

Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy*

Jeff Carter

Volume 29, Spring 2009

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs29br07>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Carter, J. (2009). Review of [Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy*]. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 29, 0–0.

Philip Arena is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Narizny, Kevin. *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Despite its waning influence over much of international relations, the realist paradigm continues to dominate studies of international security. In *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, Kevin Narizny directly challenges realist explanations of foreign policy with the compelling claim that a nation's grand strategy originates with the economic interests of the influential constituents in a government's coalition.

Narizny begins by introducing a novel three-dimensional typology of grand strategy, i.e., "the general principles by which an executive decision-maker or decision-making body pursues its international political goals." (p. 8) The first dimension is a state's assertiveness or its willingness to pay the costs (for example, military spending, diplomatic capital) of pursuing its foreign policy interests. States unwilling to actively compete in the international arena are identified as having an isolationist grand strategy. The second characteristic of a nation's grand strategy is the "geographic locus" of its foreign policy goals; that is, whether the majority of a state's foreign policy interests are in countries located at the core or periphery of the international system. The final dimension of a state's grand strategy is its willingness to use military force. A state that pursues its goals through cooperative means has an internationalist grand strategy. Coercive diplomacy is the hallmark of both *realpolitik* and interventionist grand strategies, with the distinction being a function of whether a state's policies are directed toward core or periphery countries, respectively. Finally, Narizny classifies those states that seek their foreign policy ends through the means of military conquest as following either a supremacist (core) or an imperialist (periphery) grand strategy. On its own, Narizny's typology represents a significant departure from the realist conception of grand strategy as simply those policies a state implements in pursuit of security. His biggest challenge to the realist paradigm, though, lies in the process by which a government determines its location on each of the three dimensions. Drawing on insights from political economy and liberal theory, Narizny argues that a state's foreign policy goals originate in the sectoral interests of its government's ruling coalition. Specifically, the relative influence of domestic, core, periphery, and military-colonial interests within a government determines its preferences over the assertiveness, geographic locus, and role of the military in its foreign policy. Narizny argues that the greater the influence of a given sector, the greater the degree to which a state's foreign policies will be consistent with the economic interests of that sector. Domestic and international factors exogenous to the argument condition a state's grand strategy by influencing the relative costs associated with various foreign policy options; for example, a high national debt or global economic depression might alter the relative attractiveness of imperialist and internationalist grand strategies.

Narizny's argument is tested using in-depth case studies of the domestic politics and foreign policies of the United States and Great Britain from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The US and British experiences during this period represent something of a critical test between the political economy and realist explanations of grand strategy. Realism predicts that the grand strategies of the United States and Great Britain should have become consistently more and less aggressive, respectively, over this period due to changes in the material capabilities available to each country. Alternatively, Narizny's argument expects substantial variation in US and British foreign policy across all three dimensions of grand strategy as a function of the party in control of government. Save for a few exceptions (for example, the internationalist records of both President Taft and Lord Salisbury), the empirical record strongly supports the political-economy approach to grand strategy. In arguably the most impressive display of its explanatory power, Narizny's argument accurately predicts that, despite declines in Great Britain's economic and military power, the increased importance of periphery markets for manufactures would lead to a shift in Liberal preferences for greater imperialism and, therefore, the robust defense and expansion of the British Empire beginning in the early 1880s.

The Political Economy of Grand Strategy is an impressive piece of scholarship and a significant contribution to the international security literature. Narizny makes a convincing case that the refrain about the terrestrial nature of politics falls flat even in the realm of grand strategy. As such, this book is highly recommended to anyone interested in understanding the nature and origins of any nation's foreign policy.

Jeff Carter is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at The Pennsylvania State University