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Grand Strategy in 10 Words: A Guide to Great Power Politics in the 21st Century

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Sven Biscop, *Grand Strategy in 10 words: a guide to great power politics in the 21st century*, Bristol: Bristol University Press

Grand strategy is difficult to define. Sven Biscop offers an elegant and sophisticated discussion of grand strategy, which encompasses ten different words capturing what grand strategy should entail. Biscop's writing is fluent and mostly free from theoretical jargon. Students of strategy and security studies will find the book interesting and academics who teach strategy and security studies should add this book to their reading lists. People with a general interest in strategy and security studies will also find it straightforward to engage with the book.

Following an introduction, the book unfolds through ten chapters. Each chapter is titled in accordance with one of Biscop's chosen words to define what makes a grand strategy: simple, competitive, rational, allied, comprehensive, creative, agile, courageous, dirty and proactive. As with any book or journal article on grand strategy, talk of potential rivalry among great powers is not missing. In Biscop's account, there are four great powers in the international system: the US, China, the EU and Russia. What remains somewhat less clear is exactly what indicators make a great power and whether a great power exists that is capable of advancing a grand strategy that Biscop describes.

Therefore, it would be important to think about, and to have a more far-reaching definition of, what exactly makes a great power in the 21st century? It could be seen as slightly confusing, for instance, to put the EU on par with the US and with Russia and China. This could then allow the book to provide a clearer observation concerning the emergence of multi-polarity. On the latter point, one could ask why great powers such as France and the UK were left out. Incidentally, Brexit is hardly mentioned throughout the book. This is somewhat unfortunate because Brexit has had repercussions on the EU, especially the extent to which the EU can fully realise its great power potential.

The picture that Biscop paints is not the rosiest as he asserts that 'the risk is real that a situation of permanent systematic rivalry would evolve if these four cannot accept each other's existence as great powers' (p. 212). Still, Biscop offers four precepts to

avoid the permanent risk of war. Firstly, great powers must accept each other as peer competitors and see engagement rather than confrontation as the default mode for relations between them. Secondly, they must invest in the international order and abide by the rules that they agree together. Thirdly, they must respect the sovereignty of all other states, and refrain from seeking exclusive spheres of interest. Fourthly, each must strengthen its sovereignty as a precondition to engage the others.

Whilst momentous and noble, Biscop's precepts ultimately lead to more questions than answers. If those great powers were to agree on an international order, what would this order look like? How can each great power manage to square the circle in terms of advancing its agenda abroad whilst keeping other great powers happy and managing its domestic political situation successfully? On the latter point, Biscop concedes that even if the four great powers followed all the precepts, rivalry could still take place. It therefore becomes a matter of managing rivalry rather than eliminating it. A grand strategy that manages to do that might still be wanting but Biscop's ten words are worth engaging with in the meantime.

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