

Correspondence

Can Great Powers Discern Intentions?

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To the Editors (Charles L. Glaser and Andrew H. Kydd write):

Over the past four decades, scholars and policymakers have learned a great deal about the conditions under which states can assess others' intentions and the implications for states' foreign and security policies.¹ In "The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers," however, Sebastian Rosato argues that there has never been much to learn, because states cannot acquire useful information about others' intentions and therefore pay them little attention.² In this letter, we argue that Rosato's argument is deeply flawed, on both theoretical and empirical grounds, and should not be used as a guide for policy. Owing to space limitations, we restrict our response to three points—the mismatch between Rosato's argument and the real world, the analytically misleading benchmark on which he rests his entire analysis, and his overstated claims about states' inability to learn about intentions from others' actions.

THE EMPIRICAL PROBLEM

If Rosato's claim were correct—that great powers lack useful information about others' intentions and therefore "make consequential decisions about competition and cooperation based primarily on power calculations" (p. 87)—the world would not resemble the one in which we live. A few examples confirm this observation. In Rosato's world, U.S. material preponderance following the Cold War should have generated intensive balancing. Yet this did not happen. The major European states, both individually and jointly through the European Union, have not responded as if the United States posed a threat. The key to understanding this lack of balancing is the information these states have about U.S. intentions: they are confident that the United States is not going to use its tremendous power against them.³

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1. Many of these arguments are better framed in terms of motives than of intentions. We refer to intentions, however, because this is the terminology that Rosato employs.

2. Sebastian Rosato, "The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers," *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Winter 2014/15), pp. 48–88. Subsequent references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

3. Charles L. Glaser, "Why Unipolarity Doesn't Matter (Much)," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (June 2011), pp. 136–138.

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Within Europe itself, balancing is also absent. For instance, despite their historical enmity, France and Germany today show no serious signs of military competition or preparation for the worst. Their cooperation cannot be explained as a mere by-product of U.S. predominance. U.S. power alone does not imply a continuing commitment to European security (commitments, after all, are a kind of intention), and the pivot (rebalance) to Asia suggests that any such commitment is weakening. If France and Germany had no information about U.S. or each other's intentions, they should pursue unilateral policies designed to maximize their power and weaken their neighbors. Germany is vulnerable to French nuclear weapons, and France is vulnerable to the military potential inherent in Germany's economic and manpower advantages. Despite these vulnerabilities, they continue to cooperate with each other and with the United States.

In addition, the United States constantly relies on assessments of other states' intentions in forming its security and foreign policy. The United States is very concerned about the dangers posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons and the possibility of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons, but it is relatively unconcerned by Israel's and India's possession of nuclear weapons. The difference is explained by U.S. assessments of intentions: the United States believes that neither Israeli nor India will use nuclear weapons against it, but it does not have the same confidence regarding Iran or North Korea.⁴

More generally, in today's world, major powers consistently distinguish between the small number of states that pose a real threat and the much larger group that does not. If states could not form useful estimates of other's intentions, then this kind of differentiation would be impossible. Indeed, there is probably more mutual confidence about intentions among great powers today than at any point in history. Understanding the sources of this development is an important research question.

Of course, not all assessments of opposing states intentions are clear cut. States often face greater uncertainty about the intentions of a key adversary. As we explain below, however, high confidence in an opposing state's intentions is unnecessary for information about intentions to play a significant role in a state's choice between competitive and cooperative policies.

MISFRAMING A KEY THEORETICAL ISSUE

Rosato employs his central argument—that “great powers cannot confidently assess the current intentions of others” and that they are “even less sure” about future intentions—to reach a deductive claim about states' decisions and behavior (p. 51). He writes, “because they are uncertain . . . estimates of intentions play only a marginal role” in states' decisions about competition and cooperation and “great powers focus on the balance of power”;⁵ as a result, “competition is the norm and cooperation is both rare and fleeting” (p. 88).

4. Not all of the states we mention are great powers, which are the focus of Rosato's article. The arguments he employs, however, do not apply only to great powers.

5. This argument plays a central role in offensive realism. The shortcomings of its pivotal deductive claim are well established in the literature. See Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 146–147, 152–155; and Stephen G. Brooks, “Dueling Realisms,” *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 445–477, especially pp. 453–455.

The term “confidently assess,” however, is not an analytically useful benchmark. Rosato appears to use “confident” to mean that a state is certain or nearly certain of an opposing state’s intentions. His argument is that a state should adopt a cooperative policy only when it believes with near certainty that the opposing state will reciprocate its cooperation. Cooperation, however, could be a state’s best option even if the state is not nearly certain that the opposing state will cooperate.

A rational state should cooperate if its belief that the other side intends to reciprocate exceeds a certain threshold. That threshold is a function of four variables that reflect the material factors that define a state’s international environment:⁶ the benefits of mutual cooperation, the cost of mutual noncooperation, the benefit for exploiting the other side’s cooperation, and the cost of being exploited.⁷ The higher the benefits of mutual cooperation and the lower the payoff for mutual defection, the lower this threshold will be. Similarly, the lower the payoff for exploiting the other side and the lower the cost of being exploited, the lower the threshold will be. Under a range of conditions, this threshold could be far lower than 1, that is—far from certainty.

This framework helps explain the importance of intelligence gathering and verification in the context of arms control: by providing timely warning, these activities reduce the cost of exploitation, as well as the benefits of cheating. These reductions, in turn, lower the information threshold at which an agreement becomes desirable. In addition, under certain conditions arms control agreements can be designed such that the capabilities of the allowed forces would not be catastrophically undermined by whatever cheating might occur, which also lowers the information threshold. For example, an agreement that reduced the number of nuclear land-based missiles—and thereby increased the possibility that cheating would leave too few survivors to ensure a retaliatory capability that would be sufficient for deterrence—could be bolstered by allowing submarine-based ballistic missiles that could not be jeopardized by cheating.

Once one understands that the information threshold for cooperation is less than certainty, Rosato’s overall argument falls apart. Rosato acknowledges that states can learn something about others’ intentions, but he uses a variety of descriptors—“marginal reductions” (pp. 51, 73, 83), “not particularly robust” (p. 60), “not therefore a clear sign” (p. 63)—to suggest that the amount states can learn is too small to matter. But limited amounts of new information, when added to the information a state already has, could be sufficient for the state to adopt a more cooperative policy, given that it does not need to be certain of an opposing state’s intentions.

In addition, by evaluating each potential source of information separately, Rosato fails to acknowledge that multiple channels of information could, in combination, provide information sufficient to change a state’s policy, even if each source on its own would not. For example, beginning in the second half of the 1980s, the Soviet Union adopted policies based on both reciprocal cooperation and unilateral restraint—including a moratorium on nuclear testing, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the start of withdrawal from Afghanistan, large reductions of Soviet forces in

6. If the states anticipate future interactions, then reputation and other nonmaterial factors could also matter.

7. If, in a 2×2 game, we let R be the payoff for mutual cooperation, T be the payoff for exploiting the other side, P be the payoff for mutual defection, and S be the payoff for unilateral cooperation, then the threshold is $\frac{1}{1 + \frac{R-T}{P-S}}$. If $R = 4$, $T = 3$, $P = 2$, and $S = 1$, then the threshold equals $\frac{1}{2}$.

Central Europe, and steps toward democratization. These policies produced a significant positive shift in U.S. assessments of Soviet intentions. Although it is possible that none of these moves on its own would have been sufficient to generate a large revision of U.S. assessments, their combined effect was substantial and contributed to changes in U.S. policy.⁸

LEARNING FROM ARMING POLICY AND PAST ACTIONS

Rosato rejects virtually all of the arguments that have been developed in a vast and nuanced literature on the information value of states' domestic characteristics and their foreign policy behavior. We offer correctives on two key issues.

ARMING POLICY. In reaching his conclusion that major powers cannot acquire useful information about others' intentions, Rosato argues that great powers cannot "signal or infer intentions clearly through their arms policies" (p. 73), and that they are unlikely to take actions that would signal peaceful intentions. He further argues that "communicating intentions through arms policies is a complex task" (p. 78). These observations are hardly as damning as Rosato suggests, however. In fact, they leave open the possibility that states can, under certain conditions, use their arming policies to communicate valuable information about their intentions.

There is no disagreement that the arguments Rosato critiques—an array of overlapping security dilemma, structural, and rationalist theories⁹—make clear that, under a range of conditions, a security-seeking state will face large incentives to adopt a competitive arming policy. But Rosato fails to address the opposing features of the security dilemma that simultaneously create powerful incentives for states to adopt cooperative policies under a range of conditions, which leaves his presentation unfairly skewed toward competition.

For example, when critiquing arms control he argues that "[i]f two states were to agree to significant mutual reductions in their forces, then they might be able to conclude that their partner had peaceful intentions. An agreement of this kind is unlikely, however, because any state receiving an offer of substantial mutual reductions will fear that the state making it is seeking an advantage. Otherwise why would it extend such a significant offer?" (p. 76) There are many other reasons, however, for why the opposing state might extend the offer. For example, it might believe that there is a reasonable chance it could lose the arms race and would therefore prefer to accept an agreed balance than to bet on winning. It might think that even an equal arms race would leave it less secure, because the competition could enhance both states' offensive capabilities.¹⁰ It might wish to signal its benign motives and peaceful intentions, or to save the resources that an arms race would require. Consequently, while fear of the adversary gaining an advantage—by cheating or other means—should induce caution, a state should also appreciate that its adversary could offer an arms agreement for a variety of

8. Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 225–244.

9. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January 1978), pp. 167–214; Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*; and Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*.

10. Rosato's argument appears in his discussion of quantitative limits, but his rhetorical question applies equally well to qualitative limits.

other reasons. Moreover, because the state could envision an agreement providing it with similar benefits, there are conditions under which both sides should accept an agreement, even though it entails risks.

When discussing unilateral restraint, Rosato again overreaches by holding that “peaceful great powers are unwilling to engage in significant restraint” (p. 74). In 1988 the Soviet Union announced plans for a large unilateral reduction in its conventional forces—approximately 500,000 troops—that would greatly diminish, if not eliminate, the Soviet ability to launch a surprise attack. The reduction was especially noteworthy because this type of offensive operation was the key military threat that the Soviet Union posed to Western Europe and was long identified as an indication of Soviet expansionist ambitions. As noted above, U.S. assessments of Soviet intentions became increasingly positive, especially given other unilateral Soviet measures.¹¹ Other examples of unilateral restraint include the decisions by Germany and Japan not to acquire and deploy nuclear weapons. Both countries could field a nuclear force within a short period if a political decision were made to do so, yet they have consistently refrained from taking this step. By not acquiring nuclear weapons, these countries send reassuring costly signals to their potential adversaries. Deciding now to acquire nuclear weapons would have the reverse effect.

PAST ACTIONS. Rosato argues that states “cannot reliably deduce a great power’s intentions from its past actions” (p. 83). Essentially, he is saying that states face complex situations, which make their choices hard to decipher, and that “no two situations are the same” (p. 84). We agree that the world is complicated, but this does not leave states unable to extract useful information about others’ actions. If two cases are sufficiently similar—with similarity possibly measured along a variety of dimension, including size, region, regime type, and policy history—an opposing state’s actions in one case can provide information about its likely actions in the second case. The state may not become nearly certain, but it will be able to update its estimate.

For instance, according to Rosato’s view, Russia’s recent annexation of Crimea and military involvement in eastern Ukraine would leave states’ assessments of future Russian use of military force in Ukraine and possibly in central Europe unchanged. Yet, most observers have revised their estimates of Russia’s intentions, and NATO has begun to respond to threats to the Baltic states, with the goal of reducing the probability of Russian meddling and attack.¹² These revised estimates could ultimately be incorrect; but in light of Russian actions, they reflect a rational updating of states’ estimates of Russia’s intentions. Rosato might respond that this example supports his argument, because states’ estimates of Russia’s intentions have become more negative. The example undercuts his argument in two ways, however. First, Rosato’s argument is that actions cannot provide useful information either way, that is, positive or negative. If the argument were correct, states’ assessments of Russia’s intentions would not have shifted significantly. Second, if states focus only on power, thereby effectively assuming

11. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, pp. 223–240.

12. Michael Birnbaum, “Fearing Russian Expansion, Baltic Nations Step Up Military Exercises,” *Washington Post*, May 16, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/fearing-russian-expansion-baltic-nations-step-up-military-exercises/2015/05/15/b5ee51ee-f8c8-11e4-a47c-e56f4db884ed_story.html.

the worst about adversaries' intentions, then Russia's actions would not have led states to adopt still more negative assessments.

CONCLUSION

Rosato's argument deeply misunderstands how states form assessments of others' intentions and how those assessments influence their policies. Whereas he found decades of flawed arguments, we remain confident that much has been learned and that future research will continue to produce valuable insights. It would therefore be a serious mistake to base policy on Rosato's conclusion. He has recently applied his argument to U.S.-China relations.¹³ Although analysis of this case is beyond the scope of our response, we end with the following caution: China's intentions are indeed less clear than those of many other states; it may be expansionist, at least to some extent. To design policy based on worst-case assumptions, however, disregards the uncertainty the international community faces about China's goals and intentions; it also risks generating a self-fulfilling prophecy.¹⁴

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To the Editors (Mark L. Haas and John M. Owen IV write):

In his recent article, Sebastian Rosato argues that when great powers formulate their foreign policies, they do not—and should not—rely on assessments of others's intentions, which he defines as “actions that a state plans to take under certain circumstances.”¹ Great powers (hereafter states) should instead rely on assessments of capabilities, which are more reliable.

Rosato is to be commended for challenging some widely held views about states' assessments of others' intentions, but his challenge comes up short. He does not address the large qualitative literature that documents that leaders frequently base their policies on their inferences of intention, nor does he show that it is easier to ascertain capabilities than intentions. Most important, Rosato ignores both theoretical and his-

13. Sebastian Rosato, “Why the United States and China Are on a Collision Course” (Cambridge, Mass.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2015), <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/rosato-us-china-pb-final.pdf>.

14. See Charles L. Glaser, “A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation,” *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 2015), pp. 49–90.

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1. Sebastian Rosato, “The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers,” *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Winter 2014/15), p. 51. Subsequent references to this article appear parenthetically in the text. Rosato defines “intention” as a kind of action. We find that definition confusing, and prefer to say that an intention is a plan of action consciously held by one or more actors.

torical reasons why leaders, under certain conditions, benefit by inferring intentions from ideology.

INFERRING INTENTIONS FROM IDEOLOGY

As Rosato notes, each of us argues elsewhere that state elites tend to trust foreign elites with whom they share an ideology (what Mark Haas labels “small ideological distance”).² By contrast, Rosato claims that, since 1789, great powers that share an ideology have fought wars as often as random chance would predict. If leaders inferred intentions from ideology, then ideologically compatible states would fight one another significantly less often.³ Much of Rosato’s coding of the ideologies of great powers, however, is wrong or highly suspect.⁴ France, for example, was not a monarchy from 1796 to 1804, because it did not have a monarch.⁵ Rosato’s categorization of Germany as liberal in 1914 is highly contestable. Ultimate power over foreign policy lay with the emperor, whose control over Germany’s government, wrote Woodrow Wilson in 1889, likely made him “the most powerful ruler of our time.”⁶

Rosato follows the dubious practice of inferring ideology not from what actors say they believe, but rather from how social scientists today classify regimes. If a social scientist in 2015 regards a state in 1800 or 1900 as liberal, Rosato presumes that people in 1800 or 1900 regarded it as liberal. This presumption is unwarranted. Today’s scholars may categorize both France and Great Britain as monarchies in 1805, but at the time the British and the French (as well as most Europeans and Americans) placed those two re-

2. Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005); Mark L. Haas, *The Clash of Ideologies: Middle Eastern Politics and American Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Mark L. Haas, “Ideology and Alliances: British and French External Balancing Decisions in the 1930s,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Summer 2003), pp. 34–79; Mark L. Haas, “The United States and the End of the Cold War: Reactions to Shifts in Soviet Power, Policies, or Domestic Politics?” *International Organization*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 145–179; Mark L. Haas, “Missed Ideological Opportunities and George W. Bush’s Middle Eastern Policies,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 2012), pp. 416–454; Mark L. Haas, “Ideological Polarity and Balancing in Great Power Politics,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (December 2014), pp. 715–753; John M. Owen IV, “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Fall 1994), pp. 87–125; John M. Owen IV, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); John M. Owen IV, “Transnational Liberalism and U.S. Primacy,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 117–152; John M. Owen IV, “When Do Ideologies Produce Alliances?” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (March 2005), pp. 73–99; and John M. Owen IV, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change 1510–2010* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

3. We also assert that large ideological differences result in assessments of malign intentions. Rosato examines only judgments of benign intent, while ignoring the other half of these assessments.

4. We focus on Rosato’s claim about the relationship between ideology and great power war because that is the most important one. Similar critiques apply to his assertions about militarized interstate disputes and crises.

5. France’s government from 1795 to 1799 was controlled by a five-person executive “Directory” and a bicameral legislature. The Directory was replaced by a military dictatorship under Napoleon from 1799 until 1804.

6. Woodrow Wilson, *The State: Elements of Historical and Practical Politics* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1889), p. 254. Germany’s political system before World War I was extremely similar to Japan’s (Japan modeled its constitution after Germany’s, with the two emperors having nearly identical powers). Rosato, however, codes Germany as liberal and Japan as monarchical.

gimes in antagonistic categories: Britain's was a hereditary or "legitimate" monarchy, and France's was a bureaucratic-rational regime with a self-crowned emperor pledged to uphold the principles of the French Revolution. The British and the French saw themselves as ideological enemies.⁷ For any theory that posits ideological distance as an indicator of intentions, what subjects themselves believe is what matters.

Of course, accepting the subjectivity of beliefs raises the suspicion that actors infer threats from other indicators (e.g., capabilities) and then alter their perceptions of ideological distance to match. Each of us has demonstrated elsewhere, however, that ideological beliefs and perceptions are exogenous, stable, and relatively insensitive to changes in material capabilities. Actors who believe that a foreign country adheres to their ideology, and is thus no threat, tend to maintain that belief even when the foreign country's power increases. When elites do change their understandings of ideological relationships, they are responding to objective ideological changes (e.g., party, institutional, and constitutional shifts) in other countries.⁸

Recoding states' ideologies to reflect actors' understandings before and during the conflicts in question dissolves Rosato's claim that ideologically similar states have warred as frequently as random chance predicts. He finds 16 cases (43 percent) of intra-ideological wars out of 37 warring pairs of great powers; according to his method of calculation, if each warring dyad were a random draw, intra-ideological wars would have been 47 percent of the total (p. 60). But once the most obvious corrections are made to his dataset, only 10 out of 39 warring pairs, or 26 percent, qualify as intra-ideological; a random draw of each warring dyad would predict 42 percent—a significantly higher percentage.⁹

A more serious problem is that Rosato ignores the copious qualitative evidence that we and others have published showing that leaders do infer intent from ideology and have benefited from doing so.¹⁰ Consider Prussia's and Austria's relations with Russia after the Napoleonic Wars. Both German powers bordered Russia; both had important territorial disputes that could have easily degenerated into conflict; and Russia had a massive power advantage over both states. Countering these power-based incentives

7. Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics*, p. 142; and Stuart Semmel, *Napoleon and the British* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), chap. 4.

8. Owen, "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace," pp. 109, 116; Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, pp. 31, 51, 141–145; Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, pp. 60–66, 86–88, 98–102, 120–135, 197–202; and Haas, "The United States and the End of the Cold War," pp. 156–170.

9. We subtracted the four instances of putative intra-ideological conflict during the Napoleonic Wars (France versus the other four great powers), as well as Germany's conflict with Britain, France, Italy, and the United States during the World War I. Coding Germany as a monarchical regime also adds two instances of intra-ideological conflict for World War I: Germany versus Russia and Germany versus Japan. Further, we add two inter-ideological wars that Rosato misses: revolutionary France's wars with monarchical Britain and Russia in the 1790s. There are good reasons to challenge other coding decisions in the article, such as placing the Bonapartist French regime under Napoleon III in the same ideological category as the absolute hereditary monarchies of Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Tsar Nicholas refused to recognize Napoleon. See Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War* (New York: Metropolitan, 2010), p. 102. Placing France in a separate ideological category from the eastern monarchies removes three of the remaining ten instances of intra-ideological warfare in Rosato's dataset. Although we follow Rosato's method here, we note that any inferences from that method are limited inasmuch as it selects on the dependent variable (war).

10. See the five case studies in Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*; and the ten case studies in Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*.

for state suspicion were assessments that Russia's intentions were benign, assessments that Berlin and Vienna based on the high level of ideological similarities uniting the absolute monarchies.¹¹

For much of the nineteenth century, Prussian and Austrian leaders trusted Russia to protect their countries' international interests from threats posed by liberal Britain and France and their domestic interests from revolution, and Russian elites committed to doing so. Tsar Nicholas in 1835, for example, promised Emperor Ferdinand of Austria that he would "consider . . . the conservation and the internal tranquility of the two Empires, as well as their external security, a question of mutual interest."¹² Russian leaders encouraged the other two members of the Holy Alliance to expand their influence in neighboring territories (largely for counterrevolutionary purposes) and actively supported their core interests, including by military means.¹³ Between 1815 and 1913, Russia never warred with either Prussia or Austria and was engaged in only 4 low-intensity militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) with either.¹⁴ Russia was almost three times more likely to be on the same side as one or both of the German powers in MIDs (11) over the same time period, and three times more likely to be in a dispute with Britain and France (12), including one war. Ideological ties among the three eastern empires did begin to fray near the end of the nineteenth century and eventually broke at the beginning of the twentieth as national identities became more determinative of foreign policies than transnational ideological ties (see below). For the better part of a century, however, all three absolute monarchies anticipated highly cooperative relations based on their shared ideology.

Rosato also takes issue with the logic of our explanatory arguments, finding them "faulty" because they focus "exclusively" on the effects of "transnational ideologies such as liberalism, communism, and monarchism" and "ignore nationalism." Once particularistic beliefs are factored into the analysis, he writes, "ideological distance claims collapse" (pp. 60–61). Rosato, however, ignores that our work not only docu-

11. Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics*, pp. 144–153; and Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, pp. 88–89.

12. The three monarchs committed to three agreements in the 1830s (the Chiffon de Carlsbad, the Münchengrätz agreement, and the Berlin Treaty) that pledged aid, including military support, to preserve their shared ideological orders and institutions. Writing about the accords in 1835, Prince Metternich declared that "so long as the union between the three monarchs lasts, there will be a chance of safety for the world." Quoted in A.W. Ward, G.W. Prothero, and Stanley Leathes, eds., *The Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. 10: *Restoration* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), p. 376.

13. Nicholas made good on his pledge to come to the other emperors' aid if their regimes were threatened by revolution. In 1849 the tsar agreed to Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph's request to deploy Russian troops to suppress a revolt in Hungary. See W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 144–148, 196, 207, 225 (quotation), 226–229, 281; and Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830–1841* (New York: Humanities, 1969), pp. 198, 374–377, 423.

14. Calculated from Correlates of War, "Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4.01)," <http://correlatesofwar.org/>. Data description provided in Glenn Palmer et al., "The MID4 Data Set: Procedures, Coding Rules, and Description," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, forthcoming. Austria and Prussia fought the Seven Weeks' War in 1866 over the political future of the German Confederation. The war did not, however, prevent the two from resuming their alliances with Russia, as formalized in the First and Second Dreikaiserbund (the League of the Three Emperors) from 1873 to 1875 and 1881 to 1887, respectively. As the name implies, these alliances were largely ideologically based.

ments that leaders vary in the degree to which they infer threats from ideological distance, but also explains that variation. John Owen argues that leaders' affinities with transnational ideological communities are most salient under two conditions: (1) elites within and across states are polarized over the best form of government; and (2) one or more states in the system are vulnerable to regime change, due either to intense domestic ideological contestation and instability or to war, which makes such instability likely.¹⁵ Leaders then fear that opposing ideological principles will spread within their own or other countries. During these periods of high ideological polarization, elites from different states are far more likely to view co-ideologues as friends and ideological opponents as enemies, regardless of nationality. When these conditions are not met, elites are more nationalistic and prone to infer threats from power.

Let us return to Rosato's arguments about great power war after 1789 and divide the years into three periods according to Owen's argument: (1) 1789–1849, when transnational ideological polarization was high (republicanism vs. monarchism); (2) 1850–1917, when great powers (except Russia) converged on a "conservative-liberal" ideology and nationalism became more salient; and (3) 1918 onward, when transnational ideologies (communism, fascism, and liberalism) increased in salience.¹⁶ In period (1), random chance, according to Rosato's method (but our coding from above), would predict that 60 percent of the great power wars fought (8 warring pairs) would be between co-ideologues. The comparable statistic for period (3) is 19 percent (12 warring pairs). Yet, there are no cases of intra-ideological wars in either period. During period (2), when transnational ideologies were less salient, co-ideologues fought in 53 percent of the 19 warring pairs. This percentage is close to the likelihood of intra-ideological wars if decisions had been made randomly (49 percent). Far from ignoring nationalism, the theory incorporates it, and its hypotheses fare well when tested against post-1789 data.

GOOD REASONS FOR INFERRING INTENTIONS FROM IDEOLOGY

Rosato does supply reasons why prudent states should discount, to some extent, their assessments of what other states plan to do. The degree to which a rational state disregards its assessments of intention, however, ought to depend on how reliable those assessments are relative to its assessments of capability. Rosato mentions the ambiguity of capability only at the end of his article (p. 88), but the problem is crucial. He cites one book that casts doubt on the ability of great powers to judge others' capacities: William Wohlforth's *The Elusive Balance*, an important study in the difficulty the Soviet Union and the United States had in measuring the balance of power during the Cold War.¹⁷ Rosato also might have mentioned that states seek to mislead others' regarding their own capabilities and intentions, and that they frequently make major errors in judging others' capabilities, such as the inaccurate assessments of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction in the 2000s or of Russia's offensive power before World War I. Offensive and defensive systems and deployments are indistinguishable (pp. 76–77), a problem as much about capability as intention. That scholars and policymakers use different indi-

15. Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics*, pp. 4–5, 59–70. See also Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, pp. 27–31.

16. Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics*, chaps. 5–6.

17. William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

ces of national power is also worth analyzing.¹⁸ If capabilities are also inscrutable, the incentives increase to anticipate others' policies based on perceived intent.

At the same time, inferring intentions from ideological distance can be easier than Rosato claims, and state leaders have good reasons to do it. Above we noted how nineteenth-century Prussia and Austria thrived by inferring Russian preferences from Russian ideology. Between 1792 and 1815, British elites would have been irrational not to infer French intentions from France's official ideology. Beginning in 1792, France's rulers repeatedly stated their determination to use their powerful armies to overthrow the crowned heads of Europe. In countries France conquered, it did just that, replacing royal and noble rulers with puppet republics and proxies.

Before the Soviet Union's power collapse, the most influential leaders in Ronald Reagan's administration believed that the liberal domestic reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev indicated that the Soviets were prepared to end the Cold War.¹⁹ Upon learning in April 1988 that Gorbachev intended the following summer to initiate major liberalization, National Security Adviser Colin Powell opined that Gorbachev "was going to change the USSR in ways we never imagined. He was saying, in effect, that he was ending the Cold War. The battle between their ideology and ours was over, and they had lost."²⁰ Reagan agreed. This benign (and accurate) view of Soviet intent played a key role in ending the Cold War as early and as peacefully as it did, much to the benefit of U.S. interests.

Or, consider British assessments of the German threat in the 1930s. Winston Churchill was among the first to understand the hegemonic intentions of Nazi leaders. Although frequently described as a realist, Churchill based his assessment chiefly upon Nazi ideology. To him, German power, per se, was not very threatening. It was German power in the hands of the Nazi regime that was threatening. As Churchill explained in Parliament in April 1933 (three weeks after Adolf Hitler became dictator): "One of the things which we were told after the Great War would be a security for us was that Germany would be a democracy with Parliamentary institutions. All that has been swept away. You have most grim dictatorship. You have militarism and appeals to every form of fighting spirit. . . . You have these martial or pugnacious manifestations, and also this persecution of the Jews." This aggressive "temper" would "surely" bring "ourselves within a measurable distance of the renewal of general European war" as soon as Germany was strong enough.²¹

Much to the detriment of British interests, Churchill's was a minority view in British decisionmaking circles. Noted realists, such as E.H. Carr, dismissed the importance of Nazi ideology and argued for appeasement based on power realities.²² Others who

18. Scholars tend to favor the Correlates of War Project's Composite Index of National Capabilities. Seth Jones and Gregory Treverton have produced an alternative metric in Jones and Treverton, *Measuring National Power* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2005). The Chinese have developed a Comprehensive National Power (*zonghe guoli*) index. See Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2000), chap. 5. India has developed its own method, outlined in P.K. Singh et al., *Comprehensive National Power: A Model for India* (New Delhi: Vij, 2013).

19. See Haas, "The United States and the End of the Cold War."

20. Colin L. Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 375.

21. Quoted in Winston S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (New York: Bantam, 1961), pp. 68–69.

22. Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (1939; repr. New York: Perennial, 2001).

took ideologies more seriously, including Prime Ministers Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, also refused to analyze Nazi ideology on its own terms and instead interpreted it in relation to communism. In their minds, Nazism was comparatively better.²³ All of these politicians had information about German capabilities. Yet they differed widely on how much of a threat Germany was. Had other British leaders joined Churchill in judging Germany's intentions through an analysis of Nazi ideology, their country would have been much more secure in the 1930s.

CONCLUSION

Were Rosato correct that states cannot infer others' intentions, the United States would feel more threatened today by Britain than by North Korea, and France would have nothing to fear should Germany revert to fascism.²⁴ In fact, however, leaders of great powers frequently infer one another's intentions from their domestic attributes, particularly their ideologies. Aggregate and case-study data on warfare and militarized disputes since 1789 show that they are especially prone to do so in times and places where actors across states are ideologically polarized. No doubt great power leaders sometimes infer intentions badly and pay a price, but often they do it well and enhance their security. And when they fail to do it, they often come to grief.

—Mark L. Haas
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

—John M. Owen IV
Charlottesville, Virginia

Sebastian Rosato Replies:

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the critiques of my article, "The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers."¹ I begin with a restatement of my argument and then address the issues raised by my critics.

In my article, I argue that great powers cannot reach confident—by which I mean near certain—conclusions about the current and future intentions of their peers.² Direct knowledge of another state's current intentions is elusive because its plans regarding the threat or use of force against major rivals constitute private information. Although many scholars—including my critics—have argued otherwise, inferring current intentions indirectly from other states' domestic characteristics or outward behaviors is also

23. See Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, pp. 120–130; and Haas, "Ideological Polarity and Balancing in Great Power Politics," pp. 741–749.

24. We thank Robert Jervis for providing these examples.

1. Sebastian Rosato, "The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers," *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Winter 2014/15), pp. 48–88. Further references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

2. As I note in my article, this definition of "confident" accords with David M. Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs about Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers," *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn 2002), p. 4. For the claim that states cannot be 100 percent certain, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, updated ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), pp. 31, 363, 529 n. 3.

a difficult proposition. Great powers cannot reach confident judgments about the intentions of others by examining their foreign policy goals, ideology, or political regime. Nor do their arms policies, membership in institutions, or past security actions provide a reliable guide to what other states plan to do. This is not to say that states' features and actions provide no insight into their designs, but they allow for only modest reductions in uncertainty, not assessments that even approximate near certainty, much less achieve it. To make matters worse, states have—and know that others have—significant incentives to conceal or misrepresent their strategic plans. As for future intentions, these are impossible to divine. Even if a great power could determine another's current intentions with near certainty, it cannot know what its intentions will be later on because intentions can change and there are many situations in which they are liable to do so. This argument has crucial implications for theories of international politics. Most important, it validates structural realist logic. Unable to ascertain others' current or future intentions with confidence, but acutely aware that their peers have the capability to do them grave harm, great powers live in fear and compete for power in order to protect themselves.

GREAT POWERS CANNOT BE CONFIDENT

My critics do not dispute my central argument that great powers cannot reach confident conclusions about the intentions of their peers. None of the logics they lay out, be they about ideology, arms policies, or past security actions, predict that states can assess others' intentions with near certainty. Rather, they suggest that states can discern each other's designs with only a fair degree of certainty. On careful inspection, however, even this more modest claim is overstated.

Mark Haas and John Owen argue that states can ascertain others' intentions by measuring the distance between their universalistic ideologies (e.g., monarchism, liberalism, fascism, communism). Simply put, great powers expect that states with similar ideologies will have peaceful plans and that states with different ideologies will have aggressive plans. Haas and Owen do not claim that "ideological distance" allows states to evaluate intentions with near certainty, however. Rather, they merely suggest that "state elites tend to trust foreign elites with whom they share an ideology."³ The evidence they provide in their critique illustrates the qualified nature of this statement. In examining all great power wars since 1789, they find co-ideologues fighting each other in more than a quarter of the cases.⁴

Charles Glaser and Andrew Kydd also concede that great powers cannot assess each

3. Haas and Owen note that states also find it difficult to assess capabilities and fault me for not demonstrating that states find it easier to ascertain capabilities than intentions. I agree that it can be difficult for states to measure others' capabilities (p. 88). Nevertheless, it is clearly easier to measure tangible capabilities than intangible plans of action. Therefore in arguing that "capabilities are also inscrutable," Haas and Owen are effectively endorsing my argument that states cannot reach confident conclusions about others' intentions.

4. Haas and Owen find ten cases of co-ideologues fighting each other; I find sixteen. Our results differ because they claim that France was not perceived as a monarchy in 1805 and that Germany was not perceived as a liberal state in 1914. For reasons to doubt their methodology and their claims, see Frank McLynn, *Napoleon: A Biography* (New York: Arcade, 2002), p. 297; and Ido Oren, "The Subjectivity of the 'Democratic' Peace: Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall 1995), pp. 147–184.

other's intentions with confidence.⁵ Although they contend that states can infer intentions from arms policies, they do not claim that such inferences approach near certainty. Instead, they explain that great powers "can, under certain conditions, use their arming policies to communicate valuable information about their intentions." They reach a similar judgment regarding the contention that states can deduce others' intentions by examining their past security actions. In their view, a "state may not become nearly certain, but it will be able to update its estimate." More generally, the most they suggest is that great powers can acquire "useful information" about their peers' intentions by observing their military behavior.

Even these claims that great powers can assess intentions with a fair degree of certainty are overstated. In developing their theory that states can ascertain current intentions from the distance between their universalistic ideologies, Haas and Owen fail to recognize that nationalism has long been the most powerful political ideology in the world—considerably more powerful than other ideologies—and that it is particularistic, not universalistic. Great powers that operate in a world composed of nation-states are not deeply motivated by universalistic ideologies; instead, they concentrate on pursuing their selfish interests. This may cause them to have peaceful intentions, but it may also cause them to have aggressive intentions. As a result, ideological distance is a poor guide to states' plans (pp. 61–62).

There are also good reasons to doubt the contention that great powers can discern current intentions with a fair degree of certainty from other states' arms policies or past security actions. With respect to arms policies, Glaser and Kydd argue that a state receiving an arms control offer should "appreciate" that the offering state might be making the offer because it fears "it could lose the arms race" or it wants "to save the resources that an arms race would require." It is not clear, however, that this makes an arms control offer a convincing signal of peaceful intent. Whether peaceful or aggressive, states prefer not to lose arms races or waste resources; thus arms control is a poor tool for communicating intentions. As for past behavior, Glaser and Kydd suggest that a state can use an opponent's actions in one case to update its estimate of the opposing state's likely actions in a second case as long as the two cases are similar "along a variety of dimensions, including size, region, regime type, and policy history." The problem is that few pairs of cases meet such demanding criteria.

As for future intentions, my critics tacitly concede my argument that states cannot be even fairly certain about them. As I explain, there is no proven way for states to figure out what others' future intentions will be. Consider, for example, that it is impossible to know who a state's leaders will be in future years, much less what their intentions will be. Even the same leaders may rethink their plans because of changing personal or domestic circumstances. Other changes may arise from international developments such as shifts in the balance of power, technological innovations, or diplomatic realignments. These are all reasons for states to take stock and revise their intentions (p. 87). It is telling that Glaser and Kydd say nothing about how a great power might overcome these obvious barriers to discerning future intentions. Neither do Haas and Owen.

5. Indeed, it is precisely because Glaser and Kydd agree that states cannot confidently discern intentions that they go to great lengths to argue confidence is not necessary for cooperation.

GREAT POWERS MUST BE CONFIDENT

Glaser and Kydd reject the principal implication of my argument that because great powers cannot reach confident conclusions about the current and future intentions of their peers, international “competition is the norm and cooperation is both rare and fleeting” (p. 88). In their view, states do not need to be confident that others are peaceful for them to cooperate. Instead, a state can cooperate if its belief that the other side has peaceful intentions exceeds a specific threshold, which is in turn a function of the costs and benefits of cooperation and exploitation. That “threshold . . . is less than certainty” and “under some conditions . . . far from certainty.”⁶ This claim has further consequences. First, “when added to the information the state already has,” even modest amounts of new information about intentions can produce cooperation. Second, “multiple channels of information could, in combination, provide information sufficient to . . . [cause cooperation] even if each source on its own would not.”

Glaser and Kydd’s analysis is wrong: great powers do need to be confident that their peers have peaceful intentions for them to cooperate. In their critique, they argue that the lower the benefits of exploiting the other side and the lower the costs of being exploited, the less certain a state needs to be to make cooperation its best option. The problem with this line of reasoning is that in great power politics both the benefits of exploitation and the costs of being exploited are high (pp. 49–51). If exploitation means starting a war or building capability while another state does not, then the benefits of exploiting a peer competitor include influence, independence, and security, and the costs of being exploited include vulnerability, enslavement, and destruction.⁷ This being the case, great powers may not need to be fully certain that their peers have peaceful intentions for them to cooperate, but they do need to be nearly certain.

What about the claim that a state can confidently discern another state’s intentions by adding the modest information it can infer from the second state’s features and actions to the information it already has? It rests on the unsupported assumption that states are routinely close to confident in their assessments of others’ plans. Given that intentions are private information and that great powers have significant incentives to misrepresent or conceal their intentions, it is hard to see how this contention could be true. Indeed, Glaser and Kydd concede that states “often face greater uncertainty about the intentions of a key adversary.” Great powers, in other words, are seldom close to confident in their evaluations of their peers’ plans.

There are also good reasons to doubt the assertion that although no single indicator of intentions is particularly reliable, states can combine multiple sources of information

6. Note that this task is impractical. Consider the costs of being exploited. What value would a state place on losing a piece of territory versus suffering heavy civilian casualties or being deprived of its sovereignty? And how would a state compare these costs to the benefits of cooperation? If a state saves resources by avoiding an arms race, is this benefit higher or lower than the cost of losing territory? Moreover, even if it were practically possible, states could not use the results of such an analysis to guide their policies. The reason is that states cannot know if their confidence exceeds the required information threshold. How would a state know if it was 55, 65, or 75 percent certain that it knew another’s intentions? In short, there is a fundamental mismatch between the theory Glaser and Kydd propose and how states actually operate in the real world.

7. See, for example, Joseph M. Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 497–500.

to figure out others' designs. Multiple channels can cause confusion as well as confidence. Indeed, except in the rare event when the various sources of information point in the same direction, multiple channels are likely to be a significant source of uncertainty. How do states decide which indicators of intentions to focus on? How do they weight them? David Edelstein sums up the problem: "[A]lthough there are many conceivable indicators of state intentions, none of them are sufficiently reliable to allow confident conclusions about intentions and they may, in fact, offer contradictory information about intentions."⁸

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

Although their theories effectively acknowledge that states cannot assess intentions with confidence, my critics claim to have found several historical cases that show great powers reaching confident evaluations of the intentions of their peers. There are, however, good reasons to doubt that these cases show any such thing. I consider their examples in chronological order.⁹

Haas and Owen assert that "[f]or the better part of a century [1815–1913] . . . all three absolute monarchies [Austria, Prussia, and Russia] anticipated highly cooperative relations based on their shared ideology." The evidence they provide, however, only reveals that the three monarchies were united in a desire to prevent domestic revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ It does not show that they were confident their peers had peaceful intentions toward them. In fact, a brief review of the diplomatic record suggests that decisionmakers in Berlin, Moscow, and Vienna had good reason to be uncertain about one another's intentions. After all, Austria sided with Britain and France against Prussia and Russia during the crisis over Poland and Saxony (1814–15), and Vienna opted for armed neutrality against Russia during the Crimean War (1853–56). In addition, Prussia went to war with Austria in 1866; Austria-Hungary and Germany formed the Dual Alliance against Russia in 1879; Russia responded by allying with France in 1891; and the Dual and Franco-Russian alliances squared off against each other in World War I (1914–17). Meanwhile, a detailed analysis of German-Russian relations after Germany became a great power of the first rank in the late nineteenth century reveals substantial uncertainty about intentions: the two states eyed each other warily and responded quickly to any increases in the other's military capabilities.¹¹

According to Haas and Owen, Winston Churchill was confident, based on his reading of Nazi ideology, that Germany had aggressive intentions. To support their claim, they cite a 1933 speech in which Churchill concluded that Nazi Germany's aggressive "temper" would "surely" precipitate a "general European war." The British government was not, however, near certain that Germany was bent on aggression during the

8. Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty," pp. 6–7.

9. Rather than cite counter-examples, I show that even my critics' cherry picked cases offer scant support for their claims.

10. The same is true of their other work on the subject. See Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 88–89; and John M. Owen IV, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510–2000* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 144–153.

11. Joseph M. Parent and Sebastian Rosato, "Balancing in Neorealism," *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Fall 2015), pp. 51–86.

1930s. Haas and Owen make exactly this point, acknowledging that British officials “differed widely on how much of a threat Germany was.” Elsewhere, Haas finds “substantial variation in British . . . leaders’ perceptions of [the German] threat” until March 1939.¹² This interpretation is widely shared. Christopher Layne summarizes the conventional wisdom, noting that throughout the 1930s, from “their [British policymakers’] vantage point, [Adolf] Hitler’s ultimate intentions were unclear.” To their minds, the question of whether Hitler was “a traditional German statesman striving to restore Germany to its rightful place among Europe’s great powers or was . . . bent on attaining European—or even world—hegemony” was “shrouded in ambiguity.”¹³

Contrary to my critics’ assertions, changes in the Soviet Union’s ideology and arming policy during the late 1980s did not make U.S. policymakers confident that Moscow had peaceful intentions. With respect to ideology, there is little debate that Soviet domestic reforms did not alter U.S. assessments of Soviet intentions in any meaningful way before 1988.¹⁴ Haas and Owen contend that everything changed in April 1988 when Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev announced that he “intended the following summer to initiate major liberalization.” Now U.S. officials, especially National Security Adviser Colin Powell, believed that “the Soviets were prepared to end the Cold War.” It is unlikely, however, that Powell would have become confident the Soviets had peaceful designs based on a mere declaration that they soon planned to initiate reforms at home. More important, a close look at Powell’s recollection of events reveals that he did not form a confident evaluation of the Soviet Union’s intentions in April 1988. Instead, he simply concluded that “they [the Soviets] had lost” the Cold War.¹⁵ This was an observation about the Soviet Union’s ability to continue the superpower struggle, not its attitude toward the United States. Finally, Haas admits that U.S. officials continued to disagree about the Soviet Union’s intentions even after Gorbachev’s announcement.¹⁶

Turning to arming policy, Glaser and Kydd argue that the Soviet Union’s declaration of a moratorium on nuclear testing, negotiation and ratification of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and decision to initiate large-scale conventional force reductions in Europe “produced a significant positive shift in U.S. assessments of Soviet intentions.” This account is unconvincing. In a detailed analysis of the case, Keren Yarhi-Milo finds that key decisionmakers, including President Ronald Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz, and Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, did not view any of these gestures as compelling evidence of peaceful Soviet intentions. The same is true of the intelligence community.¹⁷ Haas, it should be noted, contradicts

12. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989*, pp. 120–130, at p. 121.

13. Christopher Layne, “Security Studies and the Use of History: Neville Chamberlain’s Grand Strategy Revisited,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (July/September 2008), pp. 427–428.

14. Mark L. Haas, “The United States and the End of the Cold War: Reactions to Shifts in Soviet Power, Policies, or Domestic Politics?” *International Organization*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Winter 2007), pp. 165–166.

15. Colin L. Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 375. Haas offers an extended analysis in “The United States and the End of the Cold War,” pp. 166–168. The evidence he provides shows that officials believed that Gorbachev was sincere in his reform efforts and that “the Cold War was at an end.” It does not show that the U.S. government was convinced that the Soviet Union had peaceful designs.

16. Haas, “The United States and the End of the Cold War,” p. 168.

17. Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in*

Glaser and Kydd, as he finds that Soviet arms policies “did not push the Americans to believe that the Cold War was ending or that a new era in U.S.-Soviet relations was dawning.”¹⁸ Indeed, Kydd’s own analysis of the case stops well short of claiming that the testing moratorium, INF Treaty, and conventional reductions caused the U.S. government to become confident that the Soviet Union had peaceful designs.¹⁹ Perhaps the best evidence that the United States remained uncertain about Soviet intentions, however, comes from the period after Gorbachev’s supposedly reassuring arms reductions. As the Soviet Union began to collapse, the George H.W. Bush administration worked hard to ensure that it would not be capable of challenging U.S. preeminence in the future.²⁰

Glaser and Kydd dismiss my argument that states make decisions based primarily on power calculations, declaring that it cannot explain why the major European states have not balanced against the United States and each other since 1990. Instead, they argue, the absence of “intensive balancing” in the post-Cold War period can be attributed to confident assessments of intentions. The Europeans “are confident that the United States is not going to use its tremendous power against them,” and France and Germany believe each other to be peaceful. Yet power calculations provide a compelling explanation for this state of affairs. The Europeans have not balanced intensively against the United States because it is physically separated from Europe by the Atlantic Ocean and cannot conquer them.²¹ At the same time, the United States is far more powerful than the major European states and has remained deeply engaged in Europe since the Cold War, which means that France and Germany have had little incentive to provide for their own security and balance against each other.²² Not surprisingly, Paris and Berlin welcome this arrangement because they are not confident that the other will continue to cooperate in the event that the United States disengages from the continent.²³

Finally, Glaser and Kydd declare that “there is probably more mutual confidence about intentions among great powers today than at any point in history.” Assuming that today’s great powers include the United States, China, and Russia, it is impossible to square this statement with what is happening in the real world. There is no consensus on whether China has peaceful or aggressive strategic plans.²⁴ Most observers

International Relations (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 205–215, 221–223, 231–240.

18. Haas, “The United States and the End of the Cold War,” pp. 157–160, at p. 159.

19. Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 225–226, 228–230, 233–234.

20. See, for example, Mary Elise Sarotte, “Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to ‘Bribe the Soviets Out’ and Move NATO In,” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Summer 2010), pp. 110–137.

21. Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), p. 39.

22. Nuno P. Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 71.

23. Robert J. Art, “Why Western Europe Needs the United States and NATO,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 111, No. 1 (Spring 1996), pp. 1–9, 35–39; and David S. Yost, “Transatlantic Relations and Peace in Europe,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 292–296.

24. For a recent debate, see Walter Russell Mead, “The Return of Geopolitics: The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (May/June 2014), pp. 73–75; and G. John Ikenberry, “The Illusion of Geopolitics: The Enduring Power of the Liberal Order,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (May/June 2014), pp. 87–89.

are uncertain; few are confident either way.²⁵ In fact, Glaser and Kydd observe that “China’s intentions are . . . less clear than those of many other states,” and they reference the “uncertainty the international community faces about China’s goals and intentions.” In a more extended analysis, Glaser concludes, “Overall, then, one is left with grounds for concern about China’s motives, but also much uncertainty.”²⁶ Russian intentions have also been hotly debated, and contrary to my critics’ claims, the West is no more certain about Moscow’s medium- to long-term strategic plans today than it was before the Ukraine crisis. For some, Russia’s annexation of Crimea is a reflection of aggressive intentions; for others, it is a reaction to the threat posed by NATO enlargement and EU expansion.²⁷

CONCLUSION

The debate between my critics and me is of more than theoretical or historical interest. It has important implications for how scholars and practitioners think about the future of international politics. In particular, my argument implies that the United States and China are destined to engage in an intense security competition if the latter continues its impressive rise. Unable to reach confident conclusions about the other side’s current and future intentions but acutely aware of its formidable capabilities, Washington and Beijing will have no choice but to strengthen their military and diplomatic positions in Asia, triggering a dangerous action-reaction spiral with the potential for arms racing, crises, and possibly even war.²⁸ In contrast, my critics argue that it is possible for the United States and China—even in the absence of near certainty about each other’s intentions—to avoid such a tragic outcome. Regrettably, I think they are wrong.

—Sebastian Rosato
Notre Dame, Indiana

25. James B. Steinberg and Michael O’Hanlon, “Keep Hope Alive: How to Prevent U.S.-Chinese Relations from Blowing Up,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (July/August 2014), pp. 107–108. Steinberg and O’Hanlon point out that China is also uncertain about U.S. intentions.

26. Charles L. Glaser, “A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation,” *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Spring 2015), p. 67.

27. See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (September/October 2014), pp. 1–12; Jacob Heilbrunn, “The Interview: Henry Kissinger,” *National Interest*, August 19, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-interview-henry-kissinger-13615>; Alexander J. Motyl, “The Sources of Russian Conduct: The New Case for Containment,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 16, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2014-11-16/sources-russian-conduct>; and Michael McFaul, Stephen Sestanovich, and John J. Mearsheimer, “Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 6 (November/December 2014), pp. 167–178.

28. I am not sure why Glaser and Kydd interpret this theoretically informed prediction as a policy prescription.

ERRATUM

In the first sentence of the note below map 1 on page 43 of Fiona S. Cunningham and Taylor Fravel’s article, “Assuring Assured Retaliation: China’s Nuclear Posture and U.S.-China Strategic Stability” (Vol. 40, No. 2), the word “triggers” should be “brigades.” The sentence should read: “No launch brigades are attached to Base 22, which is the Second Artillery’s central warhead storage base.”