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ARTICLE



The rise of China, balance of power theory and US national security: Reasons for optimism?

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ABSTRACT

When and why might a rising China challenge the power and security of a relatively declining United States? Conventional wisdom argues that China – like other rising states – is apt to adopt an increasingly ambitious strategy that imperils US interests as its relative power grows. Drawing on balance of power theory, I instead argue that the threat of Chinese predation is overstated. Rising in a crowded geopolitical neighbourhood, China faces incentives to avoid preying on the United States, and may even have reason to cooperate with the United States over the long term.

Introduction

To what extent should a relatively declining United States fear that a relatively rising China will adopt an increasingly ambitious and competitive strategy that challenges US security as Chinese relative power grows?¹ Relatedly, what options are available to the United States to avoid or arrest such an outcome? Few questions speak as directly to both policy and scholarly debates. A widespread argument in academic and policymaking circles argues rising states² are apt to become increasingly predatory as their relative power grows, expanding and assertively pursuing their foreign

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¹For strategies of rising states, see Randall Schweller, 'Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory,' in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross (ed.), *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1–31.

²I use the terms 'rising' and 'declining' states to refer to great powers at either the regional or global level experiencing a shift in the distribution of capabilities that strengthens (rising states) or weakens (declining states) their relative position. What constitutes a 'great power' is a long-standing question in international relations. For the purposes of this analysis, I use it to refer to a state with sufficient material capabilities to affect the security of most other actors either regionally or globally if it so chose. On similar definitional debates, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position', *International Security* 40/3 (Winter 2015–2016), 7–53. A closely related problem concerns whether states must perceive a shift in the distribution of power for the change to affect policy; for discussion of this issue, see Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrinon, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 3.

interests at declining states' expense.³ Drawing upon this logic, analysts encompassing an array of policy and academic perspectives worry that Chinese strategy will become progressively more expansive and bellicose as the distribution of power shifts in China's favour.⁴ This may lead China to threaten American power and influence directly, setting the stage for a 'Thucydides Trap' and war as a rising China looks to supplant the United States as the dominant state in East Asia or beyond, and a declining United States attempts to arrest China's growth.⁵ Seeking, in turn, to forestall Chinese predation, analysts call for mix of cooperative and coercive steps by the United States – including deepening US-Chinese economic ties, integrating China into the US-led 'liberal order' and encouraging China's domestic liberalisation, while developing the security arrangements needed to deter China as needed – to shape Chinese strategy.⁶

Why, however, should scholars and policymakers assume at baseline that a rising China will systematically challenge US security and direct American strategy to address this anticipated outcome? Even a cursory reading of history suggests that rising states do not always adopt ambitious and aggressive strategies that challenge declining states. For every Wilhelmine Germany that eventually threatened established states such as Britain, there are also cases of rising states looking to avoid challenging their declining peers. In fact, rising states often cooperate with decliners and adopt supportive strategies to keep them comparatively powerful members of the international system. Even as it competed with Great Britain for maritime dominance, for example, Wilhelmine Germany expanded ties with a declining Austria-Hungary by extending Austria

³As Schweller describes, rising powers 'are expected to be outward-looking, to show competitive international faces, to expand when and where they can,' Randall Schweller, 'Opposite but Compatible Nationalisms: A Neoclassical Realist Approach to the Future of US-China Relations', *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 11/1 (March 2018), 32. For other work using this assumption, see Robert J. Art, 'The United States and the Rise of China: Implications for the Long Haul', *Political Science Quarterly* 125/3 (Fall 2010), 359–91; Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2011); Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi, 'Can China and India Rise Peacefully?' *Orbis* 56/3 (Summer 2012), 470–85; National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternate Worlds*, December 2012, NIC 2012–001; The White House, 'Remarks by President Obama at the University of Queensland', 15 November 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/15/remarks-president-obama-university-queensland>.

⁴This includes work in research programs as diverse as hegemonic stability theory, liberal institutionalism and dyadic applications of balance of power theory. For a good summary, see Schweller, 'Opposite but Compatible', 32–37.

⁵John J. Mearsheimer, 'The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3/4 (December 2010), 381–96; Graham Allison, 'The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?', *The Atlantic*, 24 September 2015.

⁶William Clinton, 'Remarks at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies', 8 March 2000, online by Gerhard Peters and John Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, [http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=87714&st=china&st1=wto](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=87714&st=china&st1=wto;); G. John Ikenberry, 'The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?', *Foreign Affairs* 87/1 (Jan. 2008), 23–37; Aaron L. Friedberg, 'A New U.S. Economic Strategy Toward China?', *The Washington Quarterly* 40/4 (Dec. 2017), 97–114; Nina Silove, 'The Pivot Before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Balance of Power in Asia', *International Security* 40/4 (Spring 2016), 45–88.

diplomatic and military backing in the years before 1914.⁷ Likewise, the United States supported a weakening United Kingdom after World War Two, ultimately offering Britain significant diplomatic support, security assistance via the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and economic backing via the Marshall Plan. Nor was the United States alone in these efforts: as recent research shows, a surging Soviet Union also tried to cooperate with Britain after 1945, forming plans to divide Europe into British and Soviet spheres of influence and seeking to align with Britain – a process that culminated in Anglo-Soviet alliance negotiations in the winter of 1947 – to ‘balance the imperialist expansion of the United States’.⁸ Moreover, rising states can also pursue mixed strategies that blend cooperative and competitive elements. Thus, German leaders sent out diplomatic feelers to explore the possibility of an Anglo-German alliance to manage European security affairs even while beginning a naval arms race with Britain.⁹

The fact that rising states often pursue supportive or mixed strategies towards declining actors poses two problems for existing thinking surrounding China’s rise. First, American strategy may be founded upon an unrealistic expectation of Chinese predation. Instead, it is possible that a rising China will seek to cooperate with or defer an overt challenge to the United States reasons independent of the effects of economic interdependence, ideological compatibility, or institutional ties.¹⁰ Second, even if China decides to focus on challenging the United States, the examples noted above raise the possibility that the solutions currently under discussion may not affect Chinese policy. After all, the Soviet Union and United States both supported Britain, and Germany backed Austria-Hungary, despite significant differences in the extent of their economic interdependence, political compatibility, embeddedness within international institutions and military policies. By extension, since the strategies intended to address China’s rise today appear unrelated to the success or failure of prior rising and declining state interactions, the policies

⁷Ludwig Dehio, *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1959), 14–15; Gordon Craig, *Germany, 1866–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 310–314; Imanuel Geiss, *German Foreign Policy, 1871–1914* (London: Routledge, 1976), esp. 29–43, 57–71, 110–18, 149–57.

⁸Robert Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Shiffrinson, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants*, chaps. 3–4; quote from Vladimir O. Pechatnov, *The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking About Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain*, Cold War International History Project Working Paper 13, May 1995, 5. See also the discussion below.

⁹Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980).

¹⁰For distillations of US policy, see Jeffrey Bader, *Obama and China’s Rise: An Insider’s Account of America’s Asia Strategy* (Brookings Institution Press, 2012); Thomas Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: Norton, 2015).

presently being debated may end up undermining US security by proving poorly tailored to the problem at hand.

Accordingly, this paper argues that many scholars and policymakers have been overly concerned with the risk of rising state predation in general, and with Chinese aggrandisement in particular. It does so by applying insights from balance of power realism – one of the oldest approaches in the international relations canon, and one that has proven useful in explaining relations among powerful states – to both rising state behaviour during power shifts and China's rise. Far from being natural born predators, I argue that risers often confront systemic incentives to limit or avoid preying upon declining states. Ultimately, rising states may not have the luxury of focusing their time and resources on addressing a single declining state that can stymie their rise – they often face multiple real or potential challengers. As a result, rising states that face external threats *besides* a declining state and that see some possibility of using a declining state to contain or weaken these other threats tend to support the declining state in order to 'bid' for its assistance. Conversely, rising states tend to challenge declining states directly only when (1) rising states face few, if any, external threats to their security aside from the decliner, and (2) the declining state lacks military options to keep a rising state's ambitions in check.

Applied to China's rise, this framework offers cautious optimism that a rising China may not systematically challenge and prey upon the United States' power and security position. To be sure, US-Chinese tensions have increased in recent years owing to notional Chinese challenges along the East Asian littoral and towards traditional US allies. As elaborated below, however, it is easy to overstate the degree to which China is challenging the United States in and beyond East Asia. As importantly, the fact that China is growing in a crowded international arena in which the United States, Japan, Russia and India pose real or potential threats gives China reasons to constrain its challenge to the United States for the indefinite future. Even if China and the United States face a problematic relationship today, China cannot be confident that it will not face equal or greater threats at a later date for which the United States might be of assistance. Of course, there is no guarantee that Chinese leaders read the international situation in the same way; likewise, the growth of China's economic and military strength may eventually leave it so powerful that the United States – as the strongest actor in the international system today – becomes the sole state able to oppose China. Even then, however, the United States' continuing military investments and leads in high-end military technologies should give Chinese leaders pause before overtly challenging the United States – a mixed strategy is the more likely worst-case outcome.

The remainder of this paper proceeds in five sections. First, I highlight empirical problems in assuming rising states are natural born predators and the theoretical reasons rooted in balance of power theory to question whether rising states

nearly invariably adopt predatory strategies towards their declining peers. Building upon this framework, I next elaborate on what predatory, supportive and mixed strategies entail and the conditions under which each emerges. I then apply this framework to the rise of China. In the third section, I review China's rise, emphasising the external constraints on the PRC vis-à-vis other powerful states in East Asia before – fourth – evaluating the incentives this provides for (1) Chinese support for the United States, or (2) at worst, a mixed strategy that blends cooperative and competitive elements. I conclude by discussing the implications of this analysis for declining state options for shaping rising state strategy, as well as US policy towards the PRC.

Balance of power logic and rising states: Why predation?

Across time and space, scholars and policymakers alike have worried that rising states – great powers whose relative capabilities are growing vis-à-vis one or more competitors – will prove to be natural born killers inclined to challenge the power and security of other states. Thucydides' discussion of the underlying cause of the Peloponnesian War – that it was 'the rise of Athens and the fear that this inspired in Sparta' – suggests the basic concern.¹¹ A widespread assumption in scholarly and policy discussions holds that rising states tend to pursue increasingly ambitious, aggressive and expansive strategies as the distribution of power shifts in their favour.¹² After all, not only can rising states' expanding power lead them to embrace a larger set of international interests that need securing, but they may end up seeking changes to an extant international order to further abet their rise and/or expand their influence.¹³

As a result – so the logic goes – rising powers tend to come into conflict with other, relatively declining states by placing increasingly stringent political, economic and military demands upon their declining peers.¹⁴ Over time, these

¹¹Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner and M. I. Finley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), bk. 1:23.

¹²For scholarly assumptions, see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge, 1981), chap. 5; Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 115–117; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), 33–34, 401–402. For application to China's rise, see Aaron Friedberg, 'The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?', *International Security* 30/2 (Fall 2005), 16–24; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCESR), *Annual Report 2017* (Washington: GPO, 2017), 6–8; Joel Wuthnow, 'Asian Security Without the United States? Examining China's Security Strategy in Maritime and Continental East Asia', *Asian Security* (2017), 3; Dingding Chen, Xiaoyu Pu, and Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Correspondence: Debating China's Assertiveness', *International Security* 38/3 (Winter 2013–2014), 177.

¹³Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 3; Gilpin, *War and Change*, 187. Domestic politics may play a role here, too, as a state's growing power may enable nationalist or expansionist coalitions to dominate domestic political life. For discussion of this process and the conditions under which it is particularly likely, see Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹⁴Art, 'Rise of China', 361–362; Jack Levy, 'Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War', *World Politics* 40/1 (October 1987), 87.

escalating demands can threaten a declining state's vital interests and leave it in the position of accepting challenges to its survival or risking war.¹⁵ Indeed, because they anticipate this possibility, policymakers in declining states often worry about the future and fear, as Dale Copeland observes, that 'if they allow a rising state to grow, it will either attack them later with superior power or coerce them into concessions that compromise their security.'¹⁶ Under these circumstances, war can erupt as rising and declining states fall prey to a 'Thucydides Trap' whereby declining states resist rising states' further growth and rising states seek to overcome this opposition, thus risking violence.¹⁷

Despite the prevalence of these assumptions, however, there are both empirical and theoretical reasons to question whether rising states are prone to prey upon declining states. Few studies examine the evolution of rising state attitudes towards declining states.¹⁸ That said, a large literature examining the relationship between power shifts and war – an outcome one might expect if rising states were primed to challenge declining states¹⁹ – finds only a tenuous link between shifts in the distribution of power and conflict.²⁰ Rather, this research suggests that only rising states 'dissatisfied' with the existing international order and holding 'revisionist' attitudes are prone to challenge declining states and provoke conflict.²¹ Otherwise, rising states tend to pursue policies that do not result in war²² and may even try to avoid courting conflict.²³

¹⁵For the tradeoffs declining states face, see Samuel Huntington, 'Coping with the Lippmann Gap', *Foreign Affairs* 66/3 (Jan. 1987): 453–77; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge, 1981), 187–207.

¹⁶Copeland, *Origins*, 4; also Jeffrey W. Legro, 'What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power', *Perspectives on Politics* 5/3 (Sep. 2007), 515–34.

¹⁷Allison, 'The Thucydides Trap'.

¹⁸The only direct study on this topic is Shiffrinson, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants*, which reports results similar to those here.

¹⁹Jonathan DiCicco and Jack Levy, 'Power Shifts and Problem Shifts: The Evolution of the Power Transition Research Program', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43/6 (December 1999), 694.

²⁰See, *inter alia*, Douglas Lemke and William Reed, 'War and Rivalry among the Great Powers', *American Journal of Political Science* 45/2 (Apr. 2001), 457–69; Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner, 'Power Parity, Commitment to Change, and War', *International Studies Quarterly* 40/2 (Jun. 1996), 235–260; Indra de Soysa, John R. Oneal, and Yong-Hee Park, 'Testing Power Transition Theory Using Alternative Measures of National Capabilities', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41/4 (Aug. 1997), 509–28. Seen in this light, Allison's work on the 'Thucydides Trap' – finding that war occurred in '12 of 16 cases over the past 500 years' in which a 'rising power rivals a ruling power' resulted – is the exception. Given, however, the ad hoc manner in which Allison compiled his cases (<https://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/case-file>), it seems doubtful his results challenge the broader finding.

²¹Douglas Lemke, 'Power is Not Satisfaction: A Comment on de Soysa, Oneal, and Park', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42/4 (Aug. 1998), 511–16; Woosang Kim and Scott Gates, 'Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China', *International Area Studies Review* 18/3 (Sep. 2015), 220–22; Steve Chan, 'Can't Get No Satisfaction? The Recognition of Revisionist States', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 4/2 (Aug. 2004), 207–238.

²²John A. Vasquez, 'When Are Power Transitions Dangerous? An Appraisal and Reformulation of Power Transition Theory', in Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke (ed.), *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of the War Ledge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 35–56; Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino, 'Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory', *International Relations* 23/3 (Sept. 2009), 389–410.

²³In fact, in the most extensive assessment of shifting power and war, Copeland finds that declining states are more likely than rising states to pursue competitive strategies that promote conflict Copeland, *Origins*, 3 and chap. 2.

Similarly, even in cases where rising states notionally hold revisionist or dissatisfied preferences, it is ambiguous whether such attitudes drive rising state strategies towards particular declining states. Not only do notionally revisionist actors often seek allies among the existing great powers – meaning that they may cooperate with decliners to court them as partners – but rising state strategies towards decliners do not always align with judgments of risers' intentions and motives.²⁴ For instance, Wilhelmine Germany – a state seen by many scholars as a prototypical dissatisfied, revisionist actor – nevertheless supported Austria-Hungary before 1914; likewise, a surging and equally revisionist Soviet Union still attempted to align with the United Kingdom after World War Two.²⁵ In short, not only is there an incomplete link between rising state preferences and conflict during a power shift, but risers' revisionist or dissatisfied proclivities do not determine the more focused policies used to guide their relations with declining states.

More importantly, there are also theoretical reasons rooted in balance of power realism to question whether rising states are inveterate predators. To be clear, 'balance of power realism' is not a single theory so much as a family of arguments that are themselves divided over when and why states compete by manipulating the distribution of power.²⁶ Nevertheless, as a group, balance of power theory is driven by core understandings that (1) states are the primary actors in international affairs, with the great powers the most important among this set; (2) to obtain security – whether defined in terms of minimising threats to their survival, aggregating power, or other objectives – states tend to offset and oppose one another; (3) opposition – including the possible resort to force – tends to grow more intense the more another state is seen as particularly powerful or threatening; and (4) states carry out this opposition by balancing and aggregating capabilities by arming themselves (internal balancing) and/or forming alliances (external balancing).²⁷

Although different iterations of balance of power theory carry different assumptions as to the frequency and intensity of balancing, the approach as a whole underlines two reasons why rising states may avoid preying upon decliners and – under certain conditions – engage in supportive strategies. First, states threatened by another actor can arm, ally and threaten war to protect themselves.²⁸ Hence, rising powers that challenge their relatively

²⁴On revisionist states seeking allies, see Randall Schweller, 'Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In', *International Security* 19/1 (Summer 1994), 72–107.

²⁵For these states as revisionist and dissatisfied, see Schweller, 'Managing', 22, figure 1.1.

²⁶Stephen M. Walt, 'The Progressive Power of Realism', *American Political Science Review* 91/4 (1997), 931–35.

²⁷Canonical works include Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations; the Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3rd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1963); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1979); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

²⁸Waltz, *Theory*, 166–168; Jack Levy, 'What Do Great Powers Balance Against?', in T.V. Paul, James Wirtz and Michel Fortmann (ed.), *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 32–33.

declining peers are apt to provoke counterbalancing.²⁹ In fact, rising states that expand precipitously and overtly threaten declining states may catalyse a significant counterbalancing coalition, court insecurity spirals with threatened rivals, and even encourage one or more declining states to lash out in a preventive conflict.³⁰ Rising states are therefore incentivised to anticipate these dangers, cap their foreign ambitions and limit the risk of counterbalancing so long as other states can penalise their aggrandisement.

Notably, this risk may last for a significant period of time and continue even if a rising state overtakes a decliner in net capabilities. Not only might a decliner use its remaining assets in wartime to ensure a riser only ekes out a pyrrhic victory, but history is full of states going to extreme lengths to balance significantly stronger opponents. In the early 1900s, for example, a relatively declining France scraped the bottom of its manpower and financial resources to keep pace with a rising Germany,³¹ just as the late Cold War saw the USSR devote upwards of twenty per cent of its national wealth to military affairs to compete with a surging United States.³² Declining states, in sum, often go to the mats to balance more powerful peers. This affords rising states a strong reason to limit their ambitions so long as other states can oppose these ambitions through force.

Second, the fact that several powerful states may be present and have goals that conflict with the rising state's own suggests that rising states may need partners to offset other threats. This is particularly likely in multipolar systems; with several great powers around, these situations can give rising states incentives to forego competition with decliners and instead bid for a declining state's collaboration.³³ Declining states, after all, often hold significant military and economic capabilities. Even if

²⁹Copeland, *Origins*, 2–3. For similar analysis drawing on the logic of power transition theory, see Steve Chan, 'Exploring Puzzles in Power-Transition Theory: Implications for Sino-American Relations', *Security Studies* 13/3 (Spring 2004), 105, 118–119.

³⁰As Norrin Ripsman and Jack Levy observe, preventive wars are most likely if a riser is seen as 'rapidly rising, hostile, and likely to surpass then in military strength and then resort to military force' – conditions that might occur if a rising state assertively challenges declining states; Norrin Ripsman and Jack Levy, 'British Grand Strategy and the Rise of Germany,' in Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobell (ed.), *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World War* (New York: Cambridge, 2012), 174. For over-expansion and 'self-encirclement,' see Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 6–9. On insecurity spirals and the closely-related security dilemma, Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics* 30/2 (Jan. 1978), 167–214.

³¹David G. Hermann, *The Arming of Europe and the Making of the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. 190–194; David B. Ralston, *The Army of the Republic* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), 301–15, 347–71.

³²Noel E. Firth and James H. Noren, *Soviet Defense Spending: A History of CIA Estimates, 1950–1990* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 129–130 table 5.10; ex post revelations from Soviet leaders suggest defence spending may have been as high as 20 per cent of Soviet national income; see Firth and Noren, *Soviet Defense Spending*, 188–189. For U.S. recognition that the distribution of power was shifting in its favor, see Shiffrinson, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants*, 102–104.

³³As Paul Schroeder and Patricia Weitsman note, states may also cooperate to gain influence over another's foreign policy and clarify their threat environment. Insofar as states seek to minimise threats and increase their influence, these arguments are consistent with balance of power logic and provide another reason for rising states to pull their punches; Paul Schroeder, 'Alliances, 1815–1945: Weapons of Power and Tools of Management', in Klaus Knorr (ed.), *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems* (Lawrence, KS:

waning in relative terms, they can potentially assist rising states by sharing the costs of offsetting a rising state's other challengers.³⁴ Rising states may therefore face compelling security-based incentives to prevent other actors from undercutting a decliner, bidding for the decliner's assistance and ensuring the declining state remains capable enough to help against a rising state's challengers.³⁵

Rising state strategies: Types and conditions

In short, there are reasons to question whether rising states are inherently prone to pursuing competitive and expansionist strategies vis-à-vis decliners. Indeed, the logic developed above suggests that rising state strategies are more variable and depend on more nuanced factors rooted in balance of power concerns than the conventional wisdom allows.

Supportive strategies

First, a rising state that needs assistance against other competitors – such as in multipolarity – can enact a supportive strategy towards a decliner. With a supportive strategy, a rising state seeks a declining state's assistance against other threats by cooperating with and backing a declining power with the goal of stopping the decliner's continued relative losses. To this end, rising states are apt to provide decliners with significant economic or military assistance; extend regular diplomatic backing in disputes with other states; offer declining states favourable political deals when bilateral conflicts of interest arise; and potentially even put their own security on the line by offering a decliner an alliance or military assurances. In short,, supportive strategies see rising states commit significant resources and effort to reinforce a declining state's power position and security, even at meaningful cost and risk to themselves.

Rising states are unlikely to adopt this strategy towards all other states undergoing a relative decline. Instead, incentives to pursue support given balance of power logic should be greatest under three conditions. First, support is more attractive the more a declining state is geographically positioned to help a rising state balance and confront other threats.³⁶ Ultimately, the closer a declining state

University Press of Kansas, 1976), 227–62; Patricia Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 17–33.

³⁴Put differently, rising states may try to buckpass to declining states. On buckpassing, see Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder, 'Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity', *International Organization* 44, no 2 (Spring 1990), 141.

³⁵For using concessions to entice other states into alignment and deny them to adversaries, see Timothy Crawford, 'The Alliance Politics of Concerted Accommodation: Entente Bargaining and Italian and Ottoman Interventions in the First World War', *Security Studies* 23/1 (Winter 2014), 113–147.

³⁶Geography is one of the core modifiers added to balance of power theories to explain whether and to what extent states influence one another. The proximity of states to one another is especially

is to a rising state's other competitors, the more a declining state can absorb others' attention while limiting the attention and resources devoted to opposing the riser. Second, incentives to support are larger the more a declining state is politically available as a partner. Here, the more a declining state's political leadership is open to cooperation with a rising state and the weaker a decliner's ties with states a riser seeks to balance, the more likely a rising state is to pursue support.³⁷ Finally, support is easier the less a declining state poses a military threat to the rising state – partnership is less risky when the decliner's own military position limits the dangers to a rising state that decides to back it.³⁸

Several examples from diplomatic history suggest rising states tend to adopt supportive strategies when faced with threats that decliners can help oppose. German backing for Austria-Hungary before 1914, for example, was heavily influenced by Germany's desire to obtain Austrian assistance against a France and Russia that threatened to encircle both nations. If anything, German interest in supporting Austria increased as European tensions mounted after the early 1900s and Austrian leaders threw Austria's lot in with Germany.³⁹ Similarly, Russia's relative growth in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century paralleled deepening Russian ties with a relatively declining France, as each sought partners to contain Germany.⁴⁰ More recently, Soviet backing for Britain immediately after World War Two assumed that the United States – as a 'stronghold of...dynamic imperialism' – would soon target the United Kingdom before attacking the Soviet Union. As a series of reports designed to guide post-war Soviet policy elaborated, it was thus in the USSR's interest to keep the 'impoverished and weakened' United Kingdom as capable as possible to help oppose the United States. Accordingly, Soviet planners envisioned fostering what the historian Vladimir Pechatnov calls an Anglo-Soviet 'condominium' in Europe by dividing the continent into Soviet and British spheres of influence that would reinforce British post-war security and influence in Western Europe, and lay

important: the closer states are to one another, the more they can project power that can harm one another and absorb one another's attention. When a rising state evaluates a declining state's utility, it thus considers the decliner's proximity to other powerful states – the closer a declining state to other actors, the more likely a declining state can help offset these threats. On the importance of proximity and location, see Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 20; Jeffrey Taliaferro, 'Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited', *International Security* 25/3 (Winter 2000–2001), 137.

³⁷For domestic politics and alignment choices, see Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2006). For the problems a state's alignment with one's other opponents can pose, see Crawford, 'Wedge Strategies'.

³⁸Put differently, these factors cumulatively increase the likelihood that a declining state will pose less of a challenge and appear less dangerous to a rising state than other prospective threats, thereby making support a reasonable course.

³⁹Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), chaps. 1–2.

⁴⁰William L. Langer, 'The Franco-Russian Alliance (1890–1894)', *The Slavonic Review* 3/9 (March 1925), 565–75; D.W. Spring, 'Russia and the Franco-Russian Alliance, 1905–1914: Dependence or Independence?' *The Slavonic and East European Review* 66/4 (Oct. 1988), 583–90.

the foundation for Anglo-Soviet cooperation.⁴¹ Nor were the Soviets alone, as American strategists across the Atlantic expressed the same basic set of calculations. As a 1946 State Department report explained, 'if Soviet Russia is to be denied the hegemony of Europe, the United Kingdom must continue in existence as the principal power in Western Europe.'⁴² To this end, the United States backed Great Britain with economic aid, security guarantees and diplomatic encouragement to oppose anti-Soviet machinations in Western Europe and beyond.⁴³

Predatory strategies

Conversely, rising states can adopt predatory strategies with the aim of expediting and deepening shifts in the distribution of power at a declining state's expense. They can seek this objective through a number of means, including picking off a declining state's allies; coercing a decliner into making strategically meaningful economic or territorial concessions; waging economic warfare; and even going to war with a decliner. Since, however, a rising state may encounter opposition from other states in response, these efforts can also require a rising state to pay large direct and opportunity costs. Hence, not only must a rising state pursuing a predatory strategy devote sufficient resources towards overcoming a declining state's ability to protect itself, but it must also be willing to sacrifice relations with other states opposed to a large shift in the distribution of power.

In the modern world, the clearest example of rising state predation occurred in the late Cold War as a relatively rising United States confronted the relatively declining Soviet Union.⁴⁴ As recent historical work shows, the United States exploited waning Soviet capabilities and unexpectedly propitious circumstances following the Eastern European Revolutions of 1989–1990 to evict the declining Soviet Union from Central-Eastern Europe.⁴⁵ Conversely, US policymakers had been reluctant to directly challenge the Soviet Union prior to that point – capping US efforts at what Hal Brands terms 'coercive diplomacy' – in seeking mainly to

⁴¹Pechatnov, *Big Three After World War II*. For further details, see Alexei Filitov, 'Problems of Post-War Reconstruction in Soviet Foreign Policy Conceptions during World War II,' in Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons (ed.), *The Soviet Union and the Cold War, 1943–53* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 3–22.

⁴²Memorandum by the Acting Department of State Member to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, 1 April 1946, FRUS 1946: *General, The United Nations, Volume 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972), doc. 591. For background, see Paul Nitze, 'The Grand Strategy of Containment', in S. Nelson Drew (ed.), *NSC-68: Forging the Strategy of Containment* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1994), 7.

⁴³For US policy in this period, see Hathaway, *Ambiguous*; Terry Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War, 1944–1947* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981); Elisabeth Barker, *The British Between the Superpowers, 1945–1950* (London: Macmillan 1983).

⁴⁴Using the definition of rise and decline noted earlier, the United States' rise at this time stemmed heavily from the Soviet Union's decline, which caused the United States' lead in economic and military capabilities over the USSR to expand.

⁴⁵Mary Sarotte, *1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, 'Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion', *International Security* 40/4 (Spring 2016), 7–44.

make gradual gains in arms control negotiations and contests in the Third World.⁴⁶

Predation is a highly concerning outcome for declining states. Balance of power logic, however, underscores that it is only likely to emerge under restrictive conditions. For predation to appear attractive, a rising state must conclude first that a decliner is either of little help against other threats, or that other great powers are largely absent – as might occur in bipolar systems – such that the declining state is the only actor standing between a rising state and regional or global hegemony. Even then, a riser also needs to determine that a decliner lacks the military tools to deter or defeat rising state competition. Only in such situations can rising states maximise power and security at a declining state's expense without endangering the power and security they currently enjoy. Otherwise, a rising state can imperil its own well-being by challenging a state that could otherwise be of use against other threats, or risking a potentially devastating conflict with a declining state that can still punish a rising state's aggrandisement.

In general, situations favourable to predation appear to be rare. As noted in the Introduction, even powerful states often face more than one threat to their security. In fact, it has been the relative absence of powerful states that can harm one another that has given the post-1945 world its distinctive character, and even this situation may be changing.⁴⁷ As importantly, declining states are often able to generate military capabilities of their own that can penalise rising state predation for an extended period of time. Again, not only did the Soviet Union devote nearly one-fifth of its national wealth to military affairs to check a rising United States, but German policymakers before 1914 similarly sought creative solutions to keep pace with Russia and could have continued doing so into the 1910s.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the advent of nuclear weapons means that states in the post-1945 world may be even more advantaged in stopping rising state predation: as a defensive weapon par excellence, nuclear weapons are uniquely effective in deterring challenges to a state's vital interests.⁴⁹ Even more so than the past, declining states today may thus be able to check rising state ambitions.

⁴⁶Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 123.

⁴⁷Brooks and Wohlforth, 'Rise and Fall'; Barry R. Posen, 'Emerging Multipolarity: Why Should We Care?', *Current History* 108/721 (Nov. 2009), 347–352.

⁴⁸William C. Wohlforth, 'The Perception of Power: Russia in the Pre-1914 Balance', *World Politics* 39/3 (Apr. 1987): 353–81.

⁴⁹The canonical statement along these lines is Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); For the nuclear revolution and state behaviour, see Kenneth A. Oye, 'Explaining the End of the Cold War: Behavioral & Morphological Adaptations to the Nuclear Peace', in Thomas Risse-Kappen and Richard Ned Lebow (ed.), *The End of the Cold War & International Relations Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Mark S. Bell, 'Beyond Emboldenment: How Acquiring Nuclear Weapons Can Change Foreign Policy', *International Security*, 40/1 (Summer 2015), 87–119.

Mixed strategies

Finally, rising states can pursue mixed strategies. With mixed strategies, rising states seek gradual, sequential gains at a declining state's expense while engaging in tactical cooperation if tensions begin to rise. Here, rising states consider preying upon or supporting a decliner but do not yet perceive an auspicious opportunity to do so, such that they settle for a less-ambitious course. Accordingly, mixed strategies are likely to occur when a declining state is at least as militarily threatening as the next-largest challenger to the rising state, and/or is the only threat present but can still militarily penalise predation. This approach stems from the reality that rising states face strong incentives to limit counterbalancing that can harm their security.⁵⁰ If anything, these incentives are especially strong for rising states that, seeing their relative power grow, will be comparatively more secure tomorrow than today and so have reasons to avoid causing other states to stymie their rise in the near-term. Seeking to forestall this outcome, a rising state faced with a militarily potent declining state is encouraged to lay low and, while working on the margins to further its rise, let the distribution of power shift and the security environment clarify.

Over time, a mixed strategy will eventually see the declining state's military threat to a rising state diminish.⁵¹ One of two scenarios will then occur. If other threats – particularly from other great powers – are present and the declining state can be of assistance, then the diminution of the declining state's military challenge will cause a rising state to shift and support the decliner. Britain's waning military threat to the rising United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century, for example, corresponded with the United States moving closer towards Britain in world affairs.⁵² If, however, other threats are absent and/or the declining state lacks the potential to assist against other challengers, then rising states are apt to move towards predation. This seems to capture the broad contours of US foreign policy towards the declining Soviet Union in the late Cold War. Despite the Reagan administration's rhetorical broadsides, the United States initially responded to Soviet decline by beginning a military build-up that was expected to take years to yield results, while increasing pressure on the Soviet Union in third world conflicts. Once, however, the Soviet military position in Europe unravelled in 1989–1990, the United States quickly rolled back Soviet political, military and economic influence on the continent.⁵³

⁵⁰For rising states as easily threatened, see Miranda Priebe, 'Fear and Frustration: Rising State Perceptions of Threats and Opportunities', (PhD Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014).

⁵¹That is, declining states will eventually be unable to sustain competition and either need to retrench, wage war, or surrender; see Huntington, 'Coping with the Lippmann Gap', 453–77.

⁵²Alan P. Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century: Of Friendship, Conflict, and the Rise and Decline of Superpowers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17–41; D.C. Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900–1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 24–39, 69–89.

⁵³See Brands, Sarotte, and Shiffrinson, op. cit.

Summary: Supportive, predatory and mixed strategies in theory

In sum, rising state strategy is not always predatory – at some times and in some cases, supportive and mixed strategies can also result. Ultimately, changes among the threats facing rising states – and a declining state’s geographic position relative thereto – coupled with a declining state’s military capabilities and its political availability as a partner can cause rising state strategy to vary. Importantly, this approach also help explain why the historical record is replete with instances of rising state predation giving way to supportive and/or mixed strategies (and vice versa). Given, for instance, the threat posed by Russia and changes in Austria’s political attitudes, Wilhelmine Germany shifted from a predatory strategy vis-à-vis Austria – an exercise that culminated in the 1866 Austro-Prussian War – towards support. Needing its own partners against Germany, Russia in this period similarly backed France in earnest despite having previously kept France at arm’s length. And, as noted, it was the collapse of British military power in 1946–1947 at a time when the United States sought British help against the Soviet Union that pushed the United States to move from a mixed towards a fully supportive strategy vis-à-vis the declining Great Britain.⁵⁴

China’s rise: Current strategy and future threat environment

This framework carries large implications for scholars and policymakers seeking to understand China’s strategy as its power grows and US relative power declines. As noted, many analysts fear that a rising China will embark on a predatory course designed to push the United States down or from the great power ranks. Although it is difficult in the abstract to describe what the particular elements of Chinese predation may entail, the general concern seems to be that China will adopt steps that will rapidly shift the distribution of power its favour by enacting policies that are increasingly costly for a relatively declining United States to overcome, pushing the United States to exhaust itself competing or to surrender the issues at stake, and thus imperil the United States’ position as a great power. Elements of this approach might involve Chinese efforts to engage in economic warfare by hindering US economic competitiveness and limiting American economic opportunities; adumbrate US military advantages; undercut US credibility and prestige; and weaken US alliances in East Asia or beyond.⁵⁵

⁵⁴These cases are detailed in Shifrinson, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* chap. 3 and conclusion.

⁵⁵As Ely Ratner puts it when describing Chinese ambitions, China’s preferred outcomes involve ushering in a world that would leave the United States with “weaker alliances, fewer security partners and a military forced to operate at greater distances. US firms would be left without access to leading technologies and markets, and disadvantaged by new standards, investment rules and trading blocs. Inert regional institutions would be unable to resist Chinese coercion, and the world would see a steady decline in democracy and individual freedoms. The net result would be a less secure, less prosperous United States that would be less able to exert power in the world;” Ely Ratner, ‘There Is No Grand Bargain With China’, *Foreign Affairs Snapshot*, 27 November 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-11-27/there-no-grand-bargain-china>.

Furthermore, recent Chinese actions in and around East Asia seemingly give credence to such concerns. After all, the last decade has witnessed China take an increasingly assertive stance in its maritime disputes in the South and East China Seas⁵⁶; enact an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea⁵⁷; make political and economic inroads into Central Asia and Africa⁵⁸; influence the domestic politics of Asia-Pacific states to favour pro-China policies; and expand its defence budget.⁵⁹ Concurrently, trade tensions with the United States are rising, and the Chinese government has tried to buttress its authority by cracking down on domestic opponents.⁶⁰

China's current strategy: Mixed

It is too early, however, to declare Chinese predation a fact, just as there are reasons to question whether Chinese predation is likely in the future. On one level, and consistent with research by scholars such as Avery Goldstein, Alastair Iain Johnston and others, there are less-competitive elements embedded in current Chinese strategy.⁶¹ Chinese land reclamation and military deployments in the East and South China Seas, for instance, have mostly involved territories previously claimed by the Chinese government – China has not expanded its maritime claims so much as taken a unilateral approach towards resolving existing disputes.⁶² Similarly, China's ADIZ move came after Japan expanded its own ADIZ and began consolidating control over the disputed Senkaku Islands.⁶³

⁵⁶Michael Yahuda, 'China's New Assertiveness in the South China Sea', *Journal of Contemporary China* 22/81 (January 2013), 446–459; Joel Wuthnow, 'Beyond Imposing Costs: Recalibrating U.S. Strategy in the South China Sea', *Asia Policy* 24 (July 2017), 125–130.

⁵⁷Edmund J. Burke and Astrid Cevallos, *In Line or Out of Order: China's Approach to ADIZ in Theory and Practice* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2017).

⁵⁸Michael Clarke, 'The Belt and Road Initiative: China's New Grand Strategy?', *Asia Policy* 24 (July 2017), 71–79.

⁵⁹Christopher Bodeen, 'What We Know About China's Increased Defense Spending in 2018', Associated Press, 5 March 2018.

⁶⁰Ali Wyne, 'The Greater Danger of US-China Trade Tensions', *The Diplomat*, 9 May 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/the-greater-danger-of-us-china-trade-tensions/>; Julie Makinen, 'China's Crackdown on Dissent is Described as Harshes in Decades', 10 August 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-china-crackdown-snap-story.html>.

⁶¹Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Alastair Iain Johnston, 'How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?', *International Security* 37/4 (April 2013), 7–48; Evan S. Medeiros, *China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2009); David Shambaugh, 'U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Competitive Coexistence?', *International Security* 42/4 (Spring 2018), 85–127.

⁶²For Chinese claims and approaches, see Ryan D. Martinson, *Echelon Defense: The Role of Seapower in Chinese Maritime Dispute Strategy* (Newport: U.S. Naval War College, 2018), Chinese Maritime Studies Report No. 15, 6–11; Wuthnow, 'Asian Security Without the United States', 4.

⁶³Michael D. Swaine, 'Chinese Views and Commentary on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ)', *China Leadership Monitor* 43, February 2014, 3–11, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CLM43MSCarnegie013114.pdf>.

It is also important to recognise that there are steps China could plausibly have undertaken in recent years yet chose not to. Despite concerns over a Chinese military build-up, for instance, China did not increase the share of state wealth allocated to military spending; military expenditures have remained at 1.9 per cent of Chinese gross domestic product (GDP) since 2009.⁶⁴ Likewise, China has sustained a minimalist nuclear deterrent even though this force is vulnerable to disruption.⁶⁵ Above all, China has not tried to form an anti-US alliance in East Asia – in fact, there is some evidence that China has sought to keep the United States engaged in East Asia rather than exclude it.⁶⁶ For example, not only did Chinese President Xi Jinping tell US President Barack Obama in 2014 that the ‘Pacific Ocean has ample space to accommodate our two great nations,’ but China’s *Xinhua* news agency greeted Donald Trump’s election – after a campaign marked by calls for a reduced US role in the world – with a warning *against* US isolationism.⁶⁷ These moves are not consistent with a predatory campaign: China is pursuing a mixed strategy that blends both cooperative and competitive elements.

Of course, it is possible that Chinese strategy may give way to predation in the future. Still, the approach developed above highlights that China’s future course will ultimately depend upon China’s threat environment and the constraints and opportunities this imposes. And on this basis, a series of quantitative and qualitative indicators provides room for cautious optimism that China will at worst continue its mixed strategy vis-à-vis the United States. As importantly, there are reasons that China may – under certain conditions – adopt a supportive strategy. The logic here is simple: not only is China’s threat environment such that it is far from clear whether the PRC would be able to systematically challenge the United States without significantly harming its security, but China faces competitors besides the United States. Combined, these factors should give China pause before pursuing a predatory course, and may even offer ground for supporting the United States.

⁶⁴Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), ‘SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2017’, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex> (last accessed 19 November 2018). Although uncertainties surround Chinese military spending, SIPRI’s data encompasses both official and unofficial sources, and would presumably reflect growth in Chinese military allocations.

⁶⁵Fiona S. Cunningham and M. Taylor Fravel, ‘Assuring Assured Retaliation: China’s Nuclear Posture and U.S.-China Strategic Stability’, *International Security* 40/2 (Fall 2015), 7–50. That China has the capacity to develop a much larger and more ambitious nuclear strategy makes China’s nuclear forbearance particularly interesting.

⁶⁶As Adam Liff notes, China fears being contained by the United States and its allies but has yet to advance ‘concrete, viable alternatives’ for regional security structures; Adam Liff, ‘China and the U.S. Alliance System’, *The China Quarterly* 233 (March 2018), 154.

⁶⁷Li Xiaokun, Zhang Yunbi, and Chen Weihua, ‘Xi: World Big Enough for two Great Nations’, *China Daily USA*, 10 July 2014, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/2014-07/10/content_17697610.htm; ‘China State Media Warns Trump Again Isolationism, Calls for Status Quo’, Reuters, 10 November 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-china-media-idUSKBN1350P6>.

Assessing China's threat environment

Chinese economic and military strength has clearly grown in recent decades, so much so that some analysts predict the coming end of the United States' 'unipolar era'.⁶⁸ Consider, for example, the distribution of economic strength as measured by gross GDP. China's economy has expanded dramatically.⁶⁹ Whereas China's GDP was barely one-tenth that of the United States and not even a quarter of Japan's in the early 1990s, it was over half that of the United States and nearly double Japan's twenty-five years later (Table 1).⁷⁰ Nor is this just a matter of aggregate income: although Chinese per capita GDP lags the United States by a significant margin, China's per capita gains have been dramatic, expanding nearly one order of magnitude from 1990 through 2014, and taking China into the ranks of middle income countries.⁷¹ As Robert Barro notes, this per capita growth is 'well above the rates predicted from international experience', and may even allow China to transition from a middle into an 'upper income' state.⁷²

Military spending tells a similar story (Table 2). In the early 1990s, Chinese military expenditures were less than one-tenth that of the United States and less than two-thirds that of Japan. By the mid-2010s, however, Chinese military spending had risen to over one-third that of the United States and almost five times Japan's. Even more striking, and as noted earlier, China did so despite spending comparatively less of its national income on military affairs: if the United States and PRC devoted the same share of GDP to military affairs, Chinese spending would be over half that of the United States.⁷³

⁶⁸Christopher Layne, 'The Waning of U.S. Hegemony – Myth or Reality?: A Review Essay', *International Security* 34/1 (Summer 2009), 147–172; Layne, 'This Time It's Real'.

⁶⁹Scholars debate what the most relevant features of state economic strength encompass in a post-industrial economy. Critics allege that GDP is a less useful indicator of a state's economic health than per capita GDP or net wealth. That said, it seems equally true that growing GDP will translate into greater wealth and, potentially, per capita income. For the debate over metrics, see Joshua R. Izkowitz Shiffrin and Michael Beckley, 'Debating China's Rise and U.S. Decline', *International Security* 37/3 (December 2012), 172–181.

⁷⁰Much discussion surrounds whether Chinese economic growth is overstated or relies on unsustainable macroeconomic choices. Yet, despite suggestions in the mid-2010s that Chinese growth was slowing, recent research suggests that estimates of China's economy may have underestimated its growth. For claims that Chinese growth was slowing, see Neil Gough, 'As China's Economy Slows, Here's a Look at What Could Happen', *New York Times*, 18 October 2016; 'China's Economic Growth Dials Back', *Bloomberg News*, 13 August 2017. For claims of higher than estimated growth, see Hunter Clark, Maxim Pinkovskiy, and Xavier Sala-i-Martin, 'China's GDP May Be Understated', *National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper* 23323, April 2017.

⁷¹Per capita GDP was \$1500 in 1990 (in 2011 dollars) versus \$12,600 in 2014; Robert Barro, 'Economic Growth and Convergence, Applied Especially to China', *NBER Working Paper* 21872, January 2016, Table 4. Recent World Bank figures reinforce the assessment, with Chinese per capita GDP reported at \$888 in 1992 versus \$7329 in 2017 (measured in constant 2010 dollars); see World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, last accessed November 2018.

⁷²Barro, 'Economic Growth', 12. See also Robert W. Fogel, 'Why China is Likely to Achieve Its Growth Objectives', *NBER Working Paper* 12122, March 2006; World Bank, 'World Bank Country and Lending Groups – Current Classification by Income', <http://datbank.worldbank.org/data/download/site-content/CLASS.xls>, last accessed 19 November 2018.

⁷³For 2017, SIPRI reported that the United States allocated 3.1 percent of its GDP to military affairs, against 1.9 percent for China. Given the relative size of two economies (Table 1), equal spending rates would see a Chinese defence budget more than half that of the United States. For military spending, see SIPRI, 'SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2018'. For overviews of military spending and military power trends, see

Table 1. Chinese economic rise in comparison – GDP of select countries⁷⁴
(all figures in constant 2010 USD).

State	1992	2000	2010	2017
United States	\$9,379,735,498,400	\$12,713,058,213,400	\$14,964,372,000,000	\$17,304,984,279,400
China	\$1,035,554,652,469	\$2,237,080,553,585	\$6,100,620,488,868	\$10,161,012,758,870
Japan	\$4,905,603,627,977	\$5,348,935,478,914	\$5,700,098,114,744	\$6,156,328,720,579
Russia	\$1,147,447,070,570	\$951,558,450,752	\$1,524,916,112,079	\$1,680,005,299,558
Germany	\$2,751,786,253,950	\$3,123,907,846,525	\$3,417,094,562,649	\$3,865,759,081,374
United Kingdom	\$1,630,736,553,075	\$2,095,205,239,633	\$2,441,173,394,730	\$2,806,903,096,896
India	\$497,311,165,143	\$802,754,758,766	\$1,656,617,073,125	\$2,629,542,211,701
South Korea	\$425,189,155,244	\$710,035,024,103	\$1,094,499,338,703	\$1,345,945,672,417
China as percentage of US	11	18	41	59
China as percentage of next-largest state (Japan)	21	42	107	165

Table 2. China's military rise in comparison – military spending of select countries⁷⁵ (all figures in constant 2016 millions USD).

State	1992	2000	2010	2017
USA	\$521,934	\$420,496	\$768,466	\$597,178
China	\$27,172	\$41,324	\$138,028	\$228,173
Japan	\$43,657	\$45,402	\$45,595	\$46,556
Russia	\$40,786	\$20,405	\$43,121	\$55,327
India	\$16,592	\$27,339	\$48,600	\$59,757
Germany	\$53,972	\$42,353	\$41,488	\$43,023
China as percentage of US	5	10	18	38
China as percentage of Japan	62	91	302	490s

Still, these figures need to be considered in light of what they represent. Any measure of state capabilities is an attempt to assess the resources a state could mobilise to secure its interests given opposition from other actors and the likely success of these efforts.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the fact that China's economy may be nearing parity with the United States and growing vis-à-vis competitors like Japan and India does not mean China will be free to challenge other states without suffering strategic consequences.

Michael D. Swaine et al., *China's Military & the U.S.-Japan Alliance in 2030: A Strategic Net Assessment* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013). For the shifting military balance, see Evan Braden Montgomery, *Reinforcing the Front Line: U.S. Defense Strategy and the Rise of China* (Washington: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017).

⁷⁴Data from World Bank, World Databank, World Development Indicators, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators> (last accessed 19 November 2018).

⁷⁵Data from SIPRI 'Military Expenditure Database 2018'.

⁷⁶Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (Basingstroke: Macmillan, 1988), 3rd ed.; Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 149–163.

Two dynamics are decisive. First, even a China that is on par with or moderately ahead of the United States in economic or military terms would still need to compete with a relatively shrunken United States. After all, the last two decades have seen the United States compete with China despite the fact that China's emergence as a full peer competitor remains a work in progress.⁷⁷ In security affairs, the United States has reinforced its East Asian alliances and redeployed military forces to the region.⁷⁸ Increasingly, it is also focused on improving coordination among American allies in East Asia while developing military tools and concepts optimised for regional competition.⁷⁹ Nor is this development limited to security affairs, as analysts also express interest in limiting China's economic rise and the spread of tools and techniques that could spill over into security affairs.⁸⁰ Logic therefore dictates that inverting the current distribution of power should yield a similar result: just as the United States is balancing a weaker China, so too should a future China (now in the United States' position) be compelled to balance a relatively weaker United States. Moreover, just as US policymakers have sought policies that deter China without provoking a PRC that can still impose significant costs upon the United States, so would a relatively stronger China face incentives to avoid antagonising the United States.⁸¹

Second, states such as India, Japan and (potentially) Russia could still present major challenges to China. Measured in terms of GDP, for instance,

⁷⁷For argument that China remains less than a peer competitor, see Brooks and Wohlforth, 'Rise and Fall'. For recent affirmation of growing US-China competition, see Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, 'The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations', *Foreign Affairs* 97/2 (March-April 2018).

⁷⁸On changing alliances, see Evan S. Medeiros, 'Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia-Pacific Stability', *The Washington Quarterly* 29/1 (Winter 2005–2006), 145–167; Victor D. Cha, 'Winning Asia: Washington's Untold Success Story', *Foreign Affairs* 86/6 (November–December 2007), 102–110; Richard C. Bush, 'America's Alliances and Security Partnerships in East Asia', Brookings Institution Report, 13 July 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/americas-alliances-and-security-partnerships-in-east-asia-introduction/>. On military rebalancing, see Silove, 'Pivot Before the Pivot'; Christopher M. Schnaubelt, 'The Military Aspects of the US Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific', in Alexander Moens and Brooke Smith-Windsor (ed.), *NATO and Asia-Pacific* (Rome: NATO Defence College, 2016), 39–60.

⁷⁹Hal Brands, *Dealing With Allies in Decline: Alliance Management and U.S. Strategy in an Era of Global Power Shifts* (Washington: CSBA, 2017), 53–8; Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, 'With Friends Like These: Japan-ROK Cooperation and US Policy', *Asan Forum*, 1 March 2018, <http://www.theasanforum.org/with-friends-like-these-japan-rok-cooperation-and-us-policy/>. Indeed, the United States' 'Third Offset' strategy championed by the Obama administration was heavily driven by a perceived need to acquire military tools optimised for great power competition with China; see Paul McLeary, 'The Pentagon's Third Offset May be Dead, But No One Knows What Comes Next', *Foreign Policy*, 18 December 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/18/the-pentagons-third-offset-may-be-dead-but-no-one-knows-what-comes-next/>. For evidence that intra-regional cooperation might occur without the United States, see Satu Limaye, *Weighted West, Focused on the Indian Ocean, and Cooperating across the Indo-Pacific: The Indian Navy's New Maritime Strategy. Capabilities, and Diplomacy* (Washington: CNA, 2017), 45–51.

⁸⁰Aaron L. Friedberg, 'A New U.S. Economic Strategy toward China?' *The Washington Quarterly* 40/4 (Winter 2018), 97–110.

⁸¹As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Elbridge Colby explained when announcing the 2018 U.S. Defense Strategy, American efforts were not intended to be 'a strategy of confrontation, but [...] a strategy that recognizes the reality of competition,' quoted in Jim Garamone, 'DoD Official: National Defense Strategy Will Enhance Deterrence', Department of Defense News, 19 January 2018.

Japan is currently in roughly the same position vis-à-vis China as China is relative to the United States; India, with an economy approximately one-quarter that of China, is where China was vis-à-vis the United States in the early-mid 2000s.⁸² Military spending tells a similar story: Japan is in approximately the same military position vis-à-vis China as China was vis-à-vis the United States in the early 2010s.⁸³

These figures will likely change to China's advantage if China continues rising, affording it comparatively greater latitude and resources to pursue its interests than it has in the past. However, this does not mean China will be able to ignore the constraints posed by its neighbours and sidestep opposition from these states. As recent experience implies, balancing even on the part of significantly weaker actors can limit stronger states' options. By the late 1990s, for example, Japanese leaders were already worried about and compelled to respond to a rising China that was even weaker relative to Japan than Japan is relative to China today.⁸⁴ Similarly, a sustained standoff along the Chinese-Soviet border from the 1960s through 1980s compelled the Soviet Union to deploy 50 divisions to offset Chinese strength at a time when China remained a low-developed country.⁸⁵ More recently, China has itself strengthened defences along its border with India and begun to worry about a possible Indian maritime threat even though India itself is weaker than China and faces internal constraints on its military capabilities.⁸⁶ In short, even if China becomes several times more powerful than other major states as measured by aggregate figures, the structure of the situation may still push China to devote significant attention to countering others.

Reinforcing the potential that other states could constrain Chinese freedom of action, finer-grained measures of capabilities suggest China may not be rising as fast or as far as GDP or military spending metrics might suggest. First, as William Wohlforth and Steven Brooks point out, China's economic and military rise is

⁸²Table 1.

⁸³Table 2. In 2016, China spent approximately 465 percent more than Japan on military affairs. In contrast, the United States spent approximately 550 percent more on its military than China in 2010.

⁸⁴Mike M. Mochizuki, 'Japan's Shifting Strategy Toward the Rise of China', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30/4-5 (Aug.-October 2007), 751-58. By the mid-2000s, Japanese officials began identifying China as a threat and trying to offset China's rise; Evan S. Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Response of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia of China's Rise* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2008), 49-58.

⁸⁵Harry Gelman, *The Soviet Far East Buildup and Soviet Risk-Taking Against China* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1982), vii-viii.

⁸⁶Huizhong Wu, 'China Strengthening Air Defenses with eyes on India, Says State Media', CNN, 22 February 2018; Hemant Adlakha, 'China is Starting to See India as a Major Threat', *The Diplomat*, 11 January 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/china-is-starting-to-see-india-as-a-major-threat/>; Yin Guoming, 'The Indian Military Has Again Threatened China; China Should Attach Great Importance to This Opponent', *Kunlun Policy Network*, 21 December 2017, <http://www.kunlun.com/gcyj/zxzz111111/2017-12-21/121772.html> [translated via Google Translate]; Paul Staniland, 'America Has High Expectations for India. Can New Delhi Deliver?', *War on the Rocks*, 22 February 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/02/america-has-high-expectations-for-india-can-new-delhi-deliver/>.

occurring while the country is still modernising. As a result, it often lacks the industry, human capital and technological base to generate cutting-edge military power and the high degree of economic innovation akin to that witnessed in the United States and Japan.⁸⁷ There is little scholarly agreement on whether and when developing states such as China are able to acquire such elements of national power, let alone whether such high-quality capabilities are necessary to play a significant role in world politics⁸⁸; many analysts suggest the barriers to entry are very high for states operating in the modern world, but similar claims in prior historical episodes nevertheless saw rising states quickly acquire a stock of sufficiently good tools to effectively challenge already-established powers.⁸⁹ Still, the fact that China is relatively rising while developing at home implies that China's economic and military growth should be at least partly discounted: the United States, Japan and other existing states are declining vis-à-vis China, but their comparatively more advanced societies and military-industrial bases means that their declines may not be either as rapid nor pervasive as broad measures of strength such as GDP imply.⁹⁰ Ultimately, these states are likely to continue holding important military and economic advantages – for example, the United States' ability to field and integrate high-end military technologies – that may be difficult for China to counteract.⁹¹

Geography plays a role as well. Unlike the United States, which is effectively isolated from other powerful states by water moats and weak neighbours, China is rising in a crowded neighbourhood with potential adversaries close at hand.⁹² On one level, China shares land borders with India and Russia, which have both had significant territorial disputes with China in living memory.⁹³ At the same

⁸⁷Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States' Global Role in the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 14–72.

⁸⁸Conversations with Steven Brooks, Jennifer Lind, Daryl Press and Eugene Gholz were critical on this point.

⁸⁹The paradigmatic case is Great Britain which, as Aaron Friedberg describes, at the height of its power in the mid-1800, expected to continue 'dominating world trade and maintaining its lead in industry as far ahead into the future as anyone could possibly foresee'; Friedberg, *Weary Titan*, 29. Nevertheless, the United States and Germany cut into Britain's lead after the 1880s. More recently, post-war US policymakers expected the Soviet Union would be unable to acquire a nuclear bomb until around 1950–1953 window, when the USSR actually exploded its first nuclear weapon in August 1949; Donald P. Steury, 'How the CIA Missed Stalin's Bomb', *Studies in Intelligence* 49/1 (2005).

⁹⁰Relatedly, see Michael Beckley, 'China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure', *International Security* 36/3 (Winter 2012), 41–78; Alastair Iain Johnston and Sheena Chestnut, 'Is China Rising?', in *Global Giant: Is China Changing the Rules of the Game?*, ed. Eva Paus, Penelope Prime, and Jon Western (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 237–60.

⁹¹For discussion of US advantages and Chinese efforts to close the gap, see USCESR, *Annual Report 2017*, 507–596; Montgomery, *Reinforcing*, 19–29; Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2015), xxx. As these studies underscore, China has cut into the US lead in many arenas, but the United States still retains significant advantages.

⁹²For a similar analysis, see Robert S. Ross, 'The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-First Century', *International Security* 23/4 (Apr. 1999), 81–118.

⁹³On Chinese-Indian conflict, see M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton University Press, 2008), chap. 4; Jonah Blank, 'What Were China's Objectives in the Doklam Dispute?', *Foreign Affairs Snapshot*, 7 September 2017, <https://www.foreign>

time, Japan lies nearby and across major sea lines of communication on which China's economy depends, and which would be critical to any Chinese effort to expand its regional influence. An island nation, Japan is also comparatively difficult to attack – indeed, China has been pushed to make significant investments in power projection tools to plausibly coerce Japan.⁹⁴ In addition, a host of smaller states such as Vietnam, Australia and Malaysia lie around China's periphery and have expressed varying degrees of concern with China's growth.⁹⁵ The combined situation creates a dilemma for China's leaders as the country cannot contemplate expansion without worrying about encountering sustained and perhaps overwhelming opposition from other states. Indeed, it is even possible that, like Wilhelmine Germany before it, Chinese predation will lead to China's encirclement as threatened states pool resources to limit Chinese opportunities.⁹⁶ The fact that Australia, India, Japan and South Korea alone have a combined GDP greater than China's, a larger combined population, seem to worry about Chinese ambitions, and are strategically located around China's periphery suggests Chinese leaders cannot take the risk of encirclement lightly.⁹⁷ Geography works to China's disadvantage.⁹⁸

Finally, the distribution of actualised military power should remain weighted against China for the foreseeable future. The United States alone remains ahead of China in key military areas including naval power, reconnaissance capabilities and modern aircraft.⁹⁹ The US Navy,

affairs.com/articles/asia/2017-09-07/what-were-chinas-objectives-doklam-dispute. For the China-Soviet dispute, see Gelman, *Soviet Far East Buildup*.

⁹⁴For Japan's geographic position vis-à-vis East Asian sea lines, see Sean Mirski, 'Stranglehold: The Context, Conduct, and Consequences of an American Naval Blockade of China', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36/3 (February 2013), 393–406; Ji Guoxing, 'SLOC Security in the Asia-Pacific', *Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies Occasional Paper*, February 2000, <http://apcss.org/Publications/Ocasional%20Papers/OPSloc.htm>; Tetsuo Kotani, 'The Case for Japan's Patrol in the South China Sea,' *CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, 29 July 2015, <https://amti.csis.org/the-case-for-japans-patrol-in-the-south-china-sea/>. On China's limited ability to attack Japan, see Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, 'Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, US AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia', *International Security* 41/1 (Summer 2016), 14.

⁹⁵As Ross observes, 'From Japan in Northeast Asia to Malaysia in Southeast Asia, the East Asian mainland is rimmed with a continuous chain of island countries that possess strategic location and naval facilities', impeding power projection from mainland East Asia; Ross, 'Geography', 100–101.

⁹⁶Ross, 'Geography', 105–06. For an argument that China's neighbours are beginning to bandwagon, however, see Shambaugh, 'U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia'.

⁹⁷The combined GDP of Australia, Japan, India and South Korea was \$11.5 trillion in 2017, versus \$10.2 trillion for China (measured in constant 2010 US dollars). Total population in 2017 was 1.54 billion people versus 1.39 billion. Author calculations from World Bank, World Development Indicators, <http://databank.worldbank.org/> (accessed November 2018).

⁹⁸Of course, it is also true that China enjoys significant strategic depth due to its size. This may afford it operational advantages by making it difficult for prospective opponents to invade the Chinese mainland.

⁹⁹USCSER, *Annual Report 2017*, op. cit. As the Rand Corporation notes, although 'trend lines are moving against the United States across a broad spectrum of mission areas', trends still 'vary by mission' and 'in some areas, U.S. relative capabilities remain robust or even dominant.' Ultimately, 'the Chinese military continues to lag far behind that of the United States,' Heginbotham, *Scorecard*, 21–22, also 322. See also Biddle and Oelrich, 'Future Warfare,' Owen R. Cote, Jr., 'Assessing the Undersea Balance Between the U.S. and China', MIT Security Studies Program Working Paper, February 2011, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/127154/Undersea%20Balance%20WP11-1.pdf>.

for instance, deploys 11 aircraft carriers to China's 2, 54 nuclear attack submarines to China's 9 and can draw upon more than eight decades of experience organising and operating large naval forces far from home.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, the US Air Force and Navy are deploying thousands of fifth-generation fighter aircraft at a time when China remains unable to produce a reliable jet engine, and China's home-grown fighters are reportedly less-capable than their US counterparts.¹⁰¹ American forces are backed, meanwhile, with a constellation of satellites, intelligence systems and communication networks that have traditionally given the United States significant intelligence on and operational advantages over opponents.¹⁰² China, in contrast, lacks similar systems of the same scale and complexity.¹⁰³

None of this is to understate Chinese military capabilities or to deny that the gulf separating US and Chinese capabilities is shrinking. Facing a more advanced United States, China has responded with a strategy intended to adumbrate US military advantages. It has done this primarily by focusing on anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) efforts – combining anti-ship and anti-airfield ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, diesel submarines and an integrated air defence system, with supporting operational concepts – intended to raise the costs of any US military campaign around China's periphery. As Evan Montgomery writes, these assets 'could enable [Beijing] to pose a genuine challenge to US military power across its home region and in the global commons.'¹⁰⁴ In recent years, China has taken this effort a step further by trying to speed development of advanced military technology while strengthening civil-military integration to facilitate military effectiveness.¹⁰⁵ Still, even pessimistic analyses

¹⁰⁰International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance, 2018* (London: Oxford University Press, 2018), 33, 49, 252. China deployed a second aircraft carrier in early 2018; Steven Lee Myers, 'China Launches Its First Domestically Made Aircraft Carrier', *New York Times*, 13 May 2018.

¹⁰¹IISS, *Military Balance 2018*, 32–33; Ankit Panda, 'China's Fifth-Generation Stealth Fighter is in Combat Service – But with Improved Fourth-Generation Engines', *The Diplomat*, 13 February 2018; Alex Lockie, 'China Appears to Have Rushed Its J-20 Stealth Fighter into Service with an 'Embarrassing' Flaw', *Business Insider*, 12 February 2018. As Montgomery notes, only 500 of China's approximately 2000 fighter aircraft are 4th generation units, whereas nearly all US aircraft are 4th or 5th generation forces; Evan Braden Montgomery, 'Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection', *International Security* 38/4 (Spring 2014), 133.

¹⁰²Barry Posen, 'Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony', *International Security* 28/1 (Summer 2003), 12–14.

¹⁰³Open-sources report that China only recently began seeking similar intelligence and surveillance systems; Kevin Pollpeter, 'Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission: Hearing on China's Advanced Weapons', 23 February 2017; Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017* (Washington: Department of Defense, 2017), 34–35.

¹⁰⁴Montgomery, 'Contested Primacy', 133; also IISS, *Military Balance, 2018*, 5; Andrew Krepinevich, *Preserving the Balance: A U.S. Eurasia Defense Strategy* (Washington: CSBA, 2017), 44–53.

¹⁰⁵Adam Segal, 'Civil-Military Fusion: The Missing Link Between China's Technological and Military Rise', *Council on Foreign Relations* (Blog post), 29 January 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/civil-military-fusion-missing-link-between-chinas-technological-and-military-rise>.

argue that changes to US military doctrine and operational concepts, alongside acquisition of planned or readily acquired hardware, can permit the United States to remain militarily competitive.¹⁰⁶ Given US concerns regarding Chinese strength, the question is thus not whether the United States can sustain an edge, but how and to what extent this potential is realised.¹⁰⁷ The United States is unlikely to hold the military lead it formerly enjoyed, but the military balance should still favour the United States – allowing it to threaten to impose large military costs on China for some time.

Furthermore, American military power is only part of the story. The relatively smaller countries around China's periphery hold military capabilities of their own that can present significant problems for the PRC.¹⁰⁸ As Eugene Gholz and Michael Beckley separately observe, for instance, Japan, South Korea, India and others have the capacity to adopt A2/AD strategies of their own that could prevent China from projecting military power beyond their borders (particularly in the maritime domain).¹⁰⁹ In other words, just as some military analysts worry that Chinese A2/AD will keep the United States from projecting military power near China, so too could other countries prevent China from projecting its own power near their territory.¹¹⁰ Significantly, this potential exists largely independent of the United States: because states such as Japan and India have economic and technological bases akin to or better than China's, they can field and operate the relevant forces if and when policymakers in those states opt.¹¹¹ Combined with geography, the result is a situation where China can potentially be denied egress from its near abroad if other countries so choose.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶Heginbotham, *Scorecard*, 345–50; Montgomery, 'Contested Primacy', 139–147; Jim Thomas, 'Statement before the House Armed Services Committee Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee', 11 December 2013; see also Joshua Rovner, 'Two Kinds of Catastrophe: Nuclear Escalation and Protracted War in Asia', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40/5 (2017), 712.

¹⁰⁷Suggesting the point is Krepinevich, *Preserving the Balance*, iv.

¹⁰⁸Andrew Krepinevich, 'How To Deter China: The Case for Archipelagic Defense', *Foreign Affairs* 94/2 (Mar.-Apr. 2015), 78–86; Terrence Kelly, David Gompert, and Duncan Long, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Volume 1: Exploiting U.S. Advantages to Prevent Aggression* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2016), 37, 133, 153–56.

¹⁰⁹Eugene Gholz, 'No Man's Sea' (draft article manuscript, January 2017); Michael Beckley, 'The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia: How China's Neighbors Can Check Chinese Naval Expansion', *International Security* 42/2 (Fall 2017), 78–119. For study of what such forces would look like in the Japanese context, see Eric Heginbotham and Richard Samuels, 'Active Denial: Redesigning Japan's Response to China's Military Challenge', *International Security* 42/4 (Spring 2018), 128–169.

¹¹⁰For extensive discussion of the drawbacks and – especially – advantages of this approach, see Kelly, Gompert, and Long, *Smarter Power, Volume 1*.

¹¹¹US assistance could also reinforce local actors' strengths; Eric Heginbotham and Jacob Heim, 'Deterring Without Dominance: Discouraging Chinese Adventurism Under Austerity', *The Washington Quarterly* 38/1 (Spring 2015), 194–195.

¹¹²As Beckley notes, the 'balance of power will remain stable for years to come, because China cannot afford the power-projection capabilities it would need to overcome the A2/AD forces of its neighbors'; Beckley, 'Emerging Military Balance', 81.

China as cautious riser...and potential partner?

Collectively, these factors add up to a situation where China not only lacks opportunities to readily challenge the United States, but may face systemic reasons to bid for US cooperation: facing several other major players that can harm China and hinder Chinese security, China has good reason to pull its strategic punches and may even want partners to address prospective threats. Today's China, in short, may be a comparatively less-developed version of Germany in the late nineteenth century. Not only did Germany conciliate most of Europe's major powers for the twenty-five years after German unification to avoid conflicts it might be unable to win but, even after Germany became more assertive from the mid-1890s, it was hardly an all-out surge to leave other states in the dust. Even as it competed with Russia and isolated France, for example, Germany increased military assistance and diplomatic aid to Austria-Hungary while trying – albeit coercively – to reach a strategic accommodation with Great Britain.¹¹³ Just as Germany's rise witnessed varying supportive and mixed strategies directed against different declining states, so too do current conditions seem propitious for moderating a rising China's behaviour.

Prospects for a supportive Chinese strategy

It is important to distinguish between the conditions that would lead China to support the United States, and the conditions under which China would pursue a mixed strategy of gradual, sequential gains at the United States' expense coupled with tactical cooperation. The first scenario is more likely if Chinese growth slows and China experiences difficulties acquiring military and economic tools to fully compete with the United States, Japan and other major actors. Here, China would continue facing persistent threats from several real or potential adversaries, and it would be pushed to find ways to handle these threats. Under such circumstances, Chinese leaders would encounter incentives to avoid policies that catalyse significant counterbalancing. As importantly, there would be strong reasons for China to limit others' proclivities to form or join a counterbalancing coalition, as well as to find partners of its own to manage external threats.

In this scenario, the United States could – paradoxically – benefit from China's rise. To be sure, the United States in this world would represent China's biggest potential competitor. Since, all things being equal, states tend to balance large competitors, one might expect China to focus on

¹¹³On German relations with Britain, France and Russia, see Michael A. Glosny, 'The Grand Strategies of Rising Powers: Reassurance, Coercion, and Balancing Responses' (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012), chap. 3–4; for relations with Austria-Hungary, see Shiffrinson, *Rising Titans*, conclusion.

countering the United States. Here, however, all things are not truly equal given geography and the distribution of local capabilities. The fact that the United States is positioned to help China constrain states such as India and Japan that might seek to do China harm potentially makes it a valuable Chinese partner. US cooperation would not only be valuable in restraining other actors from threatening China but, in a crisis or conflict, American assistance could be helpful in settling the contest on advantageous terms.

Moreover, problems in the US-PRC relationship are limited relative to those affecting Chinese relations with Japan or India, and less severe than those that could affect Russo-Chinese relations in the future. After all, China has fought wars in recent memory with India and Japan, just as its relations with both states have grown tenser in recent years owing to territorial disputes, access to economic resources and competition over regional leadership.¹¹⁴ Despite warming Russo-Chinese ties over the last decade, similar dynamics also present latent problems in the Russo-Chinese relationship.¹¹⁵ In contrast, US-Chinese ties have grown more conflictual more due to competition between China and US allies such as Japan rather than by directly conflicting interests between the United States and China per se.¹¹⁶ While it is true that Chinese decision-makers perceive the United States as working through its partners to stop China's rise – just as the United States worries China may quest for regional dominance – US-Chinese tensions are less direct and less severe (e.g., not involving territory) than those involving China's neighbors.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴For China's regional behaviour, see Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*; Johnston, 'New Assertiveness.' On Indo-Chinese tensions, see Yogesh Joshi and Anit Mukherjee, 'From Denial to Punishment: The Security Dilemma in India's Military Strategy towards China', *Asian Security* (online first view), 1–19.

¹¹⁵Russo-Chinese relations are in flux amid signs the states may be aligning against the United States. Still, changes in US policy could suffice to drive wedges between the two sides given latent economic, territorial and strategic divisions between them. For discussion of Russo-Chinese relations, see Stephen Blank, 'Toward a More Perfect Alliance: Russo-Chinese Ministerials in Moscow', *Eurasian Daily Monitor* 15/59 (April 2018), <https://jamestown.org/program/toward-a-more-perfect-alliance-russo-chinese-ministerials-in-moscow/>; Paul Stronski and Nicole Ng, *Cooperation and Competition: Russia and China in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018); Alexander Gabuev, 'Why Russia and China are Strengthening Security Ties', *Foreign Affairs Snapshot*, 24 September 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-09-24/why-russia-and-china-are-strengthening-security-ties>.

¹¹⁶Along similar lines, see Charles Glaser, 'A U.S.-China Grand Bargain?', *International Security* 39/4 (Spring 2015), 49–90; Joseph S. Nye, 'The Cooperative Rivalry in US-China Relations', *Project Syndicate*, 6 November 2018, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-america-relationship-cooperative-rivalry-by-joseph-s-nye-2018-11>.

¹¹⁷On Chinese concerns vis-à-vis the United States, see Liff, 'China and the U.S. Alliance System', 143–44; Ren Xiao, 'U.S. Rebalance to Asia and Responses from China's Research Community', *Orbis* 61/2 (2017), 238–254; Wu Xinbo, 'Cooperation, Competition, and Shaping the Outlook: The United States and China's Neighborhood Diplomacy', *International Affairs* 92/4 (2016), 849–867. On the centrality of alliance concerns in US policy, see Chas W. Freeman, Jr. 'A New Era in US-China Relations', Remarks to the Watson Institute and the Fairbank Center, Harvard University, November 13–14, 2018, <https://chasfreeman.net/a-new-era-in-us-china-relations/>. Thanks go to Taylor Fravel for help on this point.

As a result, China may be motivated in this world to bid for American partnership.¹¹⁸ This bid would require the PRC to offer concessions to the United States in diplomatic, military and economic affairs, with the underlying objective of strengthening US-PRC ties. These concessions – such as limiting China’s naval challenge to the United States, foregoing alternate economic arrangements in East Asia, and backing US-led initiatives in the United Nations – would have to be defined largely on American terms. Likewise, China would have to reduce the prospects for a US-China military clash. The result could be a boon for the United States: even having declined vis-à-vis China, a relatively less capable United States could emerge in a strengthened diplomatic position by virtue of China’s need for partners against other challenges. Although there is no way of knowing whether Chinese leaders will conceive of the US-PRC relationship in these terms, there are hints that this world is not impossible. Indeed, not only did China seek into the 1990s to keep the United States engaged in East Asia to help restrain Japan,¹¹⁹ but – as noted – China’s state news agency called against any US turn towards isolationism following Donald Trump’s 2016 election.¹²⁰

Prospects for a mixed strategy

Conversely, it is possible that China will continue growing while developing its economic and military base. If so, it may eventually surpass the ability of Japan, India, Russia and other prospective competitors to counterbalance either singly or in alignment, leaving the United States as the sole actor able to offset the PRC. This situation could be problematic for the United States. It would not take much for China’s leaders to conclude that, if China could further reduce US strength or evict the United States from Asia, the country would have an opportunity to dominate the region as smaller states accepted Chinese dominance. Under these conditions, it is plausible that

¹¹⁸This prospect may seem remote in light of recent US-Chinese tensions. However, the potential for a US-China ‘condominium’ was discussed in the early 2010s, and other states still fear the prospect of a US-China bargain. See Richard C. Bush, ‘The United States and China: A G-2 in the Making?’, 11 October 2011, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-united-states-and-china-a-g-2-in-the-making/>; Brendan Taylor, ‘A US-China ‘Shadow Condominium?’’, *The Strategist*, 25 October 2012, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/a-us-china-shadow-condominium/>; Kuniko Ashizawa, ‘“Keeping the United States In”: Japan and Regional Order in East Asia’ in Elena Atanassova-Cornelis, Frans-Paul van der Puttin (ed.), *Changing Security Dynamics in East Asia: A Post-US Regional Order in the Making?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 85; Michael J. Green, ‘Asia Awaits Trump’s Visit with Trepidation’, *Foreign Policy*, 27 October 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/27/asia-awaits-trumps-visit-with-trepidation/>.

¹¹⁹Interestingly, it was largely after US-Japanese relations tightened after the late 1990s and seemed to deny China an opening with the United States that Chinese leaders began questioning the utility of US engagement in Asia; Bonnie Glaser and Brittny Farrar, ‘Through Beijing’s Eyes: How China Sees the U.S.-Japan Alliance’, *The National Interest*, 12 May 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/through-beijings-eyes-how-china-sees-the-us-japan-alliance-12864>.

¹²⁰China State Media Warns Trump against Isolationism’.

China would seek ways of further maximising China's power at the United States' expense.¹²¹

Still, while China might harbour expansive ambitions, the most likely outcome here is a mixed strategy in which the intensity and competitiveness of Chinese policy remains limited. With the United States as China's premier target, Chinese leaders would be primed to realise that pushing the United States too hard could lead to a clash with the United States that could stymie China's rise.¹²² As a result, China's leadership would face a 'better later than now' situation: although incentivised to displace the United States en route to establishing regional hegemony, steps China might adopt to attain this end would have a higher chance of success the longer China waited to implement them. Indeed, the ideal scenario would be for China to wait to clearly challenge the United States' power position and threaten US interests in Asia (or beyond) until after the distribution of power has shifted to such an extent that the United States can no longer credibly harm the PRC.¹²³ Once this shift occurred, China could set to work evicting the United States from Asia by challenging American allies, engaging in economic warfare and pursuing other overtly predatory actions.

Until that point, however, a rising China – even if locked in a bilateral contest with the United States – is likely to pull its punches, challenging the United States when it looks like the threat of force is off the table but otherwise limiting the scope of its contestation.¹²⁴ And here, the fact that the United States is adept at deploying highly effective military assets and looks likely to remain a potent military actor for some time should continue acting as a brake on Chinese policy. Put differently, even if China overtakes the United States across many measures of national strength, lingering US military advantages should give China pause before preying. Tellingly, for example, the USSR was able to keep an economically stronger and technologically more advanced United States at bay until late in the Cold War, and there is no reason to suspect the United States could not do the same with China.

¹²¹Along these lines, see Mearsheimer, 'Gathering Storm,' Krepinevich, *Preserving*, 19–25.

¹²²Suggesting the point, Chinese leaders have apparently concluded that the United States' maritime capabilities are a major impediment on China's own maritime aspirations and a potential threat to Chinese maritime interests; Michael McDevitt, *Becoming a Great 'Maritime Power': A Chinese Dream* (Washington: CNA, 2016), v. For broader discussion of Chinese concerns, see Andrew Nathan and Andrew Scobell, 'How China Sees America: The Sum of Beijing's Fears', *Foreign Affairs* 91/5 (Sep./Oct. 2012), 32–47.

¹²³On this trade-off, see David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 157–61.

¹²⁴Indeed, the notion that states in a bipolar contest may pressure one another but are unlikely to take steps leading to war was one of Waltz's central insights; Waltz, *Theory*, 174–75.

Conclusion: influencing rising state behaviour in theory and practice

In sum, a rising China is unlikely to engage in the all-out quest for dominance that has characterised some prior power shifts and which declining states generally fear. Separate from the range of institutions and economic ties that connect the United States and China, the distribution of capabilities and China's need to operate in a competitive international system provide strong constraints that are likely to circumscribe Chinese strategy. At worst, this may lead China to engage in limited forms of competition with the United States; at best, China may support the United States in a bid to use the United States against other threats. Though it remains uncertain which scenario will eventually emerge, the trends provide room for cautious optimism.

Options for shaping rising state strategy

What does the preceding mean for efforts by relatively declining states to shape rising state states' behaviour? Although focused on developing a framework to understand relatively rising state strategy towards declining great powers, the logic outlined above suggests both options for and limits on a declining state's own efforts to influence rising state policy.

The limitations are stark. Major factors influencing rising state strategy such as the presence of other threats and a declining state's geographic position relative to those threats are largely beyond a declining state's influence. That said, declining states may still be able to shape rising state behaviour by working within these structural conditions. First, and most directly, declining states may be able to adjust their military position by strengthening or reducing military forces to influence rising state strategy. Depending on whether conditions mean a rising state is otherwise incentivised to prey or support a decliner, such adjustments can push a rising state towards or against such outcomes. Thus, a rising state which otherwise faces incentives to prey upon a decliner might be kept at bay and pursuing a mixed strategy if a decliner pumps resources into sustaining a potent military. Alternatively, a decliner which strategically reduces military assets might spur a riser that might support a decliner if not for the latter's military threat towards cooperation.

Second, a rising state may be able to adjust its political availability – whether the decliner is firmly aligned with a rising state's other opponents and its policy-makers are open to alignment with the riser – to affect rising state policy. The consequences of doing so, however, may be more limited than adjusting military posture and primarily affect situations where rising states are otherwise incentivised to pursue a supportive strategy. After all, support only emerges when the

presence of other threats, geography, the decliner's military challenge *and* a declining state's political availability make support a rational gambit for rising states. There may therefore be scenarios where rising states would support decliners if not for the decliner's political remove. Case in point, the Soviet Union moved away from seeking cooperation with Britain against the United States after World War Two as it became clear that Britain was firmly in the American camp in the nascent Cold War and British leaders opposed to aligning with the USSR; counterfactually, had Britain avoided a firm commitment to the United States in the mid-late 1940s, Soviet efforts to bid for British cooperation may have continued.¹²⁵ By adjusting political availability, declining states may therefore catalyse (or reinforce) rising state efforts to pursue supportive strategies under certain circumstances. Conversely, decliners that remain aloof from a rising state which otherwise has incentives to pursue support may end up pushing risers towards mixed or predatory strategies.

In contrast, declining states that fail to play to the right factors within structural constraints may court problems for themselves. On one level, devoting resources to policies that have negligible bearing on the factors influencing rising state strategy can be a waste of time and treasure. Equally significant, decliners which (1) pump resources into maintaining a strong military or remain politically unavailable when rising states would otherwise pursue support, or (2) draw down military strength in hopes of fostering cooperation when risers face predatory incentives, may expose themselves to real strategic dilemmas. In the former instance, not only would declining states encounter less cooperation with rising states than would counterfactually be the case but, in fostering a more adversarial relationship, expose themselves to a greater chance of insecurity spirals and crises. In the latter case, declining states which attempt to foster a cooperative relationship with predatory risers may simply whet a rising state's appetite, encourage its aggrandisement, and court deterrence failures. In either scenario, declining states can leave themselves worse off than would have otherwise occurred had they adjusted policies to account for a rising state's broader security environment.

Implications for shaping China's rise

These results are especially important for ongoing debates surrounding American foreign policy and efforts to address China's rise. Over the last several years, a growing consensus in US strategic circles holds that China is a 'revisionist' power that can only be addressed through the firm application of American power and resolve.¹²⁶ Reflecting this calculation, and as noted, the

¹²⁵See Shiffrinson, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants*, 83–95.

¹²⁶The Trump administration formally labelled China a 'revisionist' actor in its 2017 National Security Strategy; Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, 25.

United States is adding to its military presence in East Asia, cultivating new allies and fostering intra-regional diplomatic ties, and working to limit Chinese access to sensitive economic and technological markets.¹²⁷ In contrast, the argument developed in this article proposes that the United States would be better served adapting to China's own incentives to cooperate or compete as defined by trends in the distribution of power.

As noted earlier, there are two possible pathways – China as supporter of the United States, and China pursuing a mixed strategy – that China may go down if and as power continues to shift in its favour. Just as the first scenario represents the outcome most at odds with conventional thinking surrounding China's rise, so too does it require the most strategic adjustment by the United States. To catalyse and reinforce Chinese-American partnership, US leaders would be well-advised to underscore the United States' value to a rising China, especially its ability to assist China against other threats. This requires the United States to minimise rather than reinforce its challenge to China to avoid undercutting China's incentives for support, while communicating its interest in US-Chinese partnership. Key elements of existing US strategy in Asia might therefore have to change – including efforts to commit additional US forces to the Asia-Pacific region and to foster a nascent anti-China coalition – to avoid needlessly upsetting US-Chinese relations, courting insecurity spirals and forestalling potential cooperative opportunities. Put differently, the United States' current approach is potentially valuable if the United States is interested in deterring or containing China, but would diminish China's incentive to pursue support by mitigating the United States' geographic advantages and reifying the image of a hostile United States.¹²⁸

Instead, a less robust US security presence in Asia would simultaneously remind China's leaders of the reasons the United States is an attractive partner and signal that it might embrace deeper forms of US-Chinese cooperation. This drawdown could be coupled with steps to distance the United States from other prospective threats to China. Not only would such distancing restore flexibility to US diplomacy, but it could reduce the threat posed to China by the United States relative to other regional actors and so reinforce China's incentive to see the United States as a potential partner. Furthermore, it would undermine charges mooted in Chinese strategic discussions that the United States is organising other Asian actors against China, thereby upping the likelihood that China's leaders see the United

¹²⁷Michael Swaine, *Creating an Unstable Asia: The U.S. "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy"* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018); Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, and Mark Cancian, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016); Alan Rappoport, 'In New Slap at China, U.S. Expands Power to Block Foreign Investments', *New York Times*, 10 October 2018.

¹²⁸Implicitly recognising this dilemma is Ely Ratner, 'Rebalancing to Asia with an Insecure China', *Washington Quarterly* 36/2 (Spring 2013), 21–38.

States as a potential partner.¹²⁹ American diplomacy, meanwhile, could use bilateral and multilateral forums to communicate the United States' desire to engage the PRC on China's own terms while underlining the concessions the United States expects in exchange. American policy, in sum, would be oriented towards minimising the US threat to China to catalyse and reinforce China's incentives to cooperate. This might generate uncertainty and discontent among other states (e.g., Japan, India) in the region, suggesting the United States was ganging up with China at others' expense. Nevertheless, the approach could create conditions for the *United States* to unilaterally extract strategic concessions from a rising China.¹³⁰

However, the second scenario – China pursuing a mixed strategy – argues strongly for the United States to reinforce acquisition of military capabilities to deter or defeat Chinese aggrandisement. *Prima facie*, this might seem to call for the assertive strategy aimed at containing China by creating a robust coalition of allies backed with a large and forward-deployed military presence that many US policymakers appear to envision. However, retaining the ability to militarily defeat or deter China and threatening to impose costs in response to Chinese aggrandisement need not mean an expansive and open-ended arms build-up or coalition-building exercise. Rather, such an effort could otherwise involve retaining the ability to surge forces into Asia amid a crisis, moving offshore and imposing costs from afar (such as with a blockade), or positioning tripwire forces around a security perimeter while preparing to mobilise should China cross that theoretical line. The key, in other words, is that US leaders reinforce steps to acquire military forces able to harm an increasingly potent China while cultivating only those partnerships deemed necessary to operate these assets.¹³¹ Along the way, US leaders would need to carefully delineate core American interests and underline American resolve; by extension, efforts to conciliate China would be curtailed to make US deterrent efforts more credible. The goal, in sum, would be to underscore the United States' ability to penalise Chinese aggrandisement at the United States' expense.

Yet irrespective of which scenario comes to pass, the United States should have significant latitude in its fate. Ultimately, China will remain constrained for the indefinite future in its ability to inaugurate a predatory challenge to the United States. By playing to its military and security advantages, and considering these advantages in light of what China's own strategic landscape entails, the United States should be able to forestall Chinese predation and may be able

¹²⁹See Liff, 'China and the U.S. Alliance System', 143–44.

¹³⁰These concessions might include items such as preferential economic access or partnership, agreement on respective spheres of influence and a reduction in PRC efforts to compete with the United States militarily.

¹³¹In fact, going beyond a minimal coalition might imperil the foundations of this strategy by seeing the US take on military dependencies that need protection while contributing little to a cost-imposition strategy themselves.

to facilitate Chinese support. Though analysts understandably worry that a rising China will seek to push the United States into the dustbin of history, balance of power logic suggests this outcome is less likely than many scholars and policymakers expect. Facing the rise of China and concomitant decline of the United States, American strategists should be cautiously optimistic: the United States is playing a strong hand and should recognise as much.

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