Note: Below are informal notes taken by a JHU/APL staff member at the Seminar.

Mr. Mead began his discussion on US Grand Strategy using the description a British diplomat once gave for US foreign policy: it was much like discussing snakes in Ireland – there are none. He went on to note that US foreign policy generally lurched from one president to the next and between the presidents and Congress with various pushes and pulls from NGOs, the CIA, and other elements which all seem to dump on the State Department. This lurching could be portrayed much as Stalin described Khrushchev – like a cow dancing on ice.

US has no Grand Strategy or what is historically meant as Grand Strategy
- Bismarck had one for Germany
- Metternich had one for Europe
- Talleyrand had several
- US cannot do long-term planning
  - Secretaries of State rarely last 4 years
  - Presidents will do 8 years at the most
  - Such short terms do not permit long-term plans needed for a real Grand Strategy
- Bureaucracies in the US are designed to be weaker
  - In other countries little changes in Foreign Ministries when governments change
    - The task of coming up with overall long term plans has been deputized to a group of career officials
  - In US changes in the State Department go deep with every change in administration
    - Bureaucrats have far less weight
    - Bottomline: The system is built to be open to political pressure
- There may be a Captain at the helm of the ship of state, but there is brawl happening on the poop deck
  - Sugar lobbies (or lobbies for other commodities) might have something to say
  - Armaments lobbies and disarmament lobbies have opposing inputs
  - Result: the ship of state lurches constantly
    - Looks like a disaster to anyone looking from the outside
    - Ship never goes where any one lobby/interest wants it to go – unless it was accidental
    - No one is ever 100% satisfied with US foreign policy
- All of this mystifies the world
  - Example: the American president decides it will be nice to Saudi Arabia
    - Lots of visits planned and lower level visits occur
Much policy talk about making Saudi Arabia feel comfortable and safe
Then the State Department comes out with its annual report on religious freedom and gives a very low rating to Saudi Arabia
  - Bottomline: The world wants to know what is the Americans’ clever plan to dominate the world
  - Outside observers can’t believe that the US is so foolish or inept

**Five Steps in the “US Plan for World Domination”**

**Step #1. Don’t look like you have a Grand Strategy:** See above

**Step #2. Have what you do work – US has been rising throughout its history and so it must be doing something right in the long-term**

Why does this work?
- There are two kinds of states – Lighthouses and Mirror States
  - Lighthouse states are the classic political science state
    - Bismarck sat in a tower above it all, seeing far before coming up with a plan in a complicated game of chess played with other Lighthouse states
    - Eventually, beam of light shines out to show the course of the county
    - This is how a state should work in classic theory
  - Mirror states reflect all the various opinions within them
    - Many varying voices and interests in the Society show up
    - It is the poop deck struggle of competing voices
    - The resulting course is really a vector – the more people want to go in a given direction, the more the movement will in that general direction
    - To the extent this state has a Grand Strategy it will not be an abstract
      - Whatever order or structure is in the society will appear in its Grand Strategy
      - No one is sitting around thinking up a plan
      - Can only look at what the plan was by seeing it in history
- A pattern emerges in history – it was not a random walk
  - Must look at decades to see the pattern
  - It is so secret a plan that no one know what it is
  - To a certain extent the US stole this method from the Brits
    - The Brits stole it from the Dutch who perfected it in the 17th Century
    - The Dutch developed Version 1.0
    - The Brits moved to Version 2.0 in the 18th Century
    - The US came up with Version 3.0 after 1940
  - Consider this the *Anglo-American Plan for World Domination*
    - Big thing to remember: It has worked for centuries
    - Run by two English-speaking global commercial powers
    - Many others have tried to overcome their leadership but none have been able to do so yet
- What is the Grand Strategy embedded in the underlying structure?
  - Domestically – have an open society at home
    - Dutch in the 17th Century started this
    - Wars going on all over Europe but not in the Netherlands
Calvinists in Netherlands thought everyone else would be going to hell but them, but in the meantime willing to live with all those other idolaters, etc.
  - As long they as carried out their bad practices quietly and abided by Dutch laws, they could live, work, get rich in the Netherlands
    - Just pay taxes and help the Dutch get rich
    - Even happy to have Catholics and Jews if they contributed to the commercial success of the Dutch

Example: Jews fleeing persecution in Portugal arrived in New Amsterdam
  - The governor wanted to throw them out
  - He heard from his superiors in the Netherlands reminding him that:
    - His colony was there to make money for them
    - His colony needed all the people it could get
    - He should not force out people who might help make them a profit
  - Dutch also permitted an atmosphere of openness about ideas
    - Scientists were encouraged to work on new concepts at Dutch universities
    - It was safe to talk about new ideas there
    - Attracted lots of liberal thinkers from all over Europe and Britain
    - Universities became the hotbeds of new technologies
    - Even new business concepts were invented
      - The first stock markets were followed by the first boom/bust cycles
        - Speculating in tulips was an early bubble that burst
        - System kept going but with new ways developed to be more careful in the future
      - Joint stock companies developed
      - Developed a system of taxation that went on to fund all national governments except the North Koreans
  - Careers were open to the talented not just the connected
    - Poor peasants could get rich
    - Merit based bureaucracies and businesses were successful

Second part of Step #2: Take the show on the road
  - All those new technologies, methodologies, capitalism concepts, etc were then taken to the rest of the world to build up trade
    - Needed a navy to do so – Netherlands (about the size of Maryland) had 10,000 ships operating worldwide
    - They thought globally about all the available markets
      - Wool, spice, slaves, etc.
      - Only worried about how to maximize their returns
    - Dutch got rich from employing all those new technologies and ways in overseas trade
      - Look at the Dutch Masters painting in the National Gallery sometime
        - See how rich everyone looked, all things they had from all over the world
        - Shows that they were the first consumer society
Step #3: Develop a geo-political strategy based on world trade efforts

- The vital interests of the country should be global
  - An 18th Century British prime minister noted that his foreign policy decisions needed to take into account issues from all over the world
  - This can be seen in how the US makes its decisions when compared to all others
    - Most other countries worry about countries/problems nearest to them
    - US does not have as much concern about Mexico or Canada as it does elsewhere in the world
  - US wants to have a world system that is open to/contributes to US interests and US trade
  - Brits had the same openness concept in the 18th Century
    - All the others were worrying small nearby issues
    - Prussia and Austria fought a bloody war over little Silesia
      - Fredrick became known as the Great for winning that war
      - At the same time the Brits were busy getting the French and others out of North America and India
    - Balance of Power strategy dominated Europe
      - Concept was that no one power would conquer Europe
      - So they could never come together to conquer the British
      - The British did not try to conquer Europe
        - Wanted an open system that would work for them
    - Largely a maritime strategy
      - Admiral Mahon’s concepts were not tactical
      - More about wealth that comes from being able to trade world wide
      - Basically involved protecting the sea lanes to make them safe for commerce

Step #4: Open up your system to others

- Starts back about 1763 when the British basically defeated Europe and became a world power
  - They then could have done what Spain and Portugal had done and closed their system to others
  - Instead the Brits developed the concept of free trade for everyone
- US carried this free trade notion on in the 20th Century with GAT and other such efforts
  - Even after World War II Germany and Japan were allowed to participate
    - They could trade / buy / invest on the same terms as the US and allies
    - US wanted them to get rich and be happy
- Big strategic idea: if they are wealthy they are less likely to hate us
  - Idea goes back to Adam Smith
  - Germany and Japan no longer feel the need to overturn the system
  - It is not a zero-sum game – there can be winners on both sides
  - Society can be open
  - Same idea US is trying to promote with China and India now
Step #4A: Open the system to the world
Step#4B: If some people are not reasonable about #4A, then you need to do something about it

- Germany was getting wealthy and trading all over before WWI but it wasn’t enough for some Germans
  - It had to be “Deutschland über alles”
  - Those who chose to go for more did not understand how integrated their economy was with the rest of the world
    - Had to bring in food/other needs from elsewhere but war cut off supplies
    - Tin/rubber/etc. were particularly needed in war time but they came from far away and were cut off by war
    - Shortages for civilians were a growing problem as businesses lost their links to their markets overseas
    - Germany needed even more money for war but it was not making any
    - US became the primary customer of many South American and Asian suppliers who could no longer send goods/commodities to Germany
  - Same sort of thing happened in World War II
    - A German general noted that he knew all was lost at the Battle of the Bulge when his forces overran a US barracks
      - They found a chocolate cake that had been sent to a private
      - The Germans had not seen chocolate or the makings for a cake for years
      - Yet, here was a private who could be sent a cake from overseas to a battleground

Note: This system works and has worked for centuries for both the British and Americans

- Anglo-Americans have not lost a Great Power war since the 17th Century
  - The Brits lost only one world-changing war but the Americans did not
  - No real losses since the War of the League of Augsburg
- We should think about this fact more than we usually do when trying to look at the current state of things for now and the future

Step #5: Promote open society values around the world

- If this is the secret to US power why should we be telling everyone about it?
  - We could let China fail with its autocracy
  - In general, US society believes that we need to encourage others to be open
    - Why? We can’t get rich trading with a poor man
- In 1945 the US was on top of the world – had 50% of the world’s GDP
  - Step #4A won’t work as well if others don’t see benefits for themselves
  - We worry less about parts of the world that are doing well
    - The MidEast, where development does not seem to be working, is where we are hated most
    - China now sees that it is better to be a developing country
  - US has been laboring to promote this general openness
    - Done by the British before the US
    - Not always done consistently
Few policy-makers wake up trying to decide which of these steps to be working on during the upcoming day.

Much of this comes from our social DNA.

**A Flaw in this Plan “to Dominate the World”: Hegemonic powers tend to like status quo**

- However, the US system of capitalism and global interest as part of a Grand Strategy is really based on revolutionary change
  - Changes can be technological or social
- Fundamental challenges to US interests are invested in the global system of openness that make others wealthy
  - So always have challenges to US Grand Strategy
    - Rise of China for one
    - Rise of terrorism in the MidEast largely because of the influx of Western media, etc., bringing new challenges to them
  - It all comes from who we are and what we do
- US can be seen both as a global fire chief and as a global arsonist
  - It lights fires and can’t stop itself from doing so
  - All built into the US Grand Strategy
  - So our work is never done
    - The more success we have the more trouble we cause
    - Strategy needs to be reinvented constantly in each era

**Where are we now?**

Mr. Mead noted that he was more optimistic than many people

- In the last couple of years there has been a lot of whining
  - about foreign policy and losing wars
  - about the meltdown of the economy
  - about the rise of China in Africa and China “eating our lunch”
  - BUT: people need to read more history
- In the 350 years of development of the global system there have been busts many times
  - Starting with the tulip bust in the Netherlands
  - Look at 19th Century financial history for all its financial Panics
    - What we know about finance comes from what went wrong in the panics
    - Need to learn lessons to control the situations leading to crises
  - Crisis situations always seem to be inevitable and surprising at the same time
    - “This time it is different” – but it never is
  - The flexibility of our open system allows it to adjust to the current situation
    - Allows reconstruction to happen
    - China is likely to have more trouble because of its inflexibility
      - Locked into an export-based economic system
      - But can’t grow any faster than your customers in the long run
      - As economy grows advances won’t continue to be in the range of 10% when customers are only growing by 2 or 3%
    - Similar things used to be said about Japan
      - Japan has been looking for 20 years to find a new financial model
- China has bigger problems because it is so much bigger and has a weaker government structure
  - Looking at Asia it is better to have 2 nuclear powers with over a billion people each than to have only one
    - Compare to the 1900-1910 situation in Europe
      - Role of Germany being played by China
      - Role of Britain being played by the US
    - Concept of inevitability is only a theory
    - In 1900 German was rising like China but all those around it were failing
      - Russia, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, etc.
      - This is not the case in Asia today
        - India, Vietnam, and even Japan are rising around China
      - Europe of 1815 is more like now – Europe and US can play the off-shore balancer role that Britain did with Europe at that time

**Considering what was formerly called the Global War on Terror**
- Now it has the even worse name of Global Contingency Operations
- US is winning this no matter what it is called – this war that dares not speak its name
  - Not to say that it will be over soon
- Recent study shows that Al Qaeda has killed 8 times more Muslims than non-Muslims
  - Such information is being reported by Al Jazeera, not Western media
  - Al Qaeda has been doing Grand Strategy to make itself visible but not loved
- We are moving further away from the clash of civilizations than we were in 2000
  - Much movement both ways
  - Majority of Muslims were never into the clash of civilizations idea
    - Now they see the horror of having Al Qaeda in charge
- This is not the same as a victory but we should be relatively optimistic
  - However, this will also mean that we will be creating new problems and challenges for ourselves

**QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION**

Not a lot of people in Afghanistan are thinking about their constitution
- The state there is weak, not necessarily wrong
- There are lots of ways to organize a government even related to religion
  - In the UK you must be a Protestant to be head of state
  - In Germany the government collects dues from people for whichever church they belong to
  - In Argentina you used to have to be Catholic to be president
  - In Italy there is only a formal separation of church and state but church influence is still very strong
- We can’t expect that the Muslim world would have any less differences – there are multiple ways to arrange a Muslim state
- Need a sense of history to see
  - How countries have handled the same problem in many different ways
  - That there is no major line between the West and the Muslim world
• Afghanistan could be considered the West Virginia of the world
  o It will never be on the cutting edge of modernity

In the general view Western countries should be developing wealth and power based on openness
• Things would have been very different in the free world if Hitler had won
• We see a future utopia as an open society
• Can’t live like we are already in such a utopia if we ever hope to make it happen
• Uni-polarity is not the goal of the Brits or the US
  o Some regard the Brits as a uni-polar leader in 1763
    ▪ But that was not when Europe was most stable
  o Need a benign multi-polarity with various countries competing with each other
    ▪ Others would be holding up their side of the equation
    ▪ US would not have to be paying for everything
    ▪ Multi-polarity is often seen as bad – which it is if things are contentious
  o US wants benign multi-polarity so that others can help share the world’s burdens

One feature about open societies is that people in them have different ideas about what makes an open society
• People have different priorities
• Our society will not resolve this debate
  o It will be a little schizophrenic
  o There are fades in what concepts we are selling to the developing world
• It is probably better that we do not have an “official” definition of an open society
  o Must look back to Adam Smith again

It would probably be impossible now to arrange a smooth hand-off of responsibilities to another Great Power
• The Brits did it best, falling gracefully into the arms of the US
  o But they were very similar
  o The 17th/18th Century Brits were also much like the Dutch before them
• No other country looks to be coming up to take over – the Canadians?
• Why did Britain fall from its lead position internationally?
  o In the 19th Century it was at the cutting edge of everything – social, technological, financial, etc.
  o Then went into a decline from WWI to Prime Minister Thatcher
    ▪ Only exception was in WWII when they had a gun pointed at their heads
    ▪ Generally the British were happiest when they were in rather suicidal slides of power
  o US is less likely to slide because it is more ornery and contentious
    ▪ Brits sent all their cranks and other trouble makers long ago to the US and Australia, etc.
    ▪ Brits loss of Ireland meant they lost a lot of their reason to argue
  o Post-partisan period may be a bad thing
    ▪ Continuing to fight among ourselves is probably a good thing
    ▪ Fighting among ourselves is a sign of dynamism
Also a good sign that the US still has a lot of religious belief
  - It is healthier to have all these religions than to be in a cool post-religious consensus

This paddling around has no real theme
  - Need variety to keep a sharp edge

The opposite of terrorism is not marching around having demonstrations – it is staying home
  - It is no surprise that there have been demonstrations over cartoons, but few about the many horrendous attacks against Muslims by Muslims
  - Look at the situation in Anbar province
    - Sunnis there saw the US at its worst – an invasion force that put in a bad government
      - They could not get the electricity working, lots of security problems
    - Al Qaeda came in and showed that they could help
    - After 3 years the Sunnis determined it was safer to go with the US side for support
  - It has not been a war between civilizations, but a war between civilization and barbarianism
    - This concept has been greeted with an enthusiastic response when used in speeches around the world
    - Those who had the most reason to dislike the US still chose it over Al Qaeda

For questions not answered here, see the blog at www.walterrussellmead.com

It is not possible to predict the future of Asia
  - Look at the 3 pillars of Asia: China, India, and Japan
    - They are the likely dominant players
    - Any two will probably stop the other one from becoming a hegemonic power
    - US as the off-shore balancer will shore up the other two if they start to fail
  - Therefore, there is no single power likely to take over in Asia
    - None of them would want to be the #2 power to a hegemon
  - Therefore, expect a multi-polar situation
  - US and China really have nothing to compete about
    - The best possible courses for both are parallel since their interests are parallel
    - Bottomline: We should be optimistic about Asia