

**Final Report**  
**Language and the Politics of Grand Strategy**  
March 15, 2011

ISA Catalytic Research Workshop  
Held in conjunction with the 2011 annual meeting of the  
International Studies Association, Montreal, Canada

Overview

On March 15, 2011 we convened the International Studies Association Catalytic Research Workshop, "Language and the Politics of Grand Strategy." Ronald Krebs, of the University of Minnesota, and Stacie Goddard, of Wellesley College, organized the meeting. Participants are listed in the attached schedule. The workshop's purpose was to build upon and advance the burgeoning literature on rhetoric in international relations by promoting a focused conversation on the question of how talk, or linguistic practices, shape states' grand strategies. Grand strategy—defined as how a state's leaders coordinate the exercise of military, economic, and social power to pursue the nation's interests abroad<sup>1</sup>—is a subject that has long lain at the heart of security studies, and demonstrating the impact of rhetoric in this "hard case" would be particularly valuable. Indeed, grand strategy has its roots in theories about how the world works and in social and individual beliefs about the state's place in the international system. To be successful, grand strategies must be legitimated both at home and abroad, and only those strategies that can be sustained before relevant audiences can be pursued. Linguistic opportunities, constraints, and strategies, we argue, deserve more consideration than they have received to date in explaining why particular grand strategies are adopted, why alternatives are rejected, why some fail to gain traction, and why some are ultimately jettisoned.

Summary and discussion of broader themes

The workshop was organized around three broad themes: language and the origins of grand strategy, language and the operation of grand strategy, and language and the transformation of grand strategy. For each of these themes, we solicited two papers, which were presented and critiqued by a discussant. The workshop concluded with a discussion of broader issues of language and grand strategy, led by Michael Williams of the University of Ottawa, and William Wohlforth of Dartmouth College.

First, workshop participants explored to what extent, when, and how language influences the *origins* of a state's grand strategy? In this section, we discussed two papers. Markus Kornprobst presented his work "Contested Public Justification: The

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<sup>1</sup> Kennedy 1991, 1-2.

EU, Grand Strategy, and World Politics." In this paper, Kornprobst uses linguistic approaches, drawn from Kenneth Burke, to explore why the European Union has failed as of yet to formulate a grand strategy. Stacie Goddard's paper, "Legitimacy in the Balance: Hitler's Rhetoric and British Foreign Policy, 1933-1938" argued that Britain failed to balance against Hitler because of legitimation strategies: by appealing to recognized norms of self-determination, Hitler undercut a coherent balancing policy. Discussion following the paper presentations pushed the authors on the "value added" of a linguistic approach. How do prevailing narratives of national identity and security shape the grand strategies that emerge—privileging particular aims and policies and marginalizing others—beyond what would be expected in competing "materialist" accounts? Some asked about the relationship between agency and structure in both of the papers, suggesting that the papers were both too "agentic" in their approach.

In the second section of the workshop, we discussed papers related to the operation of grand strategy. Here, John Mearsheimer, of the University of Chicago, presented the papers of Jennifer Mitzen (The Ohio State University) and Michael Williams and Vibeke Tjalve. Mitzen's paper, "Working Together' Power: Global Governance as Collective Intention," argued that only through a discursive approach can one understand why Russia did not behave more aggressively during the Greek Revolt. Williams and Tjalve's paper posited that realists have overlooked the critical role of "rhetorical leadership," both in defining the boundaries of the state, and constructing the national interest. Discussion that followed posed several questions: how do actors' rhetorical strategies influence whether or not a grand strategy will succeed or fail—that is, effectively bring means and ends into alignment? How can leaders' linguistic choices persuade others, especially those not otherwise well inclined, that the state's aims are legitimate and therefore worthy of their support? How can leaders' rhetorical deployments box others in, coercing them into accepting outcomes that they would otherwise reject? In general, can we be more specific in identifying the mechanisms behind rhetorical mobilization and coercion than we often are when using linguistic approaches?

In the third section, we discussed papers about the transformation of grand strategy. Here, discussant Srdjan Vucetic presented and critiqued two papers, Jack Snyder's, "Myths of Empire and Blowback Revisited," and Ronald Krebs's essay, "Military Conflict and the Politics of Narrative: The Rise and Fall of the Cold War Consensus." Snyder's paper explored the relationship between ideational and material approaches to leader's rhetoric. Ron Krebs essay argued that, contra much of constructivist theory, it is in moments of *success* that narratives are most likely to change, presenting quantitative and qualitative evidence of narrative shifts during the Cold War. As with the other sections, much of the discussion that followed concerned the "value added" of linguistic approaches. Participants also raised the following questions: Under what conditions do dominant discourses and narratives erode? Do leaders jump through already open linguistic windows, or can they use clever rhetoric to open them? If the rhetorical opportunity structure is slack, must



we turn to exogenous shocks—most notably, war—to explain how agents come to challenge dominant narratives? What is the relationship between policy failures and the narratives that give rise to them: are these narratives then fully rejected, or are they simply emended?

The workshop concluded with comments from Williams and Wohlforth. These discussants urged us to more precisely define grand strategy, and to articulate more clearly the role that language plays in each of the papers. We were also encouraged to consider the role of ethics in the study of language and politics.

### Future Plans

We have already begun to discuss the future of this project. There are, at the moment, three courses of action. The first is simply to reconvene a panel on the topic at ISA, San Diego in 2012, to discuss what modifications we've made to our work in response to workshop comments and criticisms. The second, more ambitious undertaking is putting together a special issue in a peer-reviewed journal on language and grand strategy. Krebs and Goddard have begun coordinating the special issue, which has strong interest among participants. Finally, we will also consider whether to move forward on an edited volume on language and grand strategy.

### Budget Expenses

Please see attached on page 6.

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**Organizers**

*Stacie Goddard*  
(Wellesley College)

&

*Ron Krebs*  
(University of Minnesota)

*Participant list - as of February 15, 2011*

*Paper-Writers*

- Stacie Goddard, Wellesley College
- Markus Kornprobst, Vienna School of International Studies
- Ron Krebs, University of Minnesota
- Jennifer Mitzen, Ohio State University
- Jack Snyder, Columbia University
- Vibeke Schou Tjalve, University of Copenhagen
- Michael Williams, University of Ottawa

*Discussants*

- Srdjan Vucetic, University of Ottawa
- Chris Layne, Texas A&M University
- John Mearsheimer, University of Chicago
- Bill Wohlforth, Dartmouth College

*Schedule*

- 8:30 – 9      Welcome & Introduction  
                  Stacie Goddard & Ron Krebs
- 9 – 10:15     Language and the Origins of Grand Strategy
- Markus Kornprobst, "Contested Public Justification: The EU, Grand Strategy, and World Politics"
  - Stacie Goddard, "Legitimacy in the Balance: Hitler's Rhetoric and British Foreign Policy, 1933-1938"
- Discussant: William Wohlforth*
- 10:15 – 10:45 Coffee
- 10:45 – 12     Language and the Pursuit of Grand Strategy
- Jennifer Mitzen, " 'Working Together' Power: Global Governance as Collective Intention"
  - Vibeke Tjalve & Michael Williams, "The Rhetorics of Realism: American Grand Strategy and the Language of National Purpose"
- Discussant: John Mearsheimer*
- 12 – 1:15      Lunch
- 1:15 – 2:30    Language and the Transformation of Grand Strategy
- Jack Snyder, "Myths of Empire and Blowback Revisited"
  - Ron Krebs, "Military Conflict and the Politics of Narrative: The Rise and Fall of the Cold War Consensus"
- Discussant: Srdjan Vucetic*
- 2:30 – 3:00    Coffee
- 3:00 – 4:30    Concluding Comments and Final Discussion  
                  Michael Williams  
                  Bill Wohlforth

### Workshop Reimbursements

Chair: Ronald Krebs

Participants	Hotel Accommodation	Per Diem (if APL)	Misc. Approved Costs	Total Reimb.	
Stacie Dobbard	\$0.00	\$75.00		\$75.00	
Mirkus Kampstahl	\$398.56	\$150.00		\$548.56	
Ronald Krebs	\$0.00	\$75.00		\$75.00	
Christopher Layne	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$0.00	DID NOT ATTEND
John Measheimer	\$197.44	\$75.00		\$272.44	
Jennifer Milton	\$199.28	\$75.00		\$274.28	
Jack Snyder	\$199.28	\$75.00		\$274.28	
Vilkele Schow Tjave	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$0.00	CHOSE NOT TO REQUEST REIMBURSEMENT
Michael Williams	\$234.65	\$75.00		\$309.65	
William Woodfort	\$148.77	\$75.00		\$223.77	
Susan Yulew	\$199.28	\$75.00		\$274.28	
			<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$2,327.26</b>	