The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers

Sebastian Rosato

Can great powers reach confident conclusions about the intentions of their peers?[1] The answer to this question has important implications for U.S. national security policy. According to one popular view, the United States and China are destined to compete unless they can figure out each other's designs. A recent Brookings Institution report warns that although "Beijing and Washington seek to build a constructive partnership for the long run," they may be headed for trouble given their "mutual distrust of [the other's] long-term intentions."[2] Similarly, foreign policy experts James Steinberg and Michael O'Hanlon argue that "trust in both capitals . . . remains scarce, and the possibility of an accidental or even intentional conflict between the United States and China seems to be growing."[3] Reversing this logic, many analysts believe that U.S.-China relations may improve if the two sides clarify their intentions. Thus the Pentagon's latest strategic guidance document declares that if China wants to "avoid causing friction" in East Asia, then its military growth must be "accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions."[4] Meanwhile China scholars Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell recommend that even as the United States builds up its capabilities and alliances, it should "reassure Beijing that these moves are intended to create a balance of common interests rather than to threaten China."[5]

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1. For another statement of the confident versus uncertain distinction that I employ here, see David M. Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs about Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers," *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn 2002), pp. 4–5.
2. Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2012), p. vi.
3. 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), p. 107.
4. U.S. Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2012), p. 2.
5. Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, "How China Sees America: The Sum of Beijing's Fears," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (September/October 2012), p. 47.

Intentions also play a key role in theoretical debates about the prospects for conflict and cooperation among the great powers. Structural realists contend that states are always uncertain about the current and future intentions of others; and because they can inflict grave harm on one another, this uncertainty makes for a highly competitive world.[6] Not knowing if their peers have aggressive or peaceful designs, but acutely aware of the painful consequences of being wrong, great powers live in fear and compete for power to protect themselves.[7] John Mearsheimer elaborates, "[Great powers] worry about the intentions of other states, in large part because they are so hard to divine. Their greatest fear is that another state might have the capability as well as the motive to attack them. . . . Fearful of other states, and knowing that they operate in a self-help world, states quickly realize that the best way to survive is to be especially powerful."[8] Cooperation is equally difficult because great powers are unsure whether their partners intend to honor their agreements now or in the future. As Kenneth Waltz observes, "[T]he condition of insecurity—at the least, the uncertainty of each about the other's future intentions and actions—works against their cooperation."[9]

This claim that uncertainty and high stakes combine to generate great power competition is widely accepted even among structural realism's detractors.[10] Writing from a liberal perspective, Charles Lipson notes that when a "special peril of defection" exists, which is to say that actors can attack suddenly and with devastating consequences, "there is little hope for stable, extensive cooperation." Not only do these factors hinder cooperation, but they also prompt great powers to compete: "[T]he high costs of unreciprocated cooperation, together with uncertainty about others' intentions, fuels suspicion and fosters anxiety to strike first."[11] Similarly, in explaining why "security seekers" would

6. Dale C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Fall 2000), pp. 188–189, 199–203; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 31; and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), pp. 105, 186.

7. This description of structural realism relies on Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 29–54; and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 102–128.

8. John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 79–80.

9. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 105.

10. For claims that competition emerges from conflicts of interest rather than uncertainty, see Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 13–16; and Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 91, 119.

11. Charles Lipson, "International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs," *World Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (October 1984), pp. 14, 15.

ever compete with one another, defensive realist Charles Glaser declares that "uncertainty plays a central role in creating . . . insecurity," which, in turn, pushes states to adopt "competitive policies."[12]

Nevertheless, critics of structural realism are more optimistic that great powers can discern the intentions of their peers. For example, they identify several situations in which a state can confidently assess another's current plans. Robert Jervis describes military conditions in which "much of the uncertainty about the other's intentions that contributes to the security dilemma is removed."[13] Mark Haas concludes that in some ideological contexts the "potency of uncertainty as a cause of international conflict can be significantly mitigated."[14] And Andrew Kydd asserts that ideologies, regime types, and certain actions "reveal a wealth of information . . . about the intentions of other states."[15] Others argue that confidence about current intentions creates confidence about future intentions because states' foreign policy plans are stable over time. Alexander Wendt sums up the point: "Are state intentions highly unstable over time? Not as far as I can tell. . . . [N]ational interests seem quite stable, in some cases over centuries."[16]

If these optimistic claims are correct, then there are good reasons to doubt the grim structural realist worldview. Consider the security dilemma, which structural realists describe as "the condition in which states, unsure of one another's intentions, arm for the sake of security and in doing so set a vicious circle in motion."[17] If a great power is confident that another state means it no harm, then a decision by the second state to increase its military capabilities will not lead to such fierce security competition. Or take the structural realist claim that great powers are reluctant to cooperate lest their partners gain more from cooperation than they do and turn on them later from a position of strength.[18] This relative gains problem will not inhibit cooperation if states are

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12. Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 55.
13. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), p. 201.
14. Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 27.
15. Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Fall 1997), p. 153.
16. Alexander Wendt, "Social Theory as Cartesian Science: An Auto-Critique from a Quantum Perspective," in Stefano Guzzini and Anna Leander, eds., *Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and His Critics* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 211.
17. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 186. On this point, see also Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 35–36, 417 n. 27.
18. On relative gains, see Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist

satisfied that others will have peaceful designs in the future. Robert Keohane explains, "States evaluate intentions as well as capabilities. . . . If such shifts in capability seem very unlikely to be used adversely, concern for relative gains in these relationships may be of minor significance."[19]

In this article, I evaluate the major optimistic arguments that great powers can discern the intentions of their peers with confidence.[20] One set of arguments holds that states can deduce others' current intentions from certain domestic characteristics such as their foreign policy goals, ideology, or regime type. Another focuses on behavior and maintains that states can infer current intentions by examining their counterparts' arms policies, membership in international institutions, or past actions in the security realm.[21] A final set of arguments explains why intentions are unlikely to change and thus why current designs are good predictors of future plans.

I conclude that these optimistic claims are unpersuasive. Great powers cannot confidently assess the current intentions of others based on their domestic characteristics or behavior, and they are even less sure when it comes to estimating their peers' future intentions. This is not to say that states' features and actions provide no insight into their designs. At best, however, they allow for marginal reductions in uncertainty.

The rest of this article proceeds as follows. I begin by offering a definition of intentions. The bulk of the article is then devoted to describing the major optimistic claims about intentions and evaluating the logics and evidence associated with them. Next, I sketch a pessimistic argument. Briefly, great powers are uncertain about the current intentions of their peers because they rarely have direct evidence of them and cannot infer them reliably from other states'

Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 495–503.

19. Robert O. Keohane, "Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge after the Cold War," in David A. Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 276.

20. I restrict my analysis to the most prominent arguments. For other claims about how states can discern intentions, see Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 202–203; Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," pp. 142–143; and Shiping Tang, *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time: Defensive Realism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 151–152, 154–155.

21. My distinction between behavior and domestic characteristics draws on Robert Jervis's claim that actors can use "signals" or "indices" to discern intentions. See Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 18–40. Signals (behavior) allow states to communicate and should therefore enable them to reach confident estimates of intentions as long as they are costly. Indices (domestic characteristics) do not allow for communication, but are hard to manipulate and should therefore provide reliable information about intentions if observers have powerful theories that link domestic traits to foreign policy.

domestic attributes or behaviors. Future plans are even harder to divine because intentions can change, and there are many situations in which they are liable to do so. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of my argument and findings for theory and policy.

Defining Intentions

There is no accepted definition of state intentions. The concept is sometimes defined so broadly as to include states' ambitions, planned behaviors, and willingness to bear costs to achieve their goals.[22] By incorporating several diverse notions, such definitions make it hard to evaluate the role of intentions in world politics. Alternatively, some scholars have argued that intentions are the same as interests, motives, and preferences.[23] In doing so, they rule out intentions as a discrete subject of inquiry. Nevertheless, it is possible to devise a useful definition of intentions that accords with how most observers use the term.

Intentions are the actions that a state plans to take under certain circumstances.[24] Several aspects of this definition merit elaboration.[25] First, intentions entail actions: when states intend something, they plan to perform specific actions or behave in particular ways. Thus states may intend to arm or disarm, to foment or draw back from a crisis, or to attack or make concessions to their adversaries. This does not mean that intentions are the same as actions. Rather, they are attitudes about actions. Second, intentions are state-level attributes. Decisionmakers may form their own individual intentions and disagree about the correct course of action. Typically, however, they reach collective opinions—in the form of tacit bargains, verbal agreements, or written

22. See, for example, Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty," p. 3; and Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 14.

23. See, for example, Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism," p. 199; and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), p. 146.

24. For similar definitions, see Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 300; and Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 48.

25. On intentions, see Gertrude E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 1–9; Michael E. Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 1–49; Jack W. Meiland, *The Nature of Intention* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 7–96; and Kieran Setiya, "Intention," in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, Spring 2014 ed.), http://plato .stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/intention/.

documents—that can be treated as the intentions of the state.[26] Third, state intentions can change if existing leaders reconsider their policies or if new decisionmakers with different ideas come to power. This being the case, there is a distinction between current intentions—a state's present plans of action—and its future intentions—the plans it will have after it rethinks its present plans. Fourth, states usually have conditional intentions. In theory, a state could plan to go to war regardless of the situation. In practice, however, states plan to fight only under certain circumstances—for example, they are militarily superior to their adversary.

Intentions fall into three categories according to quality, time frame, and issue area. First, a state can have aggressive or peaceful intentions.[27] It has aggressive intentions if it plans to threaten or use force and peaceful intentions if it has no such plans. Second, these plans can apply to any time period, from a current crisis to a hypothetical situation in the distant future. Third, a state can have intentions regarding any sphere of activity, including security, economic, and humanitarian affairs. In the case of great power politics, however, analysts are concerned with states' decisions to procure arms, form alliances, or make agreements—decisions that rest on evaluations of others' medium- to long-term plans in the security realm.

Intentions differ from interests, motives, and preferences, which are terms that refer to states' goals. Intentions and goals are related because states devise plans of action to achieve certain objectives. They are not, however, synonymous. Intentions are about how states plan to realize their goals, whereas interests, motives, and preferences answer the question of what those goals are. To borrow from the language of strategic choice, the difference is the same as the one between preferred strategies and preferred outcomes. More concretely, plans to arm or disarm or to attack or withdraw are intentions; desires for security, hegemony, and wealth are goals.[28]

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26. For a different view, see Ernest R. May, "Conclusions: Capabilities and Proclivities," in May, ed., *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 503.

27. For the same terminology, see Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, p. 82. Other scholars use the terms "benign" or "status quo" and "malign" or "revisionist." See, for example, Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty," p. 4; and Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 39. For simplicity, I also refer to states that have peaceful intentions as "peaceful states" and to states that have aggressive intentions as "aggressive states."

28. For a similar argument to the one made in this paragraph, see Jeffry A. Frieden, "Actors and Preferences in International Relations," in David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 39–47.

The Optimistic Case: Domestic Characteristics

The domestic characteristics version of the optimistic case maintains that great powers can infer the intentions of their peers from their internal features. Specifically, states can figure out others' designs by examining their foreign policy goals, ideology, or regime type.

FOREIGN POLICY GOALS

According to one set of domestic arguments, observers can deduce states' intentions from their foreign policy goals. The central issue is whether a state's goal is "to maintain or overthrow the status quo."[29] Some want to preserve the existing order. These "status quo" powers seek "the protection of values they already possess," aim "to keep what they have," and "prefer to keep things as they are." Others want to revise the prevailing order. These "revisionist" powers "value what they covet more than what they currently possess," seek "to change the distribution of goods," and want "to improve their position in the system."[30]

   Several defensive and neoclassical realists draw a simple connection between goals and intentions: status quo powers are more likely to have peaceful intentions, whereas revisionist powers are more likely to have aggressive designs. As Randall Schweller explains, revisionists "will employ military force to change the status quo and to extend their values," whereas "status-quo states do not employ military means to . . . extend their values."[31] Similarly, Jervis declares, "Aggressive behavior should thus be regarded as entailing not only a desire to expand, but a willingness to undertake strenuous and dangerous efforts to do so, a willingness that is likely to be inversely proportional to the state's satisfaction with the status quo."[32] This notion is also logically implied in the statement that "a world of security seekers, who are known to be security seekers, would be peaceful."[33] After all, if there were a chance

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29. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status Quo Bias," p. 91.
30. The quotations are from Jason W. Davidson, "The Roots of Revisionism: Fascist Italy, 1922–39," *Security Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Summer 2002), pp. 125–126; and Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 87, 104–105. Status quo states are also referred to as "security seeking" or "trustworthy," and revisionists are also referred to as "greedy" or "untrustworthy." See, for example, Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 35–37; and Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 6–8, 32.
31. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit," p. 105.
32. Robert Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2001), p. 39.
33. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, p. 29 (emphasis removed). For the same

that status quo powers had aggressive designs, then they might not remain at peace.

IDEOLOGY

Another set of domestic arguments suggests that observers can discern states' intentions from their ideologies—their beliefs about an appropriate social order and the institutions required to achieve it. One view holds that ideological distance—the difference between states' ideologies—is an important determinant of states' assessments of one another's intentions. States categorize their peers into ingroups that share their ideology and outgroups that do not, and they are more favorably inclined toward the former than the latter. John Owen observes, "[A]dherents to a given ideology will want to treat more kindly a state governed by their ideology . . . and they will be inclined to be confrontational toward a state governed by an enemy ideology."[34] Similarly, Haas argues that states tend to adopt "hard-line policies" against ideological rivals and "engage in policies . . . designed to aid" ideological allies.[35] Thus great powers expect that co-ideologues are inclined to harbor peaceful intentions toward them and that competitors guided by rival sets of legitimating principles are not. Relations among liberal states are especially likely to feature peaceful intentions. Because such states know that they share norms of compromise and nonviolence, their relations are marked by trust and respect, and they therefore have peaceful plans for dealing with one another.[36]

A related proposition holds that outsiders can derive great powers' intentions from the content of their ideologies: some ideologies are associated with peaceful intentions and others with aggressive designs. Nationalism is frequently invoked as indicating the latter. According to Stephen Van Evera, policymakers expect states imbued with "hegemonistic" nationalism to have aggressive intentions because this kind of nationalism "assume[s] a right or duty to rule . . . other nationalities."[37] Kydd also links nationalism with aggres-

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claim, see Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 56; and Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," p. 201.
34. John M. Owen IV, "Transnational Liberalism and U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 124–125.
35. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, pp. 16–17.
36. Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 1," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1983), pp. 213–215, 225–232; and John M. Owen IV, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 22–41. This is essentially the "normative" logic used by some democratic peace theorists to explain the finding that democracies rarely fight each other.
37. Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1994), p. 13.

sion, arguing that "[a] nationalistic leadership that discriminates against or oppresses domestic minorities" is more likely to be aggressive because a government of this kind "might feel little constraint against dominating other states."[38] Elsewhere, he suggests that communist regimes tend to have aggressive intentions because "communist ideology, founded on class conflict, posited a relationship of general enmity between the socialist states and the capitalist world."[39] As for liberal states, Michael Doyle argues that "[l]iberal wars are only fought for popular, liberal purposes," which is to say self-defense or the inculcation of liberal values in other states.[40]

REGIME TYPE

A final set of domestic arguments focuses on regime type. A prominent logic holds that democracies are more peaceful than other kinds of states. It begins with the observation that domestic institutions such as free speech and regular elections make democratic governments accountable to constituencies that may in various circumstances oppose the use of force. These include the public, which prefers not to bear the costs of fighting; interest groups that expect to incur losses in the event of war; and opposition parties that stand to gain politically if military action is unsuccessful.[41] As a result, democracies are constrained from using force. As Bruce Russett puts it, "In democracies, the constraints of checks and balances, division of power, and need for public debate to enlist widespread support will slow decisions to use large-scale violence and reduce the likelihood that such decisions will be made."[42] It follows that democracies are less likely to harbor aggressive intentions.

A second logic maintains that the transparency of the democratic process makes democracies' foreign policy plans more readily apparent. Elections provide substantial evidence about where candidates, parties, and publics stand on foreign policy issues. Also, opposition parties have access to information

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38. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," p. 142.
39. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, p. 22.
40. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 1," p. 230.
41. On these points, see Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, pp. 41–43; Bruce M. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post–Cold War World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 38–40; and Kenneth A. Schultz, "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (December 1998), pp. 831–832.
42. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, p. 40. This is one of the "institutional" logics—the others rely on transparency or credibility—used by some democratic peace theorists to explain the democratic peace finding. In a crisis involving two democracies, the leaders of both states are constrained from using force, know their counterparts are similarly constrained, and are likely to reach an agreement short of war.

about the government's designs and incentives to publicize that information for political gain. Moreover, key initiatives are openly debated in legislatures and reported in the media. Even bureaucracies may release information to attract supporters or undermine rivals.[43] According to Charles Kupchan, among others, such transparency affords foreign governments the opportunity to "assess, with a relatively high degree of confidence, the intentions and motivations that inform behavior."[44]

A third logic suggests that democracies' declarations of intent are more credible than those of other regimes. In this audience costs formulation, democratic leaders who announce a certain policy and then fail to follow through can be punished by voters for revealing their incompetence or damaging their state's reputation for honesty. Executives confronting this prospect are therefore likely to make their intentions known only if they plan to carry them out. Thus democratic statements of intent—peaceful or aggressive—are sincere.[45] As Jessica Weeks notes, audience costs enhance "states' ability to convey intentions. Just as leaders may generate domestic costs by backing down from a threat, they can also incur costs by reneging on peaceful promises. . . . Thus, higher audience costs may alleviate the security dilemma by reducing uncertainty about whether a promise to keep peace is genuine."[46]

Evaluating Domestic Characteristics Arguments

Great powers cannot reach confident assessments of the intentions of their peers based on their foreign policy goals, ideology, or regime type. To be sure, states can learn something about other states' intentions by scrutinizing their domestic characteristics. They cannot, however, learn enough to judge their intentions with confidence.

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43. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," pp. 129–139.
44. Charles A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 56. See also Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, "The Surprising Logic of Transparency," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (June 1999), pp. 315–339; Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," pp. 119, 129–139; and Charles Lipson, *Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 53–55, 87–93, 104–107.
45. On audience costs, see James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 577–592; Kenneth A. Schultz, "Looking for Audience Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (February 2001), pp. 32–60; and Alastair Smith, "International Crises and Domestic Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (September 1998), pp. 623–638.
46. Jessica L. Weeks, "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve," *International Organization*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Winter 2008), p. 60.

FOREIGN POLICY GOALS AND INTENTIONS

The contention that great powers can confidently infer others' intentions from their foreign policy goals is flawed for two reasons. First, determining goals is hard; and second, goals and intentions are not straightforwardly related.

States face formidable obstacles in trying to assess others' goals. It is reasonable to assume that rational states want security, but beyond that they can have many goals.[47] For example, they may want to increase their prosperity, spread their ideology, or shape the global institutional landscape. In addition, it is hard to know which objectives are more important to them and how they will adjudicate among different goals when these conflict. Also, goals can change. As Jervis points out, "[E]ven if the other state now supports the status quo, it may become dissatisfied later. . . . Minds can be changed, new leaders can come to power, values can shift, new opportunities and dangers can arise."[48] Furthermore, states have incentives to conceal or misrepresent their objectives.[49] A great power that aspires to hegemony, for example, will try to hide this from potential victims to lull them into a false sense of security. Consequently, there is substantial uncertainty when it comes to divining states' goals.

Given these difficulties, there are no accepted guidelines for determining states' goals, and therefore even the most well known historical examples are hotly debated. In the case of World War I, defensive realists claim that German aggression was driven by insecurity, specifically by fears of encirclement and the rise of Russia. Imperial Germany was essentially a security seeker, albeit one with aggressive intentions.[50] Offensive realists dissent, claiming that Germany was a revisionist power bent on "dominating the European continent."[51] Similar disagreement exists about the origins of the Cold War, with analysts variously arguing that both superpowers preferred the status quo, that the United States was a revisionist and the Soviet Union was a status quo

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47. On this point, see Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 46; and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 91.

48. Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," p. 168.

49. James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 390–401.

50. See, for example, Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, pp. 92–94; and Stephen Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 63–64, 66–71.

51. Keir A. Lieber, "The New History of World War I and What It Means for International Relations Theory," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2007), p. 156.

power, that the Soviet Union was a revisionist and the United States was a status quo power, and that both great powers wanted to change the status quo.[52] These examples undermine propositions that rely on goals: if scholars armed with definitions and the documentary record cannot agree about what states wanted long after the fact, it is unlikely that great powers can do so in real time.

Even if states could figure out others' goals, a significant problem would remain: goals are not a dependable guide to intentions. A status quo power may have peaceful intentions; that is, it may plan to keep things as they are without threatening or using force. But it may equally have aggressive intentions, believing that it must destroy its peers to maintain the current situation. Thus the same goal—preserving the status quo—can generate different plans of action. The argument also applies to revisionists. A revisionist power may have aggressive intentions; that is, it may plan to overturn the existing order by force. Or it may have peaceful intentions, simply choosing to sit tight and wait for its more powerful rivals to decline. Again, the same goal can be associated with different intentions.

This point is not particularly controversial. Glaser declares, "Although security is a benign motive, a state seeking security could find territorial expansion to be desirable and therefore be willing to engage in an arms race and start a war to change the status quo."[53] Jervis concurs: "[I]f the adversary believes that its security requires expansion, then from the state's perspective it does not matter that from a motivational standpoint the adversary is a security seeker rather than a greedy state."[54] In other words, status quo states can have aggressive as well as peaceful designs and revisionist states can, presumably, have peaceful as well as aggressive designs.

IDEOLOGY AND INTENTIONS

Ideology-based arguments exaggerate the extent to which great powers can assess the intentions of others based on the ideological distance between them and their rivals or on the content of their competitors' ideologies. The posited

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52. See Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" pp. 42–43; and Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, pp. 80–83.
53. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 36.
54. Robert Jervis, "Dilemmas about Security Dilemmas," *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July/September 2011), p. 422.

relationships between states' ideologies and their intentions are not particularly robust.

DISTANCE. The belief that great powers sharing an ideology tend to have peaceful intentions toward each other is not borne out in the historical record.[55] There have been ten wars since 1789 in which one or more of the belligerents on both sides were great powers. Pitting all of the great powers on one side against all of the great powers on the other side of each of these wars yields a total of 37 warring pairs.[56] In 16 cases (43 percent), the antagonists shared the same ideology, a figure that is little different from the likelihood that co-ideologues would have been on different sides if they had made their war decisions at random (47 percent). An examination of all militarized disputes involving the great powers from 1816 to 1989 yields a similar finding. Of 257 fighting pairs, 31 percent involved great powers that shared an ideology, whereas the likelihood that co-ideologues would have been antagonists if they had selected disputes at random is 30 percent.[57] This evidence does not conclusively refute the distance thesis. There could be many cases in which the great powers harbored peaceful intentions toward their co-ideologues and aggressive intentions toward states with a competing ideology but were compelled by circumstances to fight the former and support the latter. Nevertheless, the evidence does suggest that states cannot conclude that their ideological brethren tend to have peaceful designs and that their ideological opponents tend to have aggressive plans.

Even great powers that share a liberal ideology cannot be confident that

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55. My coding follows Alex Weisiger, "Ideology, Ideologues, and War," University of Pennsylvania, 2011, with the following exceptions: (1) I coded constitutional monarchies as either liberal states or monarchies using Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 1," pp. 209–217; and (2) I used Weisiger's criteria to code Japan, which does not appear in the dataset. This procedure yielded the following codings: Austria-Hungary, monarchy 1789–1918; Britain, monarchy 1789–1831, liberal 1832–1945; France, monarchy 1789, 1796–1848, 1852–70, liberal 1790–95, 1849–51, 1872–1940; Germany, monarchy 1789–1871, liberal 1872–1918, 1920–33, fascist 1934–45; Italy, monarchy 1861–78, liberal 1879–1922, fascist 1923–43; Japan, monarchy 1895–1945; Russia, monarchy 1789–1917, communist 1918–89; the United States, liberal 1898–present.
56. For the wars and participants, see Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 349–350 (for 1789–1815); and Correlates of War (COW), "Inter-State War Data Set (v4.0)," http://www.correlatesofwar.org/ (for 1816–1989). For details of the COW Inter-State War and Extra-State War datasets used in this article, see Meredith R. Sarkees and Frank W. Wayman, *Resort to War: A Data Guide to Inter-State, Extra-State, Intra-State, and Non-State Wars, 1816–2007* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010).
57. For the militarized disputes and participants, see COW, "Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4.01)," http://correlatesofwar.org/. For details of the dataset, see Glenn Palmer et al., "The MID4 Data Set, 2002–2010: Procedures, Coding Rules, and Description," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, forthcoming.

their counterparts have peaceful intentions. The most important case is World War I, in which Germany fought four other liberal great powers: Britain, France, Italy, and the United States.[58] There have also been several crises between liberal great powers. Christopher Layne highlights seven such disputes: the Trent Affair (1861) and Venezuela crisis (1895–96) between the United States and Britain; the Belgian (1830–32), Near East (1838–41), Tahiti-Tangier (1844), and Fashoda (1898) crises between France and Britain; and the Franco-German Ruhr crisis (1923). In each case, he shows that the parties planned to use military force, which is to say that they had aggressive intentions.[59] Meanwhile Stephen Rock finds that the United States and Britain considered war in the Oregon crisis (1845–46) and during the American Civil War (1861–65).[60] Finally, an analysis of all great power militarized disputes reveals 41 cases in which liberal great powers either threatened or used force against each other from 1816 to 1945.[61]

Not only is the evidence for the ideological distance hypothesis weak, but the logic that explains it is also faulty. Proponents of the thesis focus exclusively on transnational ideologies such as liberalism, communism, and monarchism. They have to do this: if an ideology is not transnational and does not cross national borders, then states cannot belong to ideological ingroups or outgroups, and distance arguments become impossible. At the same time, these theorists ignore nationalism—the belief that the world is divided into distinct nations and that each of these should have its own state. They agree that it is an ideology as they define it, but they do not factor it into their analyses.[62]

Once nationalism is introduced into the discussion, ideological distance

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58. Doyle codes Germany in 1914 as liberal in domestic but not foreign affairs. See Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 1," p. 216 n. 8. There are three reasons to adopt a designation of liberal in this case, however. First, the distance argument is based on domestic ideologies. See Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, pp. 1, 5. Second, Germany was viewed as a liberal state before World War I. See Ido Oren, "The Subjectivity of the 'Democratic' Peace: Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall 1995), pp. 178–179. Third, the Reichstag's limited control over foreign policy made Germany little different from Britain and France, which are classified as liberal states. See Christopher Layne, "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Fall 1994), p. 42.
59. Layne, "Kant or Cant," pp. 5–49; and Christopher Layne, "Lord Palmerston and the Triumph of Realism: Anglo-French Relations, 1830–48," in Miriam F. Elman, ed., *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 61–100.
60. Stephen R. Rock, "Anglo-U.S. Relations, 1845–1930: Did Shared Liberal Values and Democratic Institutions Keep the Peace?" in Elman, *Paths to Peace*, pp. 101–149.
61. For the disputes, see COW, "Militarized Interstate Disputes."
62. See, for example, Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*, p. 32 n. 38.

claims collapse. Nationalism must feature in any ideology account because it has been the most powerful political ideology in the world for more than 200 years. The argument that it has routinely trumped other legitimating principles is commonplace. Ernest Gellner captures the conventional wisdom: "Whenever nationalism has taken root, it has tended to prevail with ease over other modern ideologies."[63] Owen, an advocate of distance arguments, concurs: "In the modern world the strongest political identifications are typically with the nation-state."[64] In contrast to the other ideologies, however, nationalism is particularistic not universalistic—there are no larger communities comprising multiple states in a nationalist world, just separate nation-states that put their interests above those of others. Each nation-state is an ingroup, and all others are part of an undifferentiated outgroup. In such a world, the distance between ideologies cannot be used to infer intentions, because states view all of their peers as equally ideologically distant. This does not mean they presume that others have aggressive intentions, but neither do they assume that others have peaceful intentions. Instead, they conclude that others, just like them, have selfish interests that may lead them to have peaceful designs but may also cause them to plan on aggression.

CONTENT. Ideological content arguments do not fare any better. Consider the claim that great powers imbued with hegemonistic nationalism tend to have aggressive designs toward others. Perhaps the most important problem is that hegemonistic nationalism is difficult to identify before a state acts. Van Evera defines it as nationalism marked by "self-glorifying, self-whitewashing, and other-maligning" myths that justify "expansion" and "suppression."[65] All great powers engage in such chauvinist myth-making, however. Even the United States, routinely described as exhibiting a benign, "civic" form of nationalism, has not been immune.[66] As is often pointed out, national myths portray Americans as a chosen, superior people who have a right and a duty to promote their values abroad by military force if necessary.[67] To be sure, great powers are more or less extreme in their declarations, but all of them claim a

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63. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 43.
64. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, p. 26.
65. Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," pp. 26–29.
66. For the presumed hallmarks of civic nationalism, see David Brown, "Are There Good and Bad Nationalisms?" *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (April 1999), pp. 282–288.
67. See, for example, Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Jonathan Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Spring 2005), pp. 112–156.

right or a duty to influence others, making it hard to pick out those with aggressive intentions. Kydd's suggestion that states can determine whether others are imbued with hegemonistic nationalism not by their statements but by their treatment of minorities within their borders is also questionable: how a state deals with vulnerable domestic groups says little about how it will deal with powerful peer competitors.[68]

Moreover, states may exhibit hegemonistic nationalism even if they do not have aggressive intentions. Often the elites that purvey chauvinist myths do so for domestic reasons, such as enhancing their power and legitimacy or persuading the public to endure economic or social hardship. At other times, they do so to convince citizens to fight and die to defend the state.[69] In other words, the presence of hegemonistic nationalism can imply several things other than aggressive intentions and is not therefore a clear sign that a state is bent on aggression.[70]

The contention that great powers with certain universalistic ideologies are more or less likely to be aggressive is also doubtful. One reason is that ideologies provide states with their goals—liberal states want to spread liberalism, communist states want to spread communism, and so on—they do not give them their plans for achieving those goals. As Nigel Gould-Davies notes, "[T]o characterize a state as ideological is to make a statement about the nature of its goals; it is not to impute comprehensive knowledge about how it will achieve them."[71] Take a liberal power that seeks to spread its ideology: it could plan to do so by force of example or by force of arms.

Assuming for the sake of argument that ideologies do shape intentions, a review of the evidence undermines the assertion that some ideologies prescribe more aggressive behavior than others.[72] Liberal thought advocates negotiation

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68. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," p. 142.

69. Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," pp. 30–33; and Barry R. Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 80–124.

70. Having purveyed chauvinist myths, elites may find that not acting on those myths jeopardizes their rule. If this is the case, then observers can infer that states exhibiting hegemonistic nationalism are more likely to develop aggressive designs. Because all great powers create chauvinist myths, however, their appeal to these myths does not allow others to distinguish between great powers that are likely to become aggressive or remain peaceful. On blowback, see Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 41–42.

71. Nigel Gould-Davies, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics during the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 1999), p. 95.

72. The historical record lends some plausibility to this argument. During the Cold War, the liberal United States was involved in 172 militarized disputes (initiating 142) and the communist Soviet

and nonviolent conflict resolution. This injunction is not absolute in foreign affairs, however. Liberal powers may use force in self-defense and to bring liberal values to other states.[73] Similarly, communist thought advocates peaceful behavior most of the time, while allowing aggressive policies in some situations. The prescription of peaceful coexistence with capitalists is longstanding, as is the conviction that if war breaks out it will be initiated by capitalist states. At the same time, relations with fellow socialist states should be based on equality, mutual advantage, and respect for sovereignty. Conversely, communist powers have a duty to use force if necessary to defend their ideological brethren, support independence movements, or aid proletarian revolutions.[74]

In any event, states regularly ignore the behavioral prescriptions of their governing ideologies. Liberal great powers have waged approximately half of their interstate wars for reasons other than self-defense or the inculcation of liberal values.[75] In addition, perhaps a handful of the seventy-six imperial and colonial wars they have fought can be defended on liberal grounds.[76] As for the communist Soviet Union, it arguably violated the principle of peaceful coexistence by imposing the Berlin blockade (1948–49), instigating the Berlin (1958–61) and Cuban missile (1962) crises, and authorizing North Korea's attack on South Korea (1950), because these actions markedly increased the chances of militarized conflict with the capitalist world. Meanwhile its invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), and violent disputes with China in the 1960s, hardly suggest fraternal respect for other socialist states.[77] Finally, Moscow rarely used military force to support Marxist-Leninist

Union was involved in 154 such disputes (initiating 133), suggesting that liberal and communist great powers are equally aggressive. For the disputes, see COW, "Militarized Interstate Disputes."
73. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 1," pp. 213–215, 225–232; Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Autumn 1983), pp. 323–337; and Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*, pp. 22–41.
74. Margot Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988).
75. Of the 29 interstate wars fought by liberal great powers since 1816, the following are hard to justify on liberal grounds: War of the Roman Republic; Crimean War; Anglo-Persian War; Conquest of Egypt; Sino-French War; Britain, France, and the United States in the Boxer Rebellion; Italian-Turkish War; Germany and Italy in World War I; Franco-Turkish War; Vietnam War; Second Laotian War; War of the Communist Coalition; and Invasion of Iraq. For the wars, see COW, "Inter-State War Data Set."
76. For the wars, see COW, "Extra-State War Dataset (v4.0)," http://www.correlatesofwar.org/; and for an analysis of 66 of these cases, see Sebastian Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 4 (November 2003), pp. 588–590.
77. For accounts of these cases, see Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011); and Vladislav M. Zubok,

groups attempting to seize state power in the developing world during the Cold War.[78]

REGIME TYPE AND INTENTIONS

Optimistic claims about democratic regimes and intentions are overstated. Democracies are not more peaceful than other kinds of states; they are not particularly transparent; and their statements of intent are not especially credible.

PEACEFULNESS. Explanations for why democratic great powers are more inclined to be peaceful than other types of regimes are unpersuasive. One explanation maintains that democratic leaders are restrained by cost-averse publics. Proponents have overdrawn the extent to which ordinary citizens are unwilling to bear the costs of war, however. Cost aversion is often trumped by nationalism, which makes individuals willing to fight and die to defend their state and co-nationals. If they believe that the national interest is at stake—as is the case in most serious interstate conflicts—citizens in democracies are likely to ignore the costs attached to decisions for war. Then there is the fact that democratic elites can exploit their reputation as foreign policy experts, privileged access to information, and authority in security affairs to shape public opinion and suppress dissent despite the obligation to allow free and open debate.[79] These mechanisms have often been at work. When democratic leaders have opted for war, their decisions have generally been greeted by a spontaneous nationalistic response; or in the absence of such a reaction, they have persuaded the public to support the use of force. Dan Reiter and Allan Stam find only one instance since World War I "in which a democracy participated in a war and its government faced substantial overt political opposition." As for the United States, which has been involved in most of the wars since 1900, "no American president has taken the nation into war without indication that there is broad public support."[80]

The second explanation—that democratic decisionmakers tend to be re-

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A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

78. I drew up an approximate list of Marxist-Leninist groups that attempted to seize power in their respective states during the Cold War using Mark N. Katz, "The Soviet Union and the Third World," *Current History*, October 1986, pp. 329–332, 339–340. My conclusions about the support that these groups received from the Soviet Union rely on Mark N. Katz, ed., *The USSR and Marxist Revolutions in the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Moscow's Third World Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

79. Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," pp. 594–596.

80. Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 19–25, at p. 21; pp. 144–163, at p. 162.

strained by antiwar interest groups—is also dubious. Theoretically, groups that are better organized, possess superior information, and have more at stake in a given situation are more likely to influence policy.[81] Thus there is little reason to believe that pacific groups will routinely prevail over bellicose ones. In matters of war and peace, both international traders and the military industrial complex will have a great deal at stake and will be equally organized and informed. Empirically, prowar groups have often prevailed in the decision-making process even in mature and stable democracies. Jack Snyder demonstrates that imperialist interest groups dominated British policymaking in the middle of the nineteenth century as a result of their seeming monopoly on foreign policy expertise and effective organization. Meanwhile the United States became embroiled in Korea and Vietnam because of logrolling among prowar groups.[82]

There are also issues with the third explanation—namely, that democratic leaders are constrained from going to war if opposition parties object. Opposition parties will not routinely oppose the use of force. Of course, they may do so if they believe that military action will be unpopular and unsuccessful. But if they conclude that the use of force will be popular, successful, or both, then they have few political incentives to oppose it. Moreover, democratic governments know that even in the unlikely event that opposition parties speak out and military action is both unpopular and unsuccessful, they can still use their authority in foreign policy, superior access to information, and the bully pulpit to manage the political fallout.

The empirical record generally supports the argument that democratic leaders are no more constrained than their nondemocratic counterparts. In a review of the literature, Russett finds little "evidence that democracies are especially peaceful monadically (more peaceful in general)."[83] Accordingly, there is little reason to believe that democracies are more likely to harbor peaceful intentions than other kinds of states.

TRANSPARENCY. Democracies' foreign policy intentions are not especially transparent. Unlike domestic policy where legislatures, courts, and nongovernmental organizations are also involved, the formulation of foreign policy in democracies is the near-exclusive preserve of the executive branch.

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81. Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn 1997), p. 518.
82. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 153–211, 255–304.
83. Bruce M. Russett, "Democracy, War, and Expansion through Historical Lenses," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (March 2009), p. 13.

Consequently, Michael Desch observes, "[M]uch of the information" about intentions is "internal to the government."[84] Moreover, because plans to threaten or use force against other states have a significant impact on national security, democracies do not establish institutions that require executives to make this private information public. In the United States, John Orman writes, "Congress' operating principle in regard to important foreign policy and national security data" has been one of "voluntary reticence," and "[t]he courts have always been receptive to the idea that the executive could keep certain information secret if it was in the national interest."[85] To be sure, there have been disagreements about what counts as a national security matter. There is little debate, however, about the status of intentions toward peer competitors—they are national security issues of the highest order.

Absent institutional restrictions, democratic governments have kept foreign policy matters, especially their intentions, secret. Eric Alterman summarizes the U.S. experience: "From the earliest days of the republic, the president . . . has restricted the dissemination of information relating to defense and foreign policy. . . . This was true in Philadelphia in 1789, and it remains true today."[86] Indeed, many of the behaviors that scholars associate with democracies— including lying, deception, and counterfeit diplomacy—would be impossible were it not for the fact that democratic leaders have more information than legislatures and publics and selectively withhold that information from them.[87]

Some observers counter that secrecy is unlikely in democracies because opposition parties and bureaucracies have information about the executive's intentions and may have incentives to disseminate it. The claim that opposition

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84. Michael C. Desch, *Power and Military Effectiveness: The Fallacy of Democratic Triumphalism* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 43.
85. John M. Orman, *Presidential Secrecy and Deception: Beyond the Power to Persuade* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1980), pp. 33–64, at pp. 42, 48. See also Francis E. Rourke, *Secrecy and Publicity: Dilemmas of Democracy* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), pp. 43–110. On Britain and France, see David Banisar, *Freedom of Information around the World: A Global Survey of Access to Government Information Laws* (London: Privacy International, 2006), pp. 73–75, 154–158; Colin Seymour-Ure, "Great Britain," in Itzhak Galnoor, ed., *Government Secrecy in Democracies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 157–175; Yohanan Manor, "France," in Galnoor, *Government Secrecy in Democracies,* pp. 234–254; and Itzhak Galnoor, "What Do We Know about Government Secrecy," in Galnoor, *Government Secrecy in Democracies,* p. 285.
86. Eric Alterman, *When Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and Its Consequences* (New York: Viking, 2004), p. 15.
87. On these behaviors, see John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Evan Braden Montgomery, "Counterfeit Diplomacy and Mobilization in Democracies," *Security Studies,* Vol. 22, No. 1 (January/March 2013), pp. 33–67; and John M. Schuessler, "The Deception Dividend: FDR's Undeclared War," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Spring 2010), pp. 133–165.

parties have quality information about the government's intentions, however, is an unsupported assumption.[88] Indeed, it seems more plausible that governments will keep their plans from their opponents for fear that this information may be used against them for political purposes at a later date. Nor is there a strong likelihood that a democracy's intentions will be leaked by government officials or bureaucrats. Only a few of them are privy to such high-level plans, and they know that publicizing them may gravely endanger national security. Thus, although leaks about lesser foreign policy and defense matters are fairly common, leaks about intentions are rare. Moreover, because a democratic government can use plants—authorized leaks—outsiders cannot be sure if the leaked information is a true reflection of its intentions or merely what it wants them to see.[89]

Furthermore, in the event that secrecy is compromised, democratic leaders can lie to hide their foreign policy designs. In an inventory of the historical record, Mearsheimer concludes that "American presidents have told their fellow citizens a number of important lies about foreign policy matters over [the past] . . . seven decades." Nor is such behavior restricted to the United States. Democratic leaders in Britain, France, Israel, and Japan have often lied during international crises and wars.[90] These examples are especially damaging to the transparency account. There is usually more information available about a state's behavior during crises and wars than there is about its intentions in peacetime, which means that it should be easier for governments to lie about the latter.

CREDIBILITY. There are three reasons to doubt the credibility of democratic statements of intent.[91] First, democratic leaders must make fairly unambiguous declarations to activate the audience costs logic. There is little reason, however, for them to state their intentions in an unequivocal fashion, because they understand that doing so will expose them to charges of incompetence if they later reverse course. Second, even if democratic leaders do make ex-

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88. See, for example, Schultz, "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises," pp. 831–832.
89. On leaks, see Elie Abel, *Leaking: Who Does It? Who Benefits? At What Cost*? (New York: Priority, 1987).
90. See Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, pp. 6, 65–68, 78–80, at p. 6; and John M. Schuessler, *Democracy, Deception, and Entry into War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).
91. For these points, see Joe Clare, "Domestic Audiences and Strategic Interests," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (August 2007), pp. 735–737; Alexander B. Downes and Todd S. Sechser, "The Illusion of Democratic Credibility," *International Organization*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (July 2012), p. 485; Jack Snyder and Erica D. Borghard, "The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3 (August 2011), pp. 439–441; and Marc Trachtenberg, "Audience Costs: An Historical Analysis," *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (January/March 2012), pp. 37, 39–40.

plicit statements and subsequently back away from them, they can minimize audience costs by shaping public opinion or making concessions behind the scenes. Third, it is not clear that democratic publics care more about the consistency of leaders' statements and actions—the consideration at the heart of audience costs theory—than the substance of policy. A leader who changes course but in doing so adopts a popular position or encounters foreign policy success is unlikely to face punishment.

There is also little support for the democratic credibility claim in the empirical record. Alexander Downes and Todd Sechser hypothesize that if democratic declarations of intent—they examine compellent threats—are highly credible, then the opponents of democracies are more likely than the opponents of nondemocracies to back down in crises. According to their data, there is "no support" for the claim that democratic threats are more effective than those of other kinds of states.[92] Marc Trachtenberg analyzes ten crises in which a democratic great power prevailed and asks if its opponent backed down "because it could . . . see that the democratic power's threats were credible because audience costs would be incurred if that power gave way in the dispute." He finds "little evidence that the audience costs mechanism played a 'crucial' role in any of them. Indeed, it is hard to identify any case in which that mechanism played much of a role at all."[93] Snyder and Erica Borghard reach a similar conclusion in their review of international crises since 1945: when nondemocracies complied with threats issued by democracies, audience costs were not the reason.[94]

The Optimistic Case: Behavior

The behavioral version of the optimistic case posits that states can discern the intentions of others based on their actions. In summary, great powers can figure out their peers' designs by examining their arms policies, membership in international institutions, or past actions in the security realm.

ARMS POLICIES
The proposition that states can deduce intentions from others' arms policies comes in two forms.[95] One relies on the quantity of weapons that states pro-

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92. Downes and Sechser, "The Illusion of Democratic Credibility," p. 459.
93. Trachtenberg, "Audience Costs," pp. 7–32, at pp. 7, 32.
94. Snyder and Borghard, "The Cost of Empty Threats," pp. 451–455.
95. Glaser and Kydd theorize the effect of arms policies on states' abilities to signal and to infer motives rather than intentions. See Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 37–39; and

cure. According to Kydd, states that choose to give up their weapons or not to arm signal that they have "good intentions."[96] Similarly, Glaser contends that a great power can signal peaceful intentions via "unilateral restraint—that is, by reducing its military capability below the level that it believes would otherwise be necessary for adequate deterrence and defense," or with an arms control agreement that "limits the size . . . of forces." Conversely, states with aggressive designs are more likely "to deploy forces that are larger than required to defend" or launch a "buildup to gain an advantage in force size."[97]

Because all states have incentives to signal peaceful intentions, truly peaceful states must engage in costly signaling if they want others to understand their designs.[98] "Cost" here refers to the impact a given action would have on a state's ability to carry out its plans. A measure that reduces a state's ability to use force, for example, is typically more costly for an aggressive state than it is for a peaceful one.[99]

A second arms policy claim rests on the ability to distinguish offense from defense. Simply put, when weapons and postures that provide the capability for protection and aggression are different, peaceful states can behave in ways that separate them from aggressive states.[100]

If offense and defense are distinguishable, observers can conclude that great powers that procure defensive capabilities, prioritize defense, or restrict their

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Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, pp. 11–12. Because motives are different from intentions, Glaser's and Kydd's claims cannot be applied to the issue of intentions without modification. Therefore I describe and evaluate only those of their arguments that are relevant to intentions.

96. Andrew Kydd, "Game Theory and the Spiral Model," *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (April 1997), pp. 373, 395, at p. 395.

97. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 66–67, 69–70.

98. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," p. 117.

99. On costly signaling, see James D. Morrow, "The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signaling, Commitment, and Negotiation in International Politics," in Lake and Powell, *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, pp. 86–91.

100. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 75; and Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," p. 201. I ignore the related issue of the offense-defense balance, for two reasons. First, offense-defense theorists identify states that emphasize offense as more likely to be aggressive and states that emphasize defense as more likely to be peaceful regardless of whether offense or defense is dominant. The prevailing balance may, however, rule out certain policies; for example, if it is easier to attack than defend, then states are unlikely to emphasize defense, whatever their intentions may be, for fear of putting their security at risk. This means that the offense-defense balance affects the likelihood that certain policies will be adopted, not what those policies indicate about states' intentions. Second, offense-defense theorists claim that there has been little variation in the offense-defense balance—according to Van Evera, offense has been dominant for only 26 of the past 250 years. See Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 171, 118, 191, 255.

offensive capabilities are more likely to have peaceful intentions. The reason is that such policies limit a state's prospects for aggression. Consequently, Glaser suggests that if a state engages in "arms control" restricting its offensive forces, then it is more likely to be peaceful. The same is true of a state that chooses "defense emphasis" and gives "priority to meeting its military requirements with a defensive strategy."[101]

Conversely, great powers that procure offensive capabilities, prioritize offense, or fail to restrict their offensive capabilities do not limit their prospects for aggression and are therefore more likely to have aggressive intentions. As Jervis explains, states "obtain advance warning when others plan aggression. Before a state can attack, it has to develop and deploy offensive weapons." Indeed, when it is relatively easy to defend, peaceful states do not need to "procure offensive forces, and aggressors give notice of their intentions by the posture they adopt."[102]

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Another set of behavior arguments holds that states can work out others' intentions based on their membership in international institutions—rules that prescribe and proscribe acceptable and unacceptable forms of behavior. In this view, institutions "serve as the informational and signaling mechanisms that permit states to get more information about the interests, preferences, intentions, and security strategies of other states."[103] States create institutions "largely because of uncertainty, which . . . means not having information about other states' intentions."[104]

One logic focuses on the stance that states take toward institutions. It begins with the observation that some institutions comprise rules that prohibit the threat or use of force. John Ikenberry argues that such agreements set "parameters within which states will compete" and enumerate "constraints on the way power can be used in the system."[105] Consequently, states that form, join, or remain in such institutions likely harbor peaceful intentions. By endorsing

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101. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 65–67, at p. 66.

102. Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," pp. 199, 214.

103. Celeste A. Wallander, *Mortal Friends, Best Enemies: German-Russian Cooperation after the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 25.

104. Celeste A. Wallander and Robert O. Keohane, "Risk, Threat, and Security Institutions," in Helga Haftendorn, Keohane, and Wallander, eds., *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 30.

105. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 58, 63.

institutions, declares Celeste Wallander, they "signal that their intentions are not in conflict with fundamental assumptions under which other states operate." At the same time, states that refuse to join institutions or violate the rules are likely to be aggressive: "Deviations from the norms and procedures of an institution . . . can lead states to reevaluate intentions and suspect noncompliant states."[106]

Information such as this is deemed credible because it is costly for states to adopt a positive stance toward institutions. Seth Weinberger argues that "institutions can serve a valuable role . . . in discerning the intentions of states" because "they have a unique ability to impose costs upon states." Institutions may rule out certain actions and prescribe others, create onerous obligations such as the elimination of certain weapons, take policy decisions out of states' hands, and require members to change their domestic systems. These membership costs help to reveal intentions because peaceful states "will agree to join and abide by the rules and obligations of an institution," and aggressive states "will not."[107]

Another logic holds that institutions make members' intentions more transparent.[108] According to this approach, international institutions are not only rules but also processes that require members to interact on an ongoing basis. State representatives meet regularly to provide, request, and discuss information about goals and intentions. These same officials also develop "networks of acquaintance and friendship." As a result, member states' intentions become mutually transparent: repeated contact provides them "with high-quality information about what their counterparts are likely to do."[109]

PAST ACTIONS

A final set of behavior arguments suggests that observers can derive states' intentions from their past actions in the security realm, specifically their past threats or uses of military force. Several formal theorists assume that states enter interactions with "prior" beliefs about others' preferences and intentions, assessments that rely on historical experience. Others adopt a dynamic ap-

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106. Wallander, *Mortal Friends, Best Enemies*, pp. 26, 33.
107. Seth Weinberger, "Institutional Signaling and the Origins of the Cold War," *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Summer 2003), pp. 88, 91.
108. Ikenberry, *After Victory*, pp. 66–67; and Robert Jervis, "From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation," *World Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (October 1985), pp. 73–76.
109. Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 101.

proach, arguing that great powers "update" their beliefs based on past actions. Thus Kydd divides international interactions into multiple rounds, with states using others' actions in previous rounds to reach firmer conclusions about their attitudes: "If the other side cooperates, it is identified as security seeking and if it does not, it is identified as expansionist."[110]

Informal analyses also highlight the role of past actions in revealing intentions. The enduring rivalries literature maintains that "there is enough past competition" in these cases "that such interactions affect contemporary and future behavior." Indeed, "past actions are crucial in explaining the current and future course of a rivalry."[111] Similarly, the literature on learning in international relations posits that "observation of an adversary's actions may lead to diagnostic learning about the adversary's preferences and intentions."[112]

A common line of reasoning underpins these claims: great powers' intentions are connected to their pasts. Those with a rich history of aggression are more likely to be aggressive, and those that have consistently acted peacefully are more likely to be peaceful.

Evaluating Behavior Arguments

There are good reasons to doubt that great powers can reach confident assessments of the intentions of their peers by observing their arms policies, membership in international institutions, or past security actions. They may be able to glean some information from these behaviors, but only enough to allow for marginal reductions in uncertainty.

ARMS POLICIES AND INTENTIONS
The contention that great powers can signal or infer intentions clearly through their arms policies is flawed. This is true of both the quantitative and distinguishability variants of the argument.

QUANTITY. Great powers may, in theory, be able to signal their peaceful intentions by engaging in unilateral restraint—refraining from arming or reducing existing capabilities—but they are unlikely to do so. Recall that states can signal peaceful intentions credibly only by reducing their forces below the

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110. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, p. 42.
111. Paul F. Diehl, "Introduction: An Overview and Some Theoretical Guidelines," in Diehl, ed., *The Dynamics of Enduring Rivalries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 4–5, 16.
112. Jack S. Levy, "Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *International Organization*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Spring 1994), p. 285.

level needed for adequate deterrence or defense or by engaging in arms control that would leave them open to predation if their partners were to defect. Actions short of this standard could also be taken by aggressive states and thus are not costly signals. A great power that is truly uncertain about another's designs, however, is unlikely to make itself vulnerable for fear of appearing irresolute and putting its safety at risk. As Glaser acknowledges, "Of course, this security risk will make states reluctant to adopt an ambitious policy of unilateral restraint."[113]

Because peaceful great powers are unwilling to engage in significant restraint, they have little choice but to make "small reductions, with the hope that the adversary will reciprocate."[114] Such actions provide limited information, however. An aggressive state could act in the same way to trick a competitor into letting its guard down. Thus great powers are unlikely to learn a great deal about each other's intentions through restraint. George Downs and David Rocke refer to this as a paradox of tacit bargaining: "[A] state will rarely be certain enough about an opponent's response to make a large cooperative gesture, and the opponent will rarely be trusting enough to respond enthusiastically to a small gesture."[115]

Proponents of arms policy arguments have not resolved this paradox. One approach has been to assume that the state engaging in restraint is convinced that its counterpart is peaceful, so making itself vulnerable is not an especially dangerous move.[116] There is no explanation, however, for the origins of this assumption. Indeed, it is at odds with the claim that aspiring signalers are uncertain about the intentions of others.[117] Another approach has been to argue that states adopting restraint understand that large concessions will make them vulnerable to aggressive competitors, but they make them anyway because this allows them to signal other peaceful states and avoid unnecessary conflicts with them.[118] It is not clear why this should be the case. It is equally likely that a peaceful state would prefer to be well prepared for a war with an aggressive state, even if this means an unnecessary conflict with another

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113. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 68.
114. Ibid.
115. George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, "Tacit Bargaining and Arms Control," *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (April 1987), p. 298.
116. On this point, see Evan Braden Montgomery, "Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma: Realism, Reassurance, and the Problem of Uncertainty," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), p. 161.
117. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 55–57.
118. Kydd, "Game Theory and the Spiral Model," p. 388.

peaceful state. A final approach has been to suggest that a state may be able to reassure another about its intentions if it starts with a small gesture such as a "trade treaty" and follows up with an offer involving a "more important security matter."[119] This is the kind of cheap gesture, however, that even an aggressive state would make to trick potential victims, and it is therefore not especially informative.

Given these issues, great powers have rarely engaged in unilateral restraint. Downs and Rocke find that "[t]acit bargaining played no central role in ending any of the 19th- and 20th-century arms races, and its contribution to containing the scope and pace of the U.S.-Soviet arms race has not been great."[120] Indeed, arms policy theorists have identified only one case that purportedly supports their arguments: the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty.[121] Their basic claim is that the United States signaled peaceful intentions by agreeing to a 10:6 advantage in battleships over Japan even though it had the resources to establish a larger lead, and by committing not to build further fortifications in the Philippines and Guam.[122] Even this case is not clear-cut, however. To begin, Japan wanted a 10:7 ratio, believing that this was the minimum requirement to defend against an attack, but the United States insisted on 10:6. Moreover, the United States' advantage was effectively greater than 10:6 because of the superior quality of its fleet. Although some argue that the nonfortification agreement addressed these concerns, this ignores the fact that Japan sought both a 10:7 ratio and a nonfortification clause, not one or the other. In any event, tactical and technological developments meant that the United States would likely be able to secure the Philippines for operations against Japan in a future war even without further fortifications. In addition, U.S. negotiators insisted on the dissolution of the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Alliance as a precondition for the treaty.[123] In sum, the agreement provided scant evidence that the United States was peaceful.

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119. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, pp. 188–190.
120. Downs and Rocke, "Tacit Bargaining and Arms Control," p. 323.
121. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 66; and Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," pp. 195–196.
122. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 66, 250.
123. My analysis relies on Sadao Asada, "Japanese Admirals and the Politics of Naval Limitation: Kato Tamosaburo vs. Kato Kanji," in Gerald Jordan, ed., *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century, 1900–1945* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 147–149; Emily O. Goldman, *Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control between the Wars* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 121–123, 129–130; Robert G. Kaufman, *Arms Control during the Pre-Nuclear Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 52; Carolyn J. Kitching, *Britain and the Problem of International Disarmament, 1919–34* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 64; and Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout,

Similar contradictions attend policies of reciprocal restraint. If 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? Thus great powers are likely to adopt policies of limited reciprocal restraint and provide correspondingly limited information about their intentions. This is what appears to have happened during the Cold War. The major superpower arms control treaties—including the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) Interim Agreement, and the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF)—involved limited rather than significant reciprocal restraint and therefore revealed little about the two sides' designs.[124]

DISTINGUISHABILITY. An important weakness of the distinguishability argument is that offensive and defensive weapons cannot be differentiated. Consider the common claim that firepower-enhancing systems are defensive because they enable defenders to prevent attackers from concentrating their forces. Weapons such as these also have offensive uses, including suppressive fire, preparatory bombardments, and the thinning of defensive lines. At the same time, mobile weapons, which are generally considered to be offensive, have obvious defensive uses. The mobility they provide allows defenders to move forces quickly to the theater and seize the tactical counteroffensive.[125] Given these conceptual problems, Samuel Huntington's judgment is widely held among military experts: "Weapons may be usefully differentiated in a variety of ways, but the offense/defense distinction is not one of them."[126]

Great powers have encountered problems such as these in attempting to

Toward a New Order of Sea Power: American Naval Policy and the World Scene, 1918–1922 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1940), pp. 160, 162–164, 258, 288–290.

124. George W. Downs, David M. Rocke, and Peter N. Barsoom, "Is the Good News about Compliance Good News about Cooperation?" *International Organization*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Summer 1996), pp. 389–390; and Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, p. 190.

125. Keir A. Lieber, *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 40–45.

126. Samuel P. Huntington, "U.S. Defense Strategy: The Strategic Innovations of the Reagan Years," in Joseph Kruzel, ed., *American Defense Annual, 1987–1988* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington, 1987), p. 36. See also Lieber, *War and the Engineers*, pp. 34–45; and John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 24–27. Glaser disagrees, arguing that if a given weapon shifts the balance toward offense (defense), it is offensive (defensive). To perform this assessment, however, one must first establish whether a given weapon is offensive or defensive in character. Glaser does not offer criteria for answering this prior question or provide

distinguish between offense and defense. At the 1932 World Disarmament Conference—one of the few occasions when states have tried to classify weapons—participants quickly chose not to "formulate a general definition of aggressive armaments." Several features of the ensuing discussions are worth noting. First, negotiators sought to categorize specific weapons and "avoid the pitfalls of generality." Second, there was little consensus even on specific armaments. Marion Boggs notes that although a majority agreed that heavy tanks and artillery were offensive, agreement "did not approach unanimity. . . . And in every case . . . [the] minority included one or more of the Great Powers."[127] The authors of another study reach a similar conclusion: "Although they were able to agree that heavy tanks were clearly offensive weapons, the states that were represented at the conference disagreed about the character of *every* other weapon."[128] Third, the offense-defense distinction fell victim to strategic considerations. Each great power declared that those weapons most useful to it or in which it was superior were defensive, and that those most useful to its rivals or in which they were superior were offensive.[129] Distinctions were made, then, for reasons having little to do with the offensive or defensive features of the weapons in question.

Even if weapons are distinguishable, great powers will deploy both offensive and defensive forces regardless of their intentions, making it difficult to tell peaceful from aggressive states. Peaceful great powers will want robust offensive forces to deter potential aggressors or to show resolve. They will also want an offensive capability for various strategic reasons: for example, if they face a two-front war problem, have interests beyond the homeland, or have commitments to third parties. And they will want offensive forces in the event that they end up at war with an aggressive state, either to regain territory lost in battle or because some aggressors will quit only if they suffer great pain. Meanwhile great powers with aggressive designs will deploy defensive forces to ensure that their rivals do not attack them first, as a prelude to acquiring of-

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any evidence that states have been able to distinguish whether weapons are offensive or defensive. See Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 138–139.

127. Marion William Boggs, *Attempts to Define and Limit "Aggressive" Armament in Diplomacy and Strategy* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1941), pp. 44, 60.

128. George W. Downs, David M. Rocke, and Randolph M. Siverson, "Arms Races and Cooperation," in Kenneth A. Oye, ed., *Cooperation under Anarchy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 138 (emphasis in original).

129. B.J.C. McKercher, "Of Horns and Teeth: The Preparatory Commission and the World Disarmament Conference, 1926–1934," in McKercher, ed., *Arms Limitation and Disarmament: Restraints on War, 1899–1939* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992), pp. 173–201.

fensive forces, to protect some fronts as they attack on others, or for insurance purposes in case a war goes badly.[130] Thus observers cannot draw confident inferences about intentions from arms policies.

The more basic point is that communicating intentions through arms policies is a complex task. Consider what a peaceful great power must do to reveal its intentions. It cannot send signals that are too large or it will make itself vulnerable and imply a lack of resolve, and it cannot send signals that are too small because aggressive and peaceful states are equally likely to send cheap signals. States must develop what Keir Lieber skeptically refers to as a "Goldilocks" solution: "build just the right amount and kind of military force: not too much, not too little, not too menacing, not too reassuring."[131] In theory, states may be able to accomplish this feat. It will be near impossible, however, if great powers need to focus on more than one mission, more than one rival, and strategic interests beyond their own borders—as they typically do. A Goldilocks force for one interaction cannot be just right for another.

Even if a great power could construct a force that was optimal in several different scenarios simultaneously, others may not read the signal as it was intended. The reason is that great powers have different understandings about the size and type of forces required for security and divergent opinions about how much security is enough.[132] The result, Jonathan Kirshner argues, is that even rational actors with the same information routinely reach different conclusions.[133] During the Cold War, for example, U.S. officials consistently disagreed about the relationship between the Soviet Union's defense spending and its intentions.[134]

INSTITUTIONS AND INTENTIONS

Institutionalist approaches overstate the extent to which institutions enable great powers to discern others' intentions. A state's stance toward an international institution is not a dependable indicator of its intentions, and institutions provide limited transparency about their members' foreign policy plans.

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130. For these arguments, see Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 78; Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," pp. 201–202; and Van Evera, *Causes of War*, pp. 152–160.
131. Keir A. Lieber, "Mission Impossible: Measuring the Offense-Defense Balance with Military Net Assessment," *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July/September 2011), pp. 456–459, at p. 456.
132. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 70–71; and Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," pp. 174–176.
133. Jonathan Kirshner, "Rationalist Explanations for War?" *Security Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Autumn 2000), pp. 143–150.
134. Jervis, "Dilemmas about Security Dilemmas," pp. 420–421. Glaser's response is that the only rational conclusion in this case is his. See Charles L. Glaser, "Defending *RTIP*, Without Offending Unnecessarily," *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (July/September 2011), p. 472.

stance. Before explaining why a great power's decision to join, remain in, or leave an institution reveals little about its intentions, it is worth noting that great powers have rarely agreed to common rules of behavior in the security realm. As Lipson observes, "The real question is why security regimes . . . are so rare and so limited in scope."[135] The list is short: the Concert of Europe, the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the Cold War arms agreements between the superpowers.

Whether a state's membership in an institution signals that it is peaceful depends on the rules that make up the institution. If they stipulate that members must renounce the use of force, then other states are more likely to be reassured; if they do not, then others are less likely to regard membership as a sign of peaceful intent. Similarly, observers' minds will be put at rest to the extent that members agree to be punished for noncompliance.

Great power security institutions have either not required an explicit renunciation of force or not provided for penalties against rule breakers, thereby giving members little confidence that their partners had peaceful intentions. Matthew Rendall notes that the Concert of Europe did not have "concrete rules and procedures" prohibiting the use of force.[136] Even those who view it as a kind of institution describe it as a "conceptual norm" that "gradually came to embody a code of conduct."[137] Nor were there procedures for punishing violators. Charles and Clifford Kupchan find that "mechanisms for implementing collective action" against a rule breaker "were left unstipulated." Paul Schroeder, who does detect a punishment mechanism, admits that "reckless or unlawful behavior would cost the offending state" little more than its "status and voice."[138] Indeed, the only reassurance the great powers had about intentions was an informal understanding that they would not threaten or use force against each other directly, in each other's spheres of influence, or without the approval of their peers.[139]

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135. Lipson, "International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs," p. 12.
136. Matthew Rendall, "Russia, the Concert of Europe, and Greece, 1821–29: A Test of Hypotheses about the Vienna System," *Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Summer 2000), p. 87.
137. Richard B. Elrod, "The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System," *World Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (January 1976), p. 163.
138. Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Summer 1991), p. 123; and Paul W. Schroeder, "Did the Vienna Settlement Rest on a Balance of Power?" *American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (June 1992), p. 699.
139. Elrod, "The Concert of Europe," pp. 163–167; Korina Kagan, "The Myth of the European Concert: The Realist-Institutionalist Debate and Great Power Behavior in the Eastern Question, 1821–41," *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 18–20; and Paul W. Schroeder, "The 19th-Century International System: Changes in the Structure," *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (October 1986), pp. 12–13.

A similar conclusion applies to the Covenant of the League of Nations. Article 10 required signatories to "respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members." It did not, however, specify particular sanctions in the event of a breach of the peace. This decision was left to the Council, whose pronouncements were purely advisory and had to be unanimous. The other key articles—12, 13, and 15—required members to engage in third-party resolution when disputes arose. But they were not obliged to accept the outcome of these processes and could go to war three months after any decision. States that did not submit their disputes to the League or failed to observe the waiting period would be subject to mere economic sanctions for which no initiation or enforcement mechanisms were stipulated. The Council would also consider whether military action was warranted in these cases, but again could only make recommendations and had to do so on the basis of unanimity (Article 16).[140]

There is also little in the Charter of the United Nations to indicate that the great powers had peaceful intentions when they signed it. Article 2.4 requires signatories to refrain from threatening or using force. Also, the Security Council has the authority to decide when members have broken the rules, and the means to punish transgressors (Articles 39–51). At the same time, however, the Charter granted veto power to the United States and the Soviet Union, effectively exempting them from the rules. Hence Hans Morgenthau's indictment: "The most important task of any such system is the imposition of effective restraints upon the struggle for power. This task the United Nations is incapable of performing . . . with respect to the great powers."[141]

Institutional membership is also a poor signal of peaceful intentions because great powers cannot be forced to abide by the rules they establish. As Schweller notes, "[L]eading states can never be bound by institutions." They "may choose to exhibit restraint, and then again . . . may not. In these matters, however, institutions are guarantors of nothing."[142]

Great powers have routinely violated the rules underpinning the major se-

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140. Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 51–73, at p. 53; and F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920–1946* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986), pp. 46–69.
141. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 303–304.
142. Randall L. Schweller, "The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), p. 182.

curity institutions of the modern period. Concert of Europe members repeatedly ignored their informal agreements, threatening each other, intervening outside their own spheres of influence, and using force against weak states without the approval of their peers. Korina Kagan finds that the great powers "honored Concert norms mainly in the breach." Similarly, Dan Lindley argues that the institution was characterized by "frequent war scares, blunt language, and forceful bargaining."[143] Optimists agree that the great powers often threatened and used force, but respond that there were no great power wars between 1815 and 1853, a fact they attribute to Concert norms. As several scholars point out, however, this restraint was the result of the balance of power and satisfaction with the 1815 territorial settlement rather than a commitment to norms.[144] Rule violations were equally prevalent in the twentieth century. Although the League prohibited such behavior, the Soviet Union went to war with Poland (1920); Italy occupied Corfu (1923) and invaded Ethiopia (1935); France occupied the Ruhr (1923); Japan invaded Manchuria (1931) and China (1937); Germany occupied the Rhineland (1936); and the Soviet Union invaded Finland (1939). During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union regularly used force for reasons other than those allowed by the UN Charter, and Washington has continued to do so since 1991.

What of the argument that joining an institution is a credible signal of a state's intent because membership is costly? It misses a key insight about institutions—they are created by the most powerful states, and no great power will establish rules that impose onerous obligations on it. Indeed, if an agreement promises to be costly, great powers will eschew institutions and stick to the institution-less status quo ante.[145] Many analysts note that membership in security institutions has not required the great powers to behave in ways antithetical to their interests. Lipson argues that the Concert succeeded "without transforming the self-interested behavior of states."[146] Similarly, Zara Steiner declares that the League "was not a substitute for great power politics . . . but

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143. Kagan, "The Myth of the European Concert," p. 53; and Dan Lindley, *Promoting Peace with Information: Transparency as a Tool of Security Regimes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 80.
144. See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 35–36; and Branislav L. Slantchev, "Territory and Commitment: The Concert of Europe as Self-Enforcing Equilibrium," *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (October/December 2005), pp. 565–606.
145. James D. Fearon, "Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 279, 285.
146. Charles Lipson, "Is the Future of Collective Security Like the Past?" in George W. Downs, ed., *Collective Security beyond the Cold War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 119.

rather an adjunct to it."[147] And Brian Rathbun describes the United Nations as "a great-power concert embedded in the formal trappings of a more universal security organization."[148] As for the Cold War arms control treaties, Downs, Rocke, and Peter Barsoom conclude that they did not require the United States and the Soviet Union to depart significantly from what they would have done in the absence of institutions. On careful review, the Outer Space, Seabed Arms Control, Antarctic, and ABM treaties, the SALT Interim Agreement, and SALT II did not require the superpowers to alter their behavior in meaningful ways. Indeed, even the INF and conventional forces in Europe agreements and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks were not as onerous as they might at first appear.[149]

The fact that membership is not particularly costly also undermines the optimistic argument that institutions function as "alarm bells."[150] According to this logic, states that withdraw from institutions indicate that they are no longer willing to abide by rules restraining the use of force and are therefore likely aggressors. Because membership is relatively cheap and institutions exert few meaningful restraints, however, great powers with aggressive intentions have little reason to withdraw from them, and alarm bells will rarely go off. Indeed, proponents of the argument have identified only one example of this logic playing out: Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations.[151] Moreover, even if alarm bells do ring, they will not be especially loud. After all, in leaving security institutions great powers merely indicate that they are dissatisfied with rules that do not significantly constrain their behavior anyway.

TRANSPARENCY. Security institutions do not appear to promote a great deal of transparency. Ronald Mitchell concludes that "security regimes regularly fail to produce prompt, high-quality, accurate information on the behaviors and problems they seek to remedy."[152] Similarly, in a detailed study of five security institutions, Lindley finds only "moderate" support for the claim that international institutions provide "information about potential adversaries'

147. Quoted in Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 4 (October 2007), p. 1095.
148. Brian C. Rathbun, *Trust in International Cooperation: International Security Institutions, Domestic Politics, and American Multilateralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 112.
149. Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom, "Is the Good News about Compliance Good News about Cooperation?" pp. 383, 390.
150. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, p. 203.
151. Ibid.
152. Ronald B. Mitchell, "Sources of Transparency: Information Systems in International Regimes," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (March 1998), pp. 111–112.

actions, capabilities, and intentions." In the case of the Concert of Europe—the only agreement among great powers that he examines—Lindley concludes that although it "was clearly helpful in some instances, the Concert did not increase transparency as much as it might first appear."[153]

These findings are readily explicable. First, in designing security institutions great powers must weigh the benefits of gaining information about their rivals against the costs of revealing information about themselves. In the 1950s, the Soviet Union rejected on-site inspections of its nuclear facilities not because it did not want information about U.S. capabilities, but because it feared that the United States would use such inspections for spying.[154] Consequently, security institutions tend to be minimally intrusive. Second, most security institutions rely on self-reporting, which means that great powers can either withhold relevant information or lie when pressed.

Such lack of transparency will be especially acute where intentions are concerned. States should in some situations be able to develop rules that compel others to reveal the number and kind of weapons they have as well as their force deployments. Monitoring compliance with these agreements should also be relatively straightforward because actions such as ballistic missile tests and troop mobilizations are difficult to hide. Thus security institutions can reveal the kind of information that allows for marginal reductions in uncertainty. At the same time, however, states will not be able to establish institutions that provide direct evidence of others' foreign policy designs. Unlike military forces and postures, intentions are intangible and easy to hide.

Finally, there is the argument that international institutions create transnational networks of officials who routinely convey information about their states' intentions to one another. It is hardly plausible, however, that diplomatic representatives would have detailed knowledge of their governments' intentions or that professional diplomats would be prepared to share such information with the representatives of other states. It is perhaps for these reasons that proponents of the transparency claim have offered no examples of transnational networks revealing states' intentions.

PAST ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS

Observers cannot reliably deduce a great power's intentions from its past actions. For starters, a state's past actions may not be an accurate reflection of its

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153. Lindley, *Promoting Peace with Information*, pp. 182–183, 80.
154. Fearon, "Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation," pp. 290–291.

plans at the time. A great power may have had aggressive designs toward its neighbor, but acted peacefully because it did not see an opportunity to threaten or use force. On the other hand, a great power may have planned to remain at peace with its neighbor, but ended up going to war because it became involved in a crisis it could not control. To the extent that past and present designs are related, this means that past actions are a poor guide to current intentions as well.

Moreover, it is difficult to know whether past actions are part of a pattern and, if so, what part. If a great power threatened or used force, was this the first or last in a series of such acts? To see how difficult the question is to answer, imagine a state that started and won a war. It could judge that aggression paid and emerge from the affair with aggressive intentions; or it could be content with its victory and subsequently have peaceful designs. In the former case, the aggressive action was the first in a series; in the latter, it was the last. Conversely, imagine a state that started and lost a war. It could conclude that there was no point in going to war again and develop peaceful intentions; or it could decide on revenge and develop aggressive designs. In the former case, the aggressive action was the last in a series; in the latter, it was the first. Past actions are unreliable indicators of intentions even in these simple scenarios. Multiple past actions are no more informative than single episodes. Although Germany had a "history" of aggression in 1871—it had been to war in 1848, 1862, 1866, and 1870—it did not go to war again for forty-three years. The Franco-Prussian War proved to be the last in a series. Similarly, judged by the number of wars that it had fought, Russia had a particularly peaceful "history" for a great power in 1900, but waged three wars in the next five years.[155]

Finally, no two situations are the same. One might be able to argue that a state that acted aggressively in the past would have aggressive intentions today if that state had the same leader with the same goals, operating in the same domestic context and confronting the same international environment then as it does now. This scenario is implausible, however. State leaders, their goals, their domestic situations, international alignments, the balance

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155. For the wars, see COW, "Inter-State War Data Set." To the extent that states threaten or use force to establish or preserve reputations, one might infer that a state that has acted aggressively in the past is likely to do so again for reputational reasons—thus past actions provide information about current plans. Such arguments, however, are vulnerable to the criticisms I develop here. An observer cannot know if the reputation-seeking state believes it has done enough to create or maintain a reputation or if it believes it must act aggressively again to do so. For a review of reputation arguments, see Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 11–20.

of power, the state of technology, and innumerable other factors are subject to change.[156]

The Problem of Future Intentions

No one doubts that intentions can change and that it is therefore harder for states to assess future intentions than current designs. Noting that "motives could change," Glaser argues that "judgments about future motives are difficult to make (even more so than for current motives)."[157] Similarly, Kydd claims that "a state's preferences can change over time, so that knowledge of a state's present motivations, while valuable, will not suffice to perfectly predict future behavior."[158] Wendt concurs: "[E]ven if they can plausibly trust the Other today, states must now also be concerned that the Other might change its mind in the future."[159]

Nevertheless, these same scholars claim that intentions change only moderately and rarely. Intentions are not "highly unstable" over long periods of time; states "can and do" make judgments about others' future intentions; and "there are theoretical and empirical reasons for believing that preference change from security seeking to expansionist . . . is rare."[160] Thus confident assessments of current intentions mean confident conclusions about future intentions.

Most of these claims rely on assertion, not logic and evidence. Glaser declares that great powers are able to divine future intentions, but provides no logical or empirical basis for his opinion.[161] Wendt does the same when he writes that intentions are not especially unstable. Worse still, he then reverses himself, claiming that although interests are stable over time, "[h]ow those interests are pursued varies more," which is to say that states must remain uncertain about others' future intentions.[162]

Optimistic arguments that do have a logical and evidentiary basis are

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156. For a similar argument, see Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 36–42. See also Zachary Shore, *A Sense of the Enemy: The High-Stakes History of Reading Your Rival's Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 147–166.
157. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 111.
158. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, p. 202.
159. Wendt, "Social Theory as Cartesian Science," p. 211.
160. Ibid.; Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 111; and Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, p. 203.
161. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, p. 111.
162. Wendt, "Social Theory as Cartesian Science," p. 211.

flawed. Kydd argues that states are likely to have stable intentions for domestic reasons: in democracies leaders represent median voters whose interests are stable, and in nondemocracies "political institutions can impose a certain inertia on policy, along with other domestic constraints."[163] Both logics are wanting. Regarding median voters, their views can and do change as a result of wars, crises, economic upheavals, and the like. In addition, democratic elites can exploit their authority and information advantage in foreign affairs to change the median voter's mind. This privileged position also means that leaders need not be especially responsive to voters: they can formulate plans and take actions that they believe are necessary; reap the political rewards if they are successful; and conceal, lie, or spin if they are not. Thus, even when the median voter has stable intentions, this does not mean that the state will as well. Turning to nondemocracies, domestic political institutions do exert some constraints on leaders. They do not, however, prevent them from changing their minds. Nor do they prevent other leaders with new ideas from coming to power.

Moreover, the evidence that Kydd adduces to support his argument does not show that the great powers confidently assessed future intentions. In the World War I and Cold War cases, he refers only to judgments about current intentions. Meanwhile his analysis of the interwar period is a textbook statement of uncertainty about future intentions: "Britain and France both feared that Germany might become revisionist in the future."[164]

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion is consistent with a pessimistic view of intentions—namely, that great powers are uncertain about the current and future intentions of their peers. Two questions arise: What is the pessimistic case and what implications does it have for theory and policy?

The pessimistic argument holds that uncertainty is endemic in great power politics because it is hard for states to acquire direct or indirect information about the intentions of others. Direct knowledge is elusive because intentions are private information. Only states know their own intentions.[165] Deducing

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163. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," pp. 147–148; and Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, pp. 203–204, at p. 204.
164. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," pp. 148–151, at p. 149.
165. Observers may learn a state's intentions by spying. This is unlikely, however, because intentions are closely held by only a handful of officials. Moreover, information gleaned from spying cannot be taken at face value. See Richard K. Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in*

intentions indirectly from domestic characteristics or outward behaviors is also a difficult proposition. Great powers cannot reach confident conclusions about the intentions of their peers based on their foreign policy goals, ideology, or regime type. Nor do their arms policies, membership in institutions, or past actions in the security realm provide a reliable guide to what others plan to do.

This uncertainty is exacerbated by the significant incentives great powers have to conceal or misrepresent their intentions.[166] States planning aggression may seek to hide this or appear peaceful to lull potential adversaries into a false sense of security. Similarly, states with peaceful intentions may hide their designs or appear aggressive to deter aspiring predators. In other words, whether they are aggressive or peaceful, states work to keep their plans to themselves. Because all states know this, their uncertainty about one another's intentions is heightened even further.

These difficulties pale compared to the problem of divining future intentions. Even if observers could determine a state's current designs with confidence, there is no proven way for them to know what they will be later because there are many situations in which intentions can change.[167] New policymakers with new ideas may come to power, or the same individuals may rethink their policies because of altered personal or domestic circumstances. Other changes may arise from international developments: shifting power constellations, technological innovations, or diplomatic realignments are all reasons for great powers to take stock and revise their intentions.[168]

In such a world, great powers make consequential decisions about competition and cooperation with their peers based primarily on power calculations.[169] This does not mean that they do not try to figure out intentions. Nor does it mean that they ignore intentions when crafting their foreign policies.

American National Security (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); and Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010).

166. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," pp. 390–401; and Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, pp. 3–17.

167. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism," p. 200; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, p. 62; and Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 31.

168. The finding that states cannot reach confident assessments does not mean that they do not believe that they have discerned others' intentions. Great powers may routinely believe that they have figured out their peers' designs despite the difficulty of the task. Future research should investigate whether states conclude that they are uncertain or confident in their assessments of others' intentions.

169. For this argument, see Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 42–46; and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 97–99.

Because they are uncertain, however, estimates of intentions play only a marginal role and great powers focus on the balance of power, which is more easily measurable.[170]

   If the pessimistic argument is correct, it has important implications for theory and policy. Theoretically, it strengthens structural realism against its critics given that the issue of uncertainty lies at the heart of that debate. If great powers are uncertain about the intentions of others, then self-help is persistent, balancing is endless, the security dilemma is intractable, and relative gains loom large. More simply, competition is the norm and cooperation is both rare and fleeting. As for the real world, the United States and China are on a collision course if the latter continues to rise and eventually becomes a peer competitor. This is true even if both only want peace, and regardless of any domestic changes they may undergo or signals they may send through their actions. Therein lies the tragedy of great power politics.

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170. For the claim that measuring power is difficult, see William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 1–31.