way out.

The idea of victory without war originated from a proposition in Sun tzu's Art of War. It says, "Subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence." The original meaning is to disintegrate and subdue the enemy forces under certain military pressure and coordinated with political and diplomatic offensive. This proposition is applicable not only to directing the tactics of a battle, but also to directing the strategies, including grand strategy of a war. Afterwards the proposition was developed to an idea of "victory without war" in some other classics such as Xunzi, and became a proposition of sheer grand strategy. Since

the beginning of this century, some western researchers on grand strategies have used it and taken the idea of "victory without war" as the highest criterion of grand strategy. This ancient idea has demonstrated even greater vitality since the appearance of nuclear weapons.

It is required to interpret the definition of "victory" in a broad sense when a director of grand strategy employs the principle of victory without war. To force the enemy to surrender is definitely a victory. To urge the enemy to accept peace talks is a victory, either. As a defensive country, if one can urge the enemy to abandon the war it plans to launch or even abandon its hostile altitude and turn hostility into friendship, it is an even greater victory. In the nuclear era, to contain the enemy's use of nuclear weapons is a victory as well. In a word, victory means achieving the goal of grand strategy without a bloody war. Of course the prerequisite is that there is really a possibility for a bloody war to break out.

Victory without war does not mean that there is not any war at all. The wars one must fight are political war, economic war, technological war, etc. To sum up in a word, it is a war of comprehensive national strength. Although military force is an important factor, in peacetime it usually acts as a backing and plays a role of invisible might.

It must be emphasized that victory without war can only be achieved under a series of favorable conditions. Therefore conditions must be created to strive for victory without war. One of the most important conditions is the preparation for war. Usually political leaders should pay more attention to victory without war. Whereas military leaders often pay more attention to fight and win. The better preparations we make for the war, the more possible the victory without war is. For a defensive country with well preparation, it is more possible to win the war. This is what we usually say - Prepare ourselves for both eventualities.

6. Principle of the Unity of Goals and Means

Grand strategy, like other strategies, must have unified goals and means. This is the key to the success or failure of grand strategy. The crux of the matter is to correctly handle the relationship between the goals and means. The means of grand strategy is a compound concept. It consists of two major components. One is strength, i.e., comprehensive national strength. The other is the policies, ways, methods, approaches, etc., to employ and develop comprehensive national strength.

We have described comprehensive national strength in the preceding part. Here only one point should be emphasized. Comprehensive national strength is the basis on which the goal of grand strategy can be achieved. In the meantime, policies are an indispensable condition to ensure the achievement of the goals of grand strategy. If we call comprehensive national strength a "dead" thing, then policies are "living" things. They are a vast field where the initiative of a director of grand strategy can be brought into full play. The tremendous might of brilliant policies can be unexpected. To a certain extent they can counteract the weakness of the national strength.

To maintain the goals of grand strategy in keeping with the means, attention must be paid to three points:

Firstly, the goals of grand strategy cannot go beyond the possibility of national strength. There are many examples in modern and ancient times, in China and elsewhere, which led to disastrous results because the goals went beyond the national strength.

Secondly, the goals of grand strategy must be supported by corresponding policies to ensure the achievement of the goals. A good example is the grand strategy for directing national development of our country at the present time. In order to achieve the magnificent goals in the first half of 21st Century, we have adopted a whole set of policies, both domestic and foreign. Included are a series of innovative policies for reform and opening up to the outside world (especially joining WTO and the strategy of full-scale development of the west), plus the policy known as "one country, two systems" which serves for the unification of our motherland.

Thirdly, all the means must be well coordinated to form a joined force. To do this, all the government departments and organizations concerning with formulating and implementing various policies must strive to effectively enhance the overall might of comprehensive national strength and bring it into play under the principle of conforming with the requirements of strategic goals. The situation in which the policies contradict and offset each other should be avoided.

7. Principle of Relative Stability

Any strategy has its stability. It is inconceivable that a strategy is promulgated in the morning and changed in the evening. Comparing with other strategies, the stability of grand strategy is more obvious, especially a grand strategy for directing peacetime development. Usually this kind of strategy lasts a whole historic period, i.e., several years at least or several decades at most. However, no strategy is immutable. A grand strategy will develop and change continuously in the course of its implementation; that is to say, there are unstable factors in stability. Therefore, we say it has a "relative stability".

The relative stability of grand strategy stems from the relative stability of the objective reality on which the grand strategic plan is based. The objective reality, or the strategic environment, is always in a continuous motion from quantitative change to qualitative change. When the objective reality is in a state of quantitative change, its stability is primary. When it is in a state of qualitative change, the original stability is completely broken. However, the process from quantitative change to qualitative change will generally take a long time. Therefore, a grand strategic plan, as a reflection of subjective initiative, must suit the relative stability of the objective reality. Before fixed goals are achieved, it must be kept unchanged. However, when the objective reality has changed or even a partial qualitative change has taken place, the strategic plan should be adjusted accordingly. When a fundamental qualitative change has taken place for the objective reality, it means that the original grand strategy has completed its

historical mission and should be replaced with a new one that suits the new historic period.

As far as the internal structure of grand strategy is concerned, the stability of each component is different from others. Usually the strategic goal is most stable. Goal will decide the overall situation. When goal changes, it means a change of the whole strategy. Therefore, we must be very cautious when we set the goals. We must strive to avoid adjusting or revising the entire strategy significantly in the course of its implementation due to improper goals setting. The next stable component is the strategic focal points. Change of focal points will inevitably influence the overall situation. Therefore, we must be cautious as well. The third stable component is policies, especially major policies that affect the overall situation. We should not change them thoughtlessly; otherwise we would lose the confidence of the people and cause serious consequences.

Among all the components of a grand strategy, tactics may be the most unstable one. Since tactics is usually set for a specific issue under a specific situation, when the circumstance has changed, tactics will be no longer effective. The flexibility of tactics is more obvious than its stability. Therefore, changes in tactics will not affect the overall situation.

In short, we cannot wantonly change a grand strategy that was formulated through careful consideration. However, when it must be changed we should change it resolutely. The key is that we should master the art to change and not to change. For this reason, a wise director of grand strategy must have a strong sense of information feedback as well as a strong sense of strategic opportunity. The former is the only way to verify if the objective reality has changed and what kind of change has taken place. The latter is a special skill a director of grand strategy must have, which originates from his unusual foresight. One of the most valuable characteristics a director of grand strategy must have is that he is apt to find and grasp firmly the opportunity of historic change to create a new situation. If he misses the historic opportunity he will inevitably be punished by history.

CONCLUSION

Grand strategy as a special mode of thinking for the top decision-makers of a state, has only a few principles as mentioned above. At first glance, they seem very simple. However, to have a good command of them is not easy. They are just like the rules of basic grammar in linguistics. Knowing these rules does not mean that you can write good articles. They are also like the basic rules of sport games. Knowing these rules does not mean that you will win on the sport ground. As Von Clausewitz puts it: "In strategy everything is very simple, but not on that account very easy". Sun Tzu had a more vivid description. He said: "The notes do not exceed five, but the changes of the five notes can never be fully heard. The colors do not exceed five, but the changes of the five colors can never be completely seen. The flavors do not

exceed five, but the changes of the five flavors can never be completely tasted. In warfare the strategic configurations do not exceed the unorthodox and orthodox, but the changes of unorthodox and orthodox can never be completely exhausted." What he said is about war, whereas the basic principles are completely applicable to grand strategy.

As we know, there are quite a few outstanding grand strategists in history who had committed some serious mistakes in directing grand strategies. In brief, to understand the principles of grand strategy is not difficult. However, to flexibly apply these principles to solving real problems is a very arduous undertaking. These applications include to win a war, to maintain the order and stability of a country for a long period of time, to realize its prosperity, and to seek world peace and a fair international order. Only by adopting a realistic approach, fostering the spirit of highly responsible to the people and history, working conscientiously, and going all out, can we achieve great successes.

Notes:

- ① The Book of Lao Zi (English edition), based on Ren Jiyu's A Taoist Classic: The Book of Lao Zi, Chapter 58, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1993
- ② Sun Tzu's Art of War, Planning of Offensives. See the Seven Military Classics of Ancient China, translated by Ralph Sawyer, p. 161, Westview, 1993
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About the Author

Wu Chunqiu Senior Fellow, Academy of Military Science. Former Concurrent Professor of International Politics, Beijing University; Fulbright Visiting Scholar to the United States. Recent academic work: ON GRAND STRATEGY AND WAR HISTORY OF THE WORLD (2002).