

# Partnership or Predation?

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## How Rising States Contend with Declining Great Powers

Shifts in the distribution of power are a major source of instability in international relations. As some states undergo a relative rise in power and others a relative decline, strategic uncertainty can increase; windows of opportunity or vulnerability may open and close; and patterns of cooperation and competition can change.<sup>1</sup> At such times, scholars and policymakers expect the decline of a great power to be particularly problematic, as rising states seek to gain at declining states' expense and to push them down or from the great power ranks. Dale Copeland, for example, argues that declining states worry that rising states "will either attack them later with superior power, or coerce them into concessions that compromise their security."<sup>2</sup> John Mearsheimer similarly avers that great powers "prefer to see adversaries decline, and thus will do whatever they can to speed up the process and maximize the distance of the fall." In the words of John Ikenberry and Thomas Wright, "Declining states, struggling to stay in control of the global system," often "face challenger states bent on change."<sup>3</sup> And throughout history, leaders in declining states as diverse as ancient Sparta, Napoleon III's France, Mikhail Gorbachev's Soviet Union, and the contemporary United States have feared the consequences of their countries losing strength relative to other great powers.<sup>4</sup>

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The author thanks Jasen Castillo, David Edelstein, Jennifer Erickson, Stacie Goddard, Brendan Green, Galen Jackson, Jennifer Lind, Paul MacDonald, Joseph Parent, Barry Posen, John Schuessler, and the anonymous reviewers for comments on prior drafts of this article.

1. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988); and Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999).
2. Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 4. See also Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (October 1987), p. 87, doi.org/10.2307/2010195; and Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 94–95.
3. John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), p. 53, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2538981; and G. John Ikenberry and Thomas Wright, "Rising Powers and Global Institutions: A Century Foundation Report" (New York: Century Foundation, 2008), p. 4.
4. Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell

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*International Security*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Summer 2020), pp. 90–126, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\_a\_00384  
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In practice, however, rising states employ different strategies when confronting declining powers.<sup>5</sup> A rising Rome, for instance, ultimately destroyed the declining Carthaginian Empire. Likewise, the 1980s and early 1990s saw a rising United States push a declining Soviet Union from Eastern Europe. Still, not all rising states prey on declining great powers with the same assertiveness; states vary in their willingness to invest resources and bear risks to cause changes in the distribution of power. As importantly, rising states may also support declining states. Thus, a rising Germany improved relations with Austria-Hungary in the late 1800s and early 1900s and assisted Austria against Russia before the start of World War I in 1914. More recently, the United States provided extensive economic and security backing to Britain after World War II via the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>6</sup>

What explains these behaviors? When do rising states prey on or support declining states, and why do they do so with greater or lesser assertiveness? Despite interest in the subject, research on the strategies of relatively rising states toward declining great powers constitutes a gap in existing international relations research.<sup>7</sup> In this article, I seek to help close this gap.

First, I posit a theory, termed “predation theory,” to explain the strategies that rising states can adopt toward declining great powers. I argue that rising states engage in intensive predation only after concluding that they do not need declining states’ help against other great powers, and that declining states lack military options to deter or defeat rising states’ aggrandizement. In these circumstances, rising states can gain at the expense of declining states by weakening them as much as possible. Conversely, rising states tend to support declining states when they might be able to use them against other great power adversaries; they also intensify their support when shifts in the military

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University Press, 2013); Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, ed. M.I. Finley (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1972); Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870–1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Alastair Iain Johnston, “The Failures of the ‘Failure of Engagement’ with China,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Summer 2019), pp. 99–114, doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1626688; and Hal Brands and Zack Cooper, “After the Responsible Stakeholder, What? Debating America’s China Strategy,” *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 2019), pp. 69–71, doi.org/10.26153/tsw/1943.

5. Unless otherwise noted, I use “declining [rising] great power(s)” and “declining [rising] state(s)” synonymously.

6. Immanuel Geiss, *German Foreign Policy, 1871–1914* (London: Routledge, 1976), pp. 29–71, 110–157; and Robert M. Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

7. Jeffrey W. Legro, “What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 2007), p. 515, doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707071526; and Jack S. Levy, “Preventive War: Concept and Propositions,” *International Interactions*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (March 2011), pp. 94–95, doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2011.546716.

balance suggest that the declining state might be lost as a partner against other challengers. Here, rising states are incentivized to prevent a declining power from becoming weaker, as failing to do so can leave a rising state isolated in the face of other great power threats.

Second, I contrast predation theory with competing arguments that identify other mechanisms that might influence the strategies of rising states toward declining powers. These accounts highlight the potential for economic interdependence and compatible political ideologies to ameliorate competition by giving rising and declining states a mutual stake in their well-being.<sup>8</sup>

Third, I evaluate the predictions generated by predation theory and alternate accounts to assess which approach best explains rising states' strategies. To do so, I test predation theory and the competing arguments against the record of great power rise and decline in post-1945 Europe. Utilizing primary and secondary sources, I show that predation theory outperforms alternate arguments in explaining the responses to the declines of both Britain and the Soviet Union.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. First, I define "great power decline" and offer a framework to assess the strategy—whether predatory or supportive, and to what degree—of rising states. Next, I detail predation theory's core logic, before comparing my argument to alternate accounts. I then test the argument by examining the strategies of the United States and the Soviet Union toward Britain after World War II, and of the U.S. response to Soviet decline in the late Cold War; owing to space limitations, I primarily focus on the British case while summarizing results from the Soviet episode. I conclude with a discussion of future avenues for research and the policy consequences of this work at a time when many analysts argue that a power shift is occurring between the United States and China.

### *Rising-State Strategy and Declining Great Powers*

A declining great power is one that begins to lose a large share of its military and, especially, economic capabilities relative to one or more other great powers over a sustained period.<sup>9</sup> By definition, this process also causes one or more

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8. On interdependence, see Dale C. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015); and Steven E. Lobell, *The Challenge of Hegemony: Grand Strategy, Trade, and Domestic Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003). For ideology, see Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005); and George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 2002), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>.

9. Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4

other great powers to experience a relative rise.<sup>10</sup> As leaders in Wilhelmine Germany, post-1945 Britain, and the late Cold War Soviet Union all learned, the resulting risk that declining states may find themselves too weak in relative terms to counter opponents can generate policy debates over how such states will maintain security as the distribution of power shifts.<sup>11</sup>

The strategies that rising states adopt toward a declining state are especially important in the latter's calculations: by exacerbating or reducing threats to a declining power, they can imperil or improve a declining power's standing and security in the international system. As defined here, "rising-state strategy" refers to the ends-means chain adopted by a rising state to structure its relationship with a declining great power using economic, military, and political tools.<sup>12</sup> In the process, it accounts for the rising state's relations with other great powers and how its approach is likely to affect these relationships.<sup>13</sup>

#### GOALS OF RISING STATES: PREDATORY OR SUPPORTIVE

Rising-state strategies vary along two dimensions: goals and means. Goals capture the rising state's basic preference for whether a declining state continues as a great power. Some rising states adopt a predatory goal, seeking to eliminate the declining state as a great power. To do so, they may attempt either to remove resources from the declining state's control or to challenge its economic and security interests such that the state must consume additional resources to protect itself. Alternatively, a rising state may support a declining state by slowing or stopping its losses. The United States, for example, supported Britain after 1945 by offering economic and military assistance to rebuild British strength, just as Germany aided Austria-Hungary politically and militarily before 1914.

#### MEANS: INTENSE OR LIMITED

Rising states must also decide the means that they will use to weaken or sustain a declining state, which may be difficult because rising states generally have multiple objectives requiring their attention and resources. A rising state

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(Spring 1988), pp. 602–603, doi.org/10.2307/204816; and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. xv.

10. Gilpin, *War and Change*, p. 158.

11. Copeland, *Origins of Major War*, p. 4.

12. For related discussion of rising-state grand strategy, see Randall L. Schweller, "Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory," in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1–31.

13. Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 11.

thus needs to determine its willingness to expend the resources, and to bear the risks of pursuing, a large and immediate change in the declining state's strength: it needs to decide on the assertiveness of its means vis-à-vis the declining state.

Here, rising states have two basic options. First, they can employ intense means by adopting military, political, and economic policies designed to cause (or prevent) a rapid and fundamental shift in the distribution of power that threatens (or helps) the declining great power. Examples of such policies include challenging (or reinforcing) the foundations of a declining state's political order; removing (or maintaining) strategically important territory from the declining state's control; or initiating (or curtailing) large-scale challenges to a declining state's core interests, economic strength, and military well-being. In contrast, a rising state may use limited means to cause gradual changes to the distribution of power that moderately improve or undermine a declining power's position. Here, the rising state may be hesitant to risk a militarized crisis with the declining state when preying on it, or it may be ambivalent over protecting a declining state's interests; unwilling to accept significant trade-offs vis-à-vis other interests to influence a declining power; or reluctant to ignore the concerns of other states when pursuing its preferred outcome. A classic example of a state using limited means is Britain's support for a declining Austria-Hungary against Prussia in the 1860s: although not wanting Prussia to defeat Austria-Hungary, Britain restricted its support to infrequent warnings that it would disapprove of Prussian efforts to "destroy the present equilibrium of power."<sup>14</sup>

### *Variation in the Strategies of Rising States: Ideal Types and Examples*

In combination, the goals and means of rising states generate four ideal-type strategies (see figure 1). First, rising states may pursue a strategy of relegation, whereby they seek to quickly revise the status quo against the interests of a declining state, ideally pushing it from the ranks of the great powers. To accomplish this objective, rising states enact policies that sap significant resources from the declining state, dramatically undercut its capabilities, and threaten the existing distribution of power even in the face of opposition from other actors.<sup>15</sup> An example of relegation is the United States' exploitation of

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14. Richard Millman, *British Foreign Policy and the Coming of the Franco-Prussian War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 9.

15. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 178–179.

Figure 1. Ideal-Type Strategies of Rising States toward Declining Great Powers

Note to Readers: Owing to a typesetting error, the “predatory” and “supportive” labels on the X-axis are inverted. The matter is scheduled to be corrected on the International Security website.

		rising-state goals	
		supportive	predatory
rising-state means	intense	relegation	strengthening
	limited	weakening	bolstering

the revolutions of 1989 by undercutting core Soviet alliances—including reuniting Germany within NATO—and helping evict the Soviet Union from Central-Eastern Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Second, rising states may employ a strengthening strategy that provides a declining great power intensive support to sustain the existing distribution of power. They do so by offering the declining state significant military, diplomatic, and economic backing to reduce the costs that a declining state incurs to maintain its security. These steps require a rising state to commit its own resources and risk confrontation with other states; they thus signal the declining state’s major importance to the rising state. The U.S. effort to reconstruct and protect Britain in the late 1940s by extending large-scale economic and security assistance illustrates this strategy.

A third, comparatively moderate strategy is weakening. With this strategy, a rising state tries to slowly shift the distribution of power against the declining state by, for example, engaging it in arms races, targeting its secondary interests (e.g., peripheral colonies), slowing its economic growth, or initiating diplomatic standoffs. Although unlikely to significantly harm the declining state immediately, these steps can produce large, cumulative gains for the rising state while allowing it to avoid incurring large immediate costs. The U.S. effort to launch a nuclear and conventional arms buildup and to impose sanctions on a declining Soviet Union in the mid-1980s is an example of a weakening strategy.

Fourth, rising states can pursue a bolstering strategy, judiciously working to

16. 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*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Spring 2016), pp. 7–44, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\_a\_00236.

maintain the status quo and prevent a declining state from slipping down the great power ranks without investing significant resources in the effort, and trying to avoid sacrificing important interests or relationships. Rising states are therefore likely to offer a declining state circumscribed diplomatic, political, and economic support on an ad hoc basis. Britain's ambivalence in aiding Austria-Hungary against Prussia in the 1860s exemplifies this strategy.

Beyond the preceding examples, a cursory review of diplomatic history shows that this typology captures important variation in rising-state strategy. A rising Rome, for instance, pursued a relegation strategy when it inaugurated the Third Punic War in 149 B.C.E., conquered the declining Carthaginian Empire, and razed Carthage.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, a rising Russia oscillated between a weakening and a relegation strategy vis-à-vis Sweden in the late 1600s and early 1700s, initially seeking to subvert Swedish dominance of the Baltic, before forging an offensive alliance and conquering Sweden's Baltic territories.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, France and the Ottoman Empire variously bolstered and strengthened Sweden: France attempted to broker peace between Sweden and Russia to forestall Sweden's defeat in the Great Northern War, while the Ottomans entered the conflict on Sweden's behalf.<sup>19</sup>

Relatively rising powers adopted similar strategies when managing the decline of the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, Austria and Russia exploited Ottoman weaknesses through both weakening strategies (e.g., inaugurating local boundary disputes) and relegation strategies (e.g., undertaking significant territorial conquests).<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, states including Britain, France, and Prussia supported the Ottomans using bolstering and strengthening strategies. Britain, France, and Prussia mediated Austro-Russian-Ottoman disputes, slowing the empire's losses to Austria and Russia (sometimes even restoring Ottoman control of conquered areas) and seeking to prevent the empire's collapse; Prussia also strengthened the empire in the late 1700s by extending it an alliance.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, France's decline in the late 1800s and early

17. Dexter Hoyos, *Mastering the West: Rome and Carthage at War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 246–268.

18. Robert I. Frost, *The Northern Wars: War, State, and Society in Northeastern Europe, 1558–1721* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 226–229, 242, 315–320; and Ragnhild Hatton, "Charles XII and the Great Northern War," in J.S. Bromley, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. 6 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 679.

19. Frost, *Northern Wars*, p. 296; and Hatton, "Charles XII," pp. 671–672.

20. Virginia H. Aksan, "War and Peace," in Suraiya N. Faroqhi, ed., *The Cambridge History of Modern Turkey*, Vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 101–112.

21. Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p. 108; Aksan, "War and Peace," pp. 109–110; Allan Cunningham, *Anglo-Ottoman Encounters in the Age of Revolution: Collected Essays*, Vol. 1, ed. Edward Ingram (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp. 144–180; and Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700–1870: An Empire Besieged* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 161–165, 243.

1900s saw Britain and Russia first bolster and then strengthen France, moving from general statements of support for France toward firm alliances.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, a rising Germany gradually shifted from a weakening strategy, designed to isolate France in European diplomatic circles, to a relegation strategy that emphasized preparations for attacking the country in an effort to dominate continental Europe.<sup>23</sup>

### *Predation Theory: Explaining Rising States' Strategy Choices*

In explaining the drivers and logic behind these different strategies, predation theory starts from the proposition that states exist in anarchy. To ensure their security and survival in anarchy, many states will therefore seek to increase their relative power, limit the strength of others, and (if possible) become the sole great power—the hegemon.<sup>24</sup> This does not mean that states look to gain at unlimited cost and risk to themselves. Not only might other states need to be kept from expanding, but maximizing power invites retaliation from states similarly worried for their own security and relative power.<sup>25</sup> A state considering expansion must therefore assess whether the benefits outweigh the risks. If they do not, the state will likely “wait for a more propitious moment” to increase its strength.<sup>26</sup>

All things being equal, states thus prefer to expand by minimizing the costs and risks to themselves. In particular, states seeking relative gains while limiting others' growth will want others to incur the costs of confronting great

22. For British strategy, see William L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments, 1871–1890* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), pp. 48–49; and Samuel R. Williamson Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904–1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969). On Russian policy, see Bernadotte E. Schmitt, “Triple Alliance and Triple Entente, 1902–1914,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (April 1924), pp. 453–458, doi.org/10.2307/1836520; William L. Langer, “The Franco-Russian Alliance (1890–1894),” *Slavonic Review*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (March 1925), pp. 565–575, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4201889>; and George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875–1890* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

23. Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the Development of Germany: The Period of Unification, 1815–1871* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), Kindle ed., loc. 6041–6433; Allan Mitchell, *Bismarck and the French Nation, 1848–1890* (New York: Pegasus, 1971), pp. 30–61; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918* (New York: Clarendon, 1955), pp. 221–225, 260–280, 316–317, 466–467; and Geiss, *German Foreign Policy*, pp. 68–71, 132–135.

24. Although power maximization is often considered part of offensive realism, it is also consistent with Kenneth N. Waltz's original neorealist formulation. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 113–118. For offensive realism, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001). I thank one of the reviewers for highlighting this point.

25. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 138–139; and Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 6.

26. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 37; and Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, p. 17.



power threats.<sup>27</sup> Ideally, this process will simultaneously weaken several actors—the targeted great power(s) and the state(s) bearing the costs of confrontation. States interested in maximizing power therefore often want partners to share the burdens of confronting threats and dividing competitors' attention.<sup>28</sup> Extending this logic, I argue that two factors drive the strategies of rising states: the strategic value of the declining state to the rising state, and the declining state's military posture.

#### STRATEGIC VALUE AND THE CHOICE OF PREDATION OR SUPPORT

Whether a rising state supports or preys on a declining great power depends first on whether a rising state can use a declining state to oppose other great power competitors. Declining states offer high strategic value and likely attract rising-state support when the following four conditions are met. The first condition is whether states other than the declining power can challenge a rising state's security, which is largely a function of polarity. In multipolarity, a rising state will want to share the costs of confronting additional great power threats.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, bipolarity makes cooperation unattractive, because the declining state is the rising power's principal challenge.

The second factor is whether a declining state is geographically positioned to assist the rising state against other powers and, in particular, is comparatively proximate to these threats. The closer a declining state is geographically to other great powers, the more likely it is that it can politically or militarily threaten these states or serve as a base for a rising power's own forces. These activities absorb other states' attention, limiting their ability to confront a rising state.<sup>30</sup> Conversely, a declining state that is geographically distant is less useful, as its isolation limits its ability to attract others' attention.

Third, a declining state must have the long-term potential to assist the rising state against other threats. Although it does not need to have military forces useful against competitors, it does need sufficient latent power—a large economy alongside advanced organizational and technological skills—for a rising state to conclude that if it proffers assistance, the declining state can eventually help against other threats. Fourth, a declining state must be available as a partner: it cannot be tightly aligned with a rising state's opponent(s), and there must be some domestic interest in cooperating with the rising power.<sup>31</sup>

27. Stephen M. Walt, *Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 17–18.

28. Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring 1990), p. 141, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706792>.

29. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 165–170.

30. Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, p. 23.

31. Glen H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 180–192, 352–355.

When the above conditions are met, a rising state will tend to support a declining power for three reasons. First, support helps a declining state remain comparatively stronger than it might otherwise be, prompting other states to focus on it and not the rising state. Second, support prevents other states from using the declining state against the rising power by partnering with it, or preying on it themselves. Third, support minimizes the risk of conflict with a declining power by reducing actions that can trigger confrontation.<sup>32</sup>

When some or all of the above conditions are absent, however, declining states offer low strategic value. Rising-state predation is then likely. First, when a rising state cannot use a declining power against other states, predation improves a rising state's relative position. In multipolarity, predation can facilitate expansion by weakening prospective competitors; in bipolarity, it can help a rising state eliminate the declining state as a competitor and facilitate hegemony. Second, predation limits dangers to a rising state if conflict erupts, as weakening a declining state reduces the likelihood of it being able to launch a successful attack against the rising state. Finally, predation denies the declining power as a partner to other states that may challenge the rising power.

#### MILITARY POSTURE AND RISING-STATE ASSERTIVENESS

After deciding whether to pursue a predatory or a supportive strategy, rising great powers must decide how much effort they are willing to invest in the effort. This choice is complicated by the risk that a declining state may still use force against its own opponents to ensure its security. Applying too much pressure against a declining power risks triggering a costly conflict before the rising state is prepared; offering too much support risks entangling the rising state in foreign adventures undertaken by an emboldened partner or sparking competition with other great powers.<sup>33</sup> Rising states therefore need to calibrate their assertiveness toward a declining great power to address these complications.

The declining state's military posture accounts for this variation. Military posture refers to a state's extant military capabilities in the most salient theater of reference and its ability to perform required military missions.<sup>34</sup> As states interact, they assess whether and how they can use military tools to pursue

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32. Copeland, *Origins of Major War*, pp. 37–42.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–25.

34. Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 44, 110–111; John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

their interests. These assessments go beyond raw measures of military potential to include “quantitative measures and qualitative indicators” of military strength, describing how forces are trained, positioned, and equipped for specific military scenario(s).<sup>35</sup> For example, for a great power protecting distant colonies, posture involves the quality, size, and sustainability of its expeditionary forces; for a power contemplating war with other capable states, posture hinges on fielding capable land forces and supporting air and naval units; for a state protecting its homeland, posture involves having sufficient conventional or nuclear forces to blunt or deter an attack.

I distinguish between two archetypical military postures: robust and weak. A declining state with a robust military posture can deter attacks if it is challenged or impose meaningful costs if deterrence fails.<sup>36</sup> Such states generally have numerous, well-equipped, and motivated forces capable of a variety of missions, able to deploy to a fight and to remain in the field; if the state has nuclear weapons, its conventional and nuclear assets are integrated.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, a declining state with a weak military posture lacks the capabilities to deter an attack or to impose meaningful costs in a conflict. It may be unable to deploy, field, or sustain adequate forces to address a threat; it may lack training, equipment, and staying power; or it may be unable to credibly threaten nuclear retaliation. For instance, funding shortfalls, inadequate training, and internal dissent caused observers before 1914 to discount the Austro-Hungarian army’s likely wartime performance.<sup>38</sup>

Importantly, military posture operates independently of strategic value, as the factors driving strategic value affect a state’s military capabilities only indirectly. Neither a state’s availability as a partner nor the presence of other great powers determines the size and quality of its military. Nor does a state’s geographic position determine its military posture. For instance, Britain maintained a robust military for continental operations before 1914 and prepared to deploy its highly trained army to Europe, only to gut its military and foreclose continental commitments after World War I.<sup>39</sup> Above all, military posture is

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35. Keren Yarhi-Milo, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper, “To Arm or Ally? The Patron’s Dilemma and the Strategic Logic of Arms Transfers and Alliances,” *International Security*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Fall 2016), p. 99, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\_a\_00250.

36. On creating effective militaries, see Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator’s Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2015).

37. On the interaction between deterrence and warfighting, see Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 24–25; and Barry R. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

38. Tim Hadley, “Military Diplomacy in the Dual Alliance: German Military Attaché Reporting from Vienna, 1906–1914,” *War in History*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2010), pp. 294–312, doi.org/10.1177/0968344510365421.

39. Samuel R. Williamson Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904–*

distinct from a state's long-term potential. At root, it reflects the state's decision to convert latent power into actualized capabilities.<sup>40</sup> In turn, a state's willingness to transform latent power into actualized capabilities can give relatively weak states disproportionately robust militaries, or it could leave strong states with disproportionately weak militaries. The Soviet Union, for example, kept pace militarily with the United States until the late 1980s, despite possessing a substantially weaker economic base, by investing disproportionately in its military; in contrast, contemporary Japan maintains a comparatively weak military despite its large economy.<sup>41</sup>

A declining great power's military posture influences rising-state strategy by signaling both the declining state's ability to provide security for itself and the threat it poses to others. Robust postures make other states worry about their security. For predatory rising states, maximizing power at the expense of a declining state that can defend itself risks pushing the declining state into launching a preventive war or exacerbating tensions that eventually trigger costly conflict.<sup>42</sup> Yet, states interested in supporting a declining great power also face problems, because a declining state with a robust military can readily betray or attack its partners. It can also threaten other states, potentially ensnaring a rising state in undesired conflicts by provoking third parties and encouraging counterbalancing.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, declining states with robust militaries signal to potential backers that, because they can defend themselves, they do not need significant assistance, as the risk of their being exploited or pushed into alignment with other actors remains manageable.

In contrast, weak military postures reduce and clarify the risks of rising states using intense means to prey on or support a declining state. First, the likelihood and consequences of a war being initiated by a declining great power shrink, as other states can readily defeat an attack and the declining state recognizes as much. The risk of provoking third parties and ensnaring a rising state in undesired conflicts diminishes for the same reason. Likewise, a declining power unable to defend itself signals to a rising state that it needs to move expeditiously to prevent the declining state from being lost as a partner or to preclude other states from gaining from its weakness.

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1914 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); and Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972).

40. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, pp. 41–43.

41. Noel E. Firth and James H. Noren, *Soviet Defense Spending: A History of CIA Estimates, 1950–1990* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), pp. 129–130; and Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007).

42. Copeland, *Origins of Major War*, pp. 16–17.

43. Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, pp. 181–186.

SHAPING STRATEGY: STRATEGIC VALUE AND MILITARY POSTURE

Together, the strategic value and military posture of a declining great power explain when and why rising states adopt certain strategies (see figure 2). At one extreme, relegation is likely when a declining state has low strategic value and a weak military posture. Here, a rising state calculates that it engages in intensive predation to eliminate a potential challenger while facing few risks from the declining state. Alternatively, weakening emerges when a declining state lacks strategic value yet retains a robust military. With weakening, rising states see predation as strategically attractive, yet also recognize that a robustly postured declining state can use force to penalize too much predation.<sup>44</sup> Rising states therefore constrain their assertiveness. Bolstering, meanwhile, occurs when a declining state has high strategic value and a robust posture. Here, a rising power supports a declining state to help oppose other threats, while limiting its assistance in order to circumscribe its exposure to a declining state's misbehavior or adverse responses by other states. Finally, strengthening occurs when a declining state has high strategic value but a weak posture, as rising powers work intensely to sustain (and potentially rebuild) a declining state's strength. These steps are unlikely to allow the declining state to recover enough to challenge the rising state. Instead, the intention is to prevent a declining state from falling any further and to block other states from either gaining at the declining state's expense or making it a partner. In the process, a rising state calculates that it can limit both its exposure to entrapment by the declining state and tensions with other great powers by using its economic and military assistance to restrain the declining state or by reducing cooperation with the declining power.

*Alternate Arguments: Economics and Ideology*

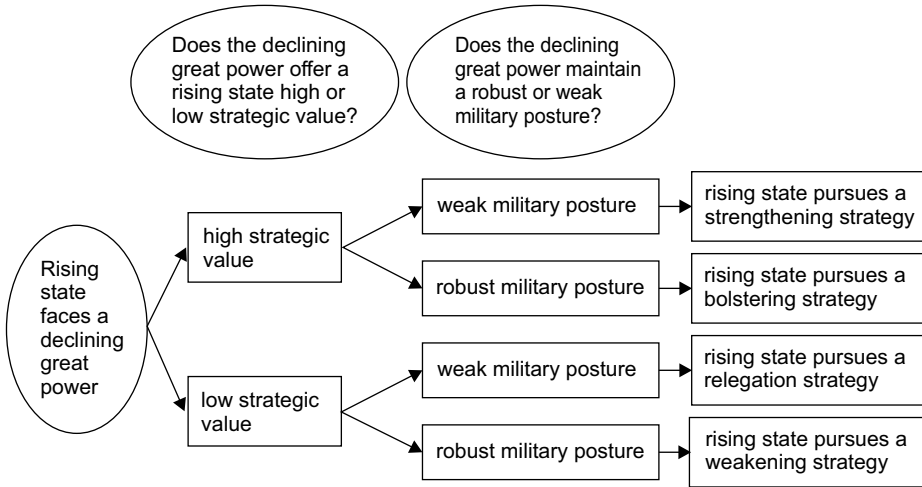
Scholars offer various arguments for understanding the drivers of rising-state strategy; two of the most prominent concern the influence of, respectively, economic interdependence and political ideologies. The first argument is that economic interdependence can reduce rising-state predation and incentivize support for a declining state.<sup>45</sup> It does this by creating domestic groups whose livelihoods depend on continued economic exchange, leading such groups to oppose predatory policies that may upset bilateral relations. This behavior should be especially intense when rising states expect continued economic ex-

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44. Gilpin, "Theory of Hegemonic War," p. 602.

45. Lobell, *Challenge of Hegemony*; and Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007).

Figure 2. Strategic Value, Military Posture, and Strategy Choices of Rising States



change.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, predation is more plausible in rising or declining states with closed economies. The second argument holds that a rising state with an ideology similar to the that of a declining power should offer it support; a rising state with a different ideology is likely to engage in predation.<sup>47</sup> Several mechanisms may explain this phenomena. For example, support for a declining state with a similar ideology may strengthen a rising state's domestic legitimacy or reflect reduced threat perceptions; rising-state predation toward ideological rivals can also bolster the state's domestic legitimacy.<sup>48</sup> Although plausible, I show that neither argument satisfactorily explains rising-state strategy in practice: predation and support take place across ideological divides and levels of interdependence.

### Testing Predation Theory

To demonstrate that predation theory best explains the strategies that rising states adopt toward declining great powers, I evaluate the universe of rising and declining state interactions in post-1945 Europe. I begin by coding states that qualify as great powers after 1945 and identifying the periods in

46. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War*.

47. Haas, *Ideological Origins*, p. 1; and Henry Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002).

48. Hal Brands, "The Lost Art of Long-Term Competition," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter 2019), pp. 36–37, doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1556559.

which they declined.<sup>49</sup> The results show that both Britain and the Soviet Union declined as great powers during this period, with the United States and the Soviet Union gaining relative to Britain in the late 1940s, and the United States rising vis-à-vis the Soviet Union from the mid-1980s through the early 1990s.

The British and Soviet cases are useful for testing my theory for two reasons. First, both are rich in data, allowing employment of congruence procedures and process tracing to track the course and drivers of rising-state behavior. By showing sequences of events, outcomes, and the arguments employed by leaders at the time, I can evaluate the predictions and mechanisms of predation theory and the alternate arguments.<sup>50</sup> Second, both cases offer strong tests of the competing arguments.<sup>51</sup> Each case features large values on variables emphasized by one or more of the alternative arguments; likewise, my theory and the alternates generally make discrete and divergent empirical predictions. Hence, if predation theory or alternative approaches explain rising-state behavior, they should do so in observable ways.

### *British Decline: U.S. and Soviet Responses, 1945–49*

By 1949–50, Britain had ceased to be a great power; despite appearing on William Fox's initial 1944 list of "superpowers," the country underwent considerable decline relative to the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> Arguments that emphasize ideological affinity and economic interdependence, meanwhile, seemingly provide compelling accounts of the strategies adopted by the relatively rising United States and the Soviet Union. In fact, many studies suggest that this period witnessed the consolidation of a U.S.-British "special relationship," involving extensive economic and military collaboration, just as competition between the Soviets and the British began to develop in earnest. And, indeed, considering the similarity of the ideologies of the United States and Britain and the two countries' significant economic interdependence in the form of wartime aid and plans for postwar economic collaboration, one would expect intense U.S. support.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, dissimilar British

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49. For measurement procedures, see the online appendix at [doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WZJPGY](https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WZJPGY).

50. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 181–232.

51. Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 31, 79–93.

52. William T.R. Fox, *The Super-Powers: The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union—Their Responsibility for Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1944).

53. Haas, *Ideological Origins*, p. 2; and G. John Ikenberry, "A World Economy Restored: Expert Consensus and the Anglo-American Postwar Settlement," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 1992), pp. 294–305, [doi.org/10.1017/S002081830000151X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081830000151X).

and Soviet ideologies and the absence of significant Soviet-British economic ties seemingly gave the Soviet Union incentives to prey on a weakened Britain.

These accounts cannot explain two empirical puzzles, however. First, from the end of World War II into 1947, both the United States and the Soviet Union provided limited support to Britain; only after late 1947 did their strategies diverge as the United States continued backing Britain, while the Soviet Union turned predatory. Second, whereas the United States and the Soviet Union offered limited support to Britain from 1945 to 1946, both intensified their efforts starting in early 1947; the United States extended significant economic aid and military guarantees, while the Soviet Union offered Britain an alliance. Considering that U.S.-British and Soviet-British ideological affinities and economic interdependence did not change during this period, these developments are difficult for competing arguments to explain.

In contrast, predation theory explains trends in U.S.-British and U.S.-Soviet relations by linking U.S. and Soviet strategies to shifts in Britain's strategic value and military posture. Immediately after 1945, Britain offered high value to both the United States and the Soviet Union: each could use Britain as a partner, just as Britain—situated between the United States and the Soviet Union—was geographically positioned to help either state against the other. Moreover, given the fluidity of postwar British politics and the 1945 electoral triumph of the Labour Party (many of whose members sought Soviet-British cooperation<sup>54</sup>), there was some possibility that Britain would partner with either side.<sup>55</sup> Instead, only after Britain's value to the Soviet Union waned in late 1947, amid growing anti-Soviet sentiment among British leaders and deepening U.S.-British alignment, does my theory expect Soviet and U.S. strategies to diverge: from late 1947 onward, Britain's high value to the United States helps explain U.S. support, whereas Britain's low value to the Soviet Union accounts for Soviet predation.

Changes in Britain's military posture, meanwhile, should have affected the assertiveness of U.S. and Soviet strategies. Britain maintained a robust military posture from 1945 through 1946, thereby incentivizing the United States and the Soviet Union to offer support using limited means. That said, the theory expects early 1947 to be an inflection point, as Britain greatly reduced its military capacity, thus pushing the United States and the Soviet Union into intensi-

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54. Wayne Knight, "Labourite Britain: America's 'Sure Friend?' The Anglo-Soviet Treaty Issue, 1947," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (October 1983), pp. 267–282, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1983.tb00395.x.

55. Terry H. Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War, 1944–1947* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), pp. 157–158.



fyng their support for fear of losing Britain as a partner. Only after Britain aligned firmly with the United States did the Soviets' strategy turn predatory.

There is, however, one important caveat: although this case study focuses on a period in which the Cold War's political divisions developed, U.S. and Soviet strategies vis-à-vis Britain constitute a stand-alone subject. At root, Cold War dynamics did not dictate the relations of either rising power with Britain. Not only is it unclear whether a firm "Cold War consensus" mandating U.S.-Soviet competition for power and influence existed in the mid-to-late 1940s, but, amid emerging rivalry, the substance of U.S. and Soviet policies regarding Britain remains underspecified.<sup>56</sup> As importantly, U.S. and Soviet strategists were grappling with Britain's decline in 1944–45, before the idea of U.S.-Soviet rivalry had gained traction. Combined, a more logical explanation is that Britain's strategic value and military posture—not Cold War politics—drove U.S.-British and Soviet-British relations.

#### BRITAIN'S POSTWAR POSITION

World War II severely damaged Britain's economy, left the country deeply in debt,<sup>57</sup> and deprived it of traditional sources of revenue to facilitate its postwar recovery.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, the growing strength of the United States and the Soviet Union meant that Britain's problems translated into the state's relative losses. U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), for instance, doubled during the war, while the Soviet Union doubled its industrial potential compared to pre-war levels by the early 1950s.<sup>59</sup> Still, British strategists were determined to prevent any state from dominating Europe and threatening Britain's security. In context, this meant the Soviet Union.<sup>60</sup> The Soviet Union's relative strength,

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56. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 22. On the permeability of the "Cold War consensus" in the 1940s, see Ronald R. Krebs, "How Dominant Narratives Rise and Fall: Military Conflict, Politics, and the Cold War Consensus," *International Organization*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Fall 2015), pp. 1–37, doi.org/10.1017/S0020818315000181.

57. Damage was estimated at \$5.8 billion and debt at \$13.5 billion, against a GDP of approximately \$40 billion. *Statistical Material Presented during the Washington Negotiations* (Washington, D.C.: British Information Services, 1945), pp. 11, 13, [https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/historical/martin/18\\_02\\_194512xx.pdf](https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/historical/martin/18_02_194512xx.pdf). British GDP calculated from "A Millennium of Macroeconomic Data," April 30, 2017, distributed by Bank of England, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/statistics/research-datasets>.

58. Richard N. Gardner, *Sterling Dollar Diplomacy: Anglo-American Collaboration in the Reconstruction of Multilateral Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), p. 307.

59. Angus Maddison, "Statistics on World Population, GDP, and Per Capita GDP, 1–2008 AD" (Groningen, Netherlands: University of Groningen, 2008), <http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/oriindex.htm>; and Paul Bairoch, "International Industrialization Levels from 1750 to 1980," *Journal of European Economic History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Fall 1982), p. 299.

60. Geoffrey Warner, "From 'Ally' to Enemy: Britain's Relations with the Soviet Union, 1941–8," in Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, eds., *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943–53* (London, Macmillan, 1996), pp. 297–300.

however, meant that British efforts to balance the Soviets were risky, as opposing the Soviets in the short term could trigger a Soviet-British rivalry that a declining Britain could not win.<sup>61</sup>

Britain's preferred solution was twofold: a firm U.S. security commitment to deter Soviet aggrandizement and significant U.S. assistance to facilitate recovery.<sup>62</sup> Theoretically, if the United States retrenched as it did after World War I, Britain could otherwise attempt to construct a Western European bloc using other resources. These resources, however, were likely unavailable, and mobilizing Western Europe risked antagonizing the United States and exacerbating Soviet-British tensions.<sup>63</sup>

With U.S. policymakers having rejected Britain's wartime request for a peacetime U.S.-British alliance, British leaders immediately after the war pursued a mixed strategy calling for a strong military in Europe to hedge against U.S. withdrawal, deter Soviet aggression, and prepare for a potential British-led European bloc.<sup>64</sup> By 1946, Britain possessed the second-largest military in Europe, having poured resources into sustaining large ground and air forces optimized for deterrence and defense.<sup>65</sup> Admittedly, British ground units were tasked primarily with occupying strategically valuable territories (e.g., Germany).<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, Britain worked to sustain unit readiness while pre-

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61. Orme Sargent's paper, "Stocktaking after V.E. Day," 11 July 1945 (revised version), doc. 39, in Graham Ross, ed., *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1941-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 210-217; and Anderson, *United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War*, pp. 11-12.

62. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2006), pp. 16-18.

63. Sean Greenwood, "Ernest Bevin, France, and 'Western Union': August 1945-February 1946," *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1984), pp. 320-321, doi.org/10.1177/026569148401400303.

64. For additional details on British military posture in 1945-46, see Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 53-55.

65. By mid-1946, Britain had more than 360,000 personnel stationed in Europe, compared with 330,000 for the United States and 1.6 million for the Soviet Union; figures include only forces stationed outside Soviet and British homelands. U.S. figures reported in Walter Elkins, "United States Forces European Theater," [https://www.usarmygermany.com/Sont.htm?https&&www.usarmygermany.com/Units/Occupation/USAREUR\\_HqUSFET.htm](https://www.usarmygermany.com/Sont.htm?https&&www.usarmygermany.com/Units/Occupation/USAREUR_HqUSFET.htm). For the Soviet force number, see Central Intelligence Agency, "Effect of Demobilization on Soviet Military Potential; Effects of Soviet Propaganda," Weekly Summary, 20 September 1946, doc. 10, in Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2007); and Cristann L. Gibson, "Patterns of Demobilization: The US and USSR after World War Two," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1983, p. 309. British forces estimated from Chiefs of Staff, "Memorandum on the Size of the Armed Forces—30th June, 1946 and 31st December, 1946," February 13, 1946, Appendix A, DO (46) 20, The National Archives (Britain, henceforth NA), London; Chiefs of Staff, "Call-Up to the Forces in the Transitional Period," May 10, 1946, DO (46) 66, NA; and Secretary of State for War, "Size of the Army at 31st December, 1946," July 15, 1946, DO (46) 91, NA. British estimates do not include air force personnel.

66. Defence Committee, "Minutes of a Meeting Held at No. 10 Downing Street on Friday, 11th January, 1946, at 11:30 a.m.," DO (46) 1st meeting, NA; Chiefs of Staff, "Memorandum on the Size of the Armed Forces—30th June, 1946 and 31st December, 1946" and Annex, February 13, 1946, DO

paring for possible future conflicts by designing air, sea, and land forces to serve as the nucleus for units that would be mobilized after hostilities; maintaining lines of communication; and obtaining bases from which air power could be directed against the Soviet Union.<sup>67</sup> British war plans, meanwhile, called for standing forces to defend as far forward for as long as possible while air power attrited an opponent's strength and Britain mobilized.<sup>68</sup>

#### THE UNITED STATES' BOLSTERING STRATEGY, 1945–46

Immediately after the war, U.S. strategy was premised on reaching an understanding with Britain and the Soviet Union on postwar European security that limited U.S. involvement in continental affairs. U.S. plans established before the 1945 Yalta and Potsdam Conferences envisioned separate spheres of influence in which the Soviet Union dominated Eastern Europe, and Britain and the United States oversaw Western Europe.<sup>69</sup> In practice, this approach gave Britain primary responsibility for Western Europe, with President Franklin Roosevelt explaining: "In as much as the United States is approximately 3,500 miles removed from Europe, it is not its natural task to bear the postwar burden of re-constituting France, Italy and the Balkans. This is properly the task of Great Britain which is far more vitally interested than is the United States."<sup>70</sup> The United States would not abandon Europe, but day-to-day management of European affairs would be left to the Soviet Union and Britain.<sup>71</sup>

(46) 20, NA; and Chiefs of Staff, "Strength of the Armed Forces at 31st December, 1946 and 31st March, 1948," November 8, 1946, DO (46) 135, NA.

67. Defence Committee, "Minutes of a Meeting Held at No. 10 Downing Street on Friday, 15th February, 1946, at 11:30 a.m.," DO (46) 5th meeting, NA; Chairman of the Manpower Committee, "Call Up of Forces in the Transitional Period," May 10, 1946, CP (46) 194, NA; Chiefs of Staff, "Strength of the Armed Forces at 31st December, 1946 and 31st March, 1948"; Defence Committee, "Minutes of a Meeting Held at No. 10 Downing Street on Friday, 17th May, 1946 at 5:30 p.m.," DO (46) 16th meeting, NA; L.V. Scott, *Conscription and the Attlee Governments: The Politics and Policy of National Service, 1945–1951* (New York: Clarendon, 1993), pp. 46–64; Anthony Gorst, "'We Must Cut Our Coat According to Our Cloth': The Making of British Defence Policy, 1945–8," in Richard J. Aldrich, ed., *British Intelligence, Strategy, and the Cold War, 1945–51* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 143–165; and Paul Cornish, "Learning New Lessons: The British Army and the Strategic Debate, 1945–50," in Hew Strachan, ed., *Big Wars and Small Wars: The British Army and the Lessons of War in the 20th Century* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2006), pp. 58–59.

68. Donald C. Watt, "British Military Perceptions of the Soviet Union as a Strategic Threat, 1945–1950," in Josef Becker and Franz Knipping, eds., *Power in Europe? Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany in a Postwar World, 1945–1950* (New York: de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 331–333; Chiefs of Staff Committee, "Strategic Position of the British Commonwealth," April 18, 1946, COS (46) 119 (0), NA; and Chiefs of Staff, "Strength of the Armed Forces at 31st December, 1946 and 31st March, 1948."

69. Mark S. Sheetz, "Exit Strategies: American Grand Designs for Postwar European Security," *Security Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1999), p. 18, doi.org/10.1080/09636419908429385; and Randall Bennett Woods, *A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941–1946* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 256.

70. Quoted in Sheetz, "Exit Strategies," p. 18.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

The United States' desire to pass the buck to Britain while sustaining great power cooperation provided the rationale for its bolstering strategy. Maintaining warm but limited U.S.-British relations might lessen Soviet concerns of a united U.S.-British front. As Chief of Staff William Leahy advised Presidents Roosevelt and Harry Truman in 1944–45, to “present Russia with any agreement on [European security] as between the British and ourselves, prior to consultation with Russia, might well . . . lead eventually to a situation we most wish to avoid.”<sup>72</sup> Equally important, the United States sought to avoid entanglement in Soviet-British disputes. As the Joint Intelligence Staff warned, Britain sought “to improve her position in every possible way in order to bring her more nearly to Russia’s level,” risking a conflict that could “rapidly involve other countries.”<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, the United States regarded Britain as its “first line of defense,” but circumscribing the relationship mitigated the risk of conflict in the first place by neither emboldening Britain nor antagonizing the Soviet Union.<sup>74</sup>

The United States thus moved toward limited support for Britain in 1945–46. In military affairs, U.S. strategists quickly passed responsibility for Western Europe’s security to Britain and reduced U.S. forces in Europe from 3.1 million troops in mid-1945 to barely 300,000 one year later.<sup>75</sup> Nor did the United States extend Britain credible security guarantees: if war came, plans called for withdrawing U.S. forces from Europe and avoiding for as long as possible involvement in what was assumed would be a British-Soviet fight.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, this matter was not open to renegotiation, as the United States rebuffed British calls for joint military planning.<sup>77</sup>

The United States also limited its economic support to Britain. Contravening wartime agreements, President Truman unilaterally curtailed Lend-Lease assistance to Britain once the war ended.<sup>78</sup> When Britain subsequently sought

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72. British Plans for a Western European Bloc, undated, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1945: Potsdam*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1960), p. 256, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=article&did=FRUS.FRUS1945Berlinv01.i0002&id=FRUS.FRUS1945Berlinv01&isize=M>. References to the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series will be given as *FRUS, Year: Volume* following the first citation.

73. Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Military Capabilities and Intentions of Great Britain,” December 17, 1945, JOS 161/6, box 81, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Geographic File 1942–1945, RG 218, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

74. British Plans, *FRUS, 1945: Potsdam*, Vol. 1, pp. 259, 264.

75. Steven T. Ross, *American War Plans: 1945–1950* (Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 1996), p. 11; John C. Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1952), pp. 265–277, 320–321; and James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943–1954* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 46–49.

76. Ross, *American War Plans*, pp. 26–54.

77. Secretary of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, *Papers and Minutes of the Terminal Conference, July 1945* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1945), p. 95.

78. Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, pp. 65–66, 84–85.

economic aid in late 1945–46 to facilitate its economic recovery, U.S. policy-makers drove a hard bargain in what became the 1946 Anglo-American Loan, offering less aid than requested and insisting on a loan rather than a grant.<sup>79</sup> U.S. negotiators also demanded that Britain quickly make its currency convertible into dollars, undercutting Britain's ability to revive trade within a bloc centered on the British Commonwealth.

In diplomatic affairs, meanwhile, U.S. officials refused to coordinate U.S.-British policy in Europe, given concerns that the Soviet Union might conclude Britain and the United States were "ganging up" against it.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, even as U.S.-Soviet relations worsened in 1945–46 over the future of Germany and seeming Soviet threats to the Near East, the United States refrained from regular diplomatic collaboration with Britain. U.S. diplomatic notes meant to back Turkey against the Soviets, for example, were delivered unilaterally.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, only heavy British lobbying convinced the United States to issue a joint *démarche* demanding withdrawal of Soviet forces from Iran in early 1946.<sup>82</sup>

To be clear, U.S. strategists recognized the importance of preserving Britain as a great power. As the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee put it in 1946, 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 economically and militarily."<sup>83</sup> This conclusion echoed a 1945 State Department analysis calling for preservation of the existing "relationship in military potential" among Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States.<sup>84</sup> Still, the United States was not about to give "a blank check of American support" when Britain could imperil U.S. security. Instead, support would be given only in what the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee termed "areas and interests . . . vital to the maintenance of the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth of nations as a great power," and it would be limited to moderate economic, military, and political backing.<sup>85</sup> A 1945 analysis by the

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79. *Ibid.*, pp. 189–198.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–162; and quotation from Joseph Edward Davies, "First Talk with Truman," April 30, 1945, Library of Congress, Joseph Edward Davies Papers, box 16, series 1.

81. Ritchie Ovendale, *The English-Speaking Alliance: Britain, the United States, the Dominions, and the Cold War, 1945–51* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1985), p. 41.

82. Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945–1951* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 234–237.

83. Memorandum by the Acting Department of State Member, *FRUS, 1946: General*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972) p. 1170, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=article&did=FRUS.FRUS1946v01.i0002&id=FRUS.FRUS1946v01&isize=M&q1=blank%20check%20of%20American%20support>.

84. Memorandum Prepared for the Secretary's Staff Committee, November 16, 1945, *FRUS, 1946: 1*, p. 1126.

85. Memorandum by the Acting Department of State Member, *FRUS, 1946: 1*, p. 1170.

Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) is instructive in this regard. Arguing for “mutual cooperation between Britain, Russia, and ourselves,” JCS members cautioned that the “greatest likelihood of eventual conflict between Britain and Russia would seem to grow out of either nation initiating attempts to build up its strength, by seeking to attach to herself parts of Europe to the disadvantage . . . of her potential adversary.”<sup>86</sup> Nor was the JCS alone in this assessment, as analysts ranging from State Department bureaucrats to Secretary of War Henry Stimson warned against what one scholar terms Britain’s “obvious desire to enlist American might in the creation of a solid bloc opposing the Russians.”<sup>87</sup>

THE SOVIET UNION’S BOLSTERING STRATEGY, 1945–46

The Soviet Union adopted a bolstering strategy in 1945–46 similar to the United States’. Postwar Soviet policy, first outlined in a series of 1944–45 reports, envisioned an opportunity for sustained cooperation with Britain.<sup>88</sup> After all, the two states shared an interest in preventing Germany’s resurgence,<sup>89</sup> just as the United States—a rising and “dynamic imperialist” power—might challenge both countries by first preying upon a declining Britain before targeting the Soviet Union.<sup>90</sup> It was thus “to the USSR’s interest to keep Britain as a strong power.”<sup>91</sup> Of course, doing so would be difficult if Britain engaged in its own provocative behavior and targeted the Soviet Union.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, the Soviet Union and Britain had put aside differences during the war, just as postwar planners recognized the importance of preventing the creation of what one Soviet diplomat termed “a bloc of Great Britain and the U.S.A. against us.”<sup>93</sup>

Soviet strategists therefore proposed dividing Europe into Soviet and British

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86. Excerpts from a Letter from the Chiefs of Staff, *FRUS, 1945: Potsdam*, 1, p. 265.

87. Quote from Hathaway, *Ambiguous Partnership*, p. 137; and Robert Messer, *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 147–148.

88. 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,” Working Paper No. 13 (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars [WWICS], 1995), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-big-three-after-world-war-ii-new-documents-soviet-thinking-about-post-war-relations>.

89. Vladislav M. Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 29–35.

90. Pechatnov, “The Big Three After World War II,” p. 4.

91. Quoted in Aleksei M. Filitov, “Problems of Post-War Reconstruction in Soviet Foreign Policy Conceptions during World War II,” in Gori and Pons, *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943–53*, p. 12.

92. Filitov, “Problems of Post-War Reconstruction,” p. 13.

93. Vladimir O. Pechatnov and C. Earl Edmondson, “The Russian Perspective,” in Ralph B. Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War: American and Russian Perspectives* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 100.

spheres of interest. Paralleling the United States' plans, the Soviet Union would control most of Eastern Europe, Sweden, parts of the Balkans, and Turkey, while Britain would have influence over Belgium, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain; Denmark, Germany, and Italy, meanwhile, would constitute a neutral zone.<sup>94</sup> Except for Sweden and Turkey—where the Soviets allowed that they might have to “compromise”—the Soviet sphere covered areas already under Soviet occupation, while Britain's sphere encompassed nearly all of Western Europe.<sup>95</sup> The result would be an “Anglo-Soviet strategic condominium.”<sup>96</sup>

Soviet policy embraced this spheres-of-influence solution. “At no point,” historians Constantine Pleshakov and Vladislav Zubok observe, “did Joseph Stalin's demands and ambitions in 1945–1946 exceed the maximum zone of responsibility” per the 1944–45 planning documents.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, Stalin agreed to a 1944 British proposal to divide Southeastern Europe into Soviet and British areas.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, when Greek communists tried to overthrow the British-backed Greek government, Stalin refused to endorse them, reasoning that “in relation to bourgeois politicians, you have to be careful”; there was no telling how British or U.S. leaders might respond.<sup>99</sup>

Soviet policy also reinforced Britain's position in Western Europe. In 1945–46, Soviet leaders agreed to Western calls to divide Germany into Soviet and Western sectors. Although this altered plans to keep Germany neutral, division was consistent with a spheres-of-influence approach. The Soviets further tried to discourage local communist parties from opposing what were expected to be British-led reconstruction efforts. To this end, Soviet policy encouraged communists in France and Italy to cooperate in stabilizing postwar Western European politics, and tried to prevent German communists from quickly constructing a socialist state in the Soviet sector.<sup>100</sup>

94. Filitov, “Problems of Post-War Reconstruction,” p. 13.

95. Silvio Pons, “In the Aftermath of the Age of Wars: The Impact of World War II on Soviet Security Policy,” in Pons and Andrea Romano, eds., *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914–1945* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000), p. 300.

96. Pechatnov, “The Big Three After World War II,” p. 14.

97. Zubok and Pleshakov, *Kremlin's Cold War*, p. 38.

98. Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 217–225.

99. Roberts, *Stalin's Wars*, p. 235; and Gerhard Wettig, *Stalin and the Cold War in Europe: The Emergence and Development of East-West Conflict, 1939–1953* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), p. 52.

100. Eduard Mark, “Revolution by Degrees: Stalin's National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941–1947,” Working Paper No. 31 (Washington D.C.: WWICS, February 2001), pp. 34–36, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/revolution-degrees-stalins-national-front-strategy-for-europe-1941-1947>; Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 72; and Wettig, *Stalin and the Cold War in Europe*, p. 111.

Concurrently, Soviet military policy limited the threat posed to Western Europe and, with it, Britain. Despite being the strongest European military power after the war, the Soviet Union moderated its military challenge and withdrew forces from areas in the British sphere. Remaining forces in the Soviet sphere, meanwhile, were heavily demobilized and were estimated in 1946 as barely adequate for occupation duties, let alone attacking Western Europe.<sup>101</sup>

Not all Soviet policies appeared benign to British analysts, however, with Soviet moves against Greece, Iran, and Turkey in 1945–46, in particular, taken as evidence of Soviet plans to exploit Britain's problems.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the evidence is mixed. Even while attempting to restrain communists eager to challenge the British in Greece, for example, the Soviet Union pressured Turkey to allow it access through the Turkish Straits; still, contemporary reports of a Soviet military buildup against Turkey to back up Soviet demands appear to have been overstated.<sup>103</sup> Likewise, the Soviet Union violated an agreement to withdraw its forces from Iran (stationed there during the war) by March 1946.<sup>104</sup> The resulting crisis was resolved when the United States joined Britain in calling for Soviet withdrawal. As Stalin explained, failure to retrench would otherwise justify a U.S.-British military presence in Iran and spur further cooperation between Washington and London.<sup>105</sup>

#### THE 1947 SHIFT IN BRITAIN'S MILITARY POSTURE

Despite U.S. and Soviet bolstering, British military power collapsed in the winter of 1946–47.<sup>106</sup> Amid mounting economic problems, the British government announced plans for a major military drawdown:<sup>107</sup> forces in Greece, Italy, and Austria would withdraw; assets in Germany would be kept at minimal strength; and the number of units would be substantially reduced.<sup>108</sup> Aid to Greece and Turkey would also cease. By 1948–49, the British army was re-

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101. Gibson, "Patterns of Demobilization," pp. 200–215; and Matthew Evangelista, "Stalin's Post-war Army Reappraised," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Winter 1982), pp. 112–114, doi.org/10.2307/2538554.

102. Pechatnov and Edmondson, "The Russian Perspective," p. 111.

103. Eduard Mark, "The War Scare of 1946 and its Consequences," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 409–410, doi.org/10.1111/1467-7709.00078.

104. John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War: 1941–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 309–312.

105. Roberts, *Stalin's Wars*, p. 309.

106. Chancellor of the Exchequer, "Defence Estimates for 1947–1948," January 13, 1947, DO (47) 9, NA.

107. See table 1 in the online appendix.

108. Defence Committee, "Strength of the Armed Forces at 31st December 1946 and 31st March 1948," November 8, 1946; "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet Held at 10 Downing Street on Friday, 17th January, 1947," CM(47)9, NA; and Minister of Defence, "Defence Requirements," September 15, 1947, DO (47) 68, NA.



duced to approximately two understrength divisions in Europe with additional cuts ongoing.<sup>109</sup> The Royal Navy experienced similarly drastic cuts, while the Royal Air Force was left with only a small number of aging planes.<sup>110</sup> Collectively, the British military could no longer plausibly service the country's commitments.<sup>111</sup>

THE UNITED STATES' STRENGTHENING STRATEGY, 1947–49

Britain's collapse shocked U.S. policymakers. According to State Department analysts, Britain "seemed to feel itself unable to maintain its imperial structure on the same scale as in the past."<sup>112</sup> Without increased aid, the country might bandwagon and reach "terms with the Soviet Union" that "would greatly strengthen the Soviet Union [. . . and] tend to isolate the United States."<sup>113</sup>

Seeking Britain's "loyal cooperation," the United States adopted a strengthening strategy.<sup>114</sup> As British force reductions commenced, beginning in Greece and Turkey, the Truman administration extended military and economic assistance to both countries.<sup>115</sup> But as Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson emphasized, Britain's pullout from Greece and Turkey represented "part of a much larger problem growing out of the change in Great Britain's strength."<sup>116</sup> Hence, when British policymakers alerted U.S. officials in mid-1947 that the Anglo-American Loan was nearly exhausted, the United States assumed financial responsibility for Britain's share of the German occupation. Contravening the terms of the Loan, it also allowed Britain to suspend pound-dollar convertibility.<sup>117</sup>

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109. Minister of Defence, "The Defence Position" and Annexes, July 26, 1948, DO (48) 46, NA; and Chiefs of Staff, "Western European Defence—United Kingdom Commitment," June 17, 1949, DO (49) 45, NA.

110. Minister of Defence, "The Defence Position" and Annexes; Defence Committee, "Minutes of a Meeting Held at No. 10 Downing Street, on Tuesday, 14th January, 1947," DO (47) 2nd meeting; Minister of Defence, "Defence Requirements," September 15, 1947; and Minister of Defence, "The Requirements of National Defence: Size and Shape of the Armed Forces 1950–1953," October 18, 1949, DO (49) 66, NA.

111. For additional details on the collapse of British military posture, see Shiffrin, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants*, pp. 56–58.

112. Minutes of the First Meeting of the Special Committee to Study Assistance to Greece and Turkey, February 24, 1947, *FRUS, 1947: The Near East and North Africa*, Vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1971), p. 45, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=article&did=FRUS.FRUS1947v05.i0002&id=FRUS.FRUS1947v05&isize=M>.

113. Memorandum of the Chairman of the Special Committee to Study Assistance to Greece and Turkey, undated, *FRUS, 1947: 5*, pp. 51–52.

114. Memorandum of the Chairman of the Special Committee, undated, *FRUS, 1947: 5*, p. 53.

115. Memorandum by the Secretary of State to President Truman, February 26, 1947, *FRUS, 1947: 5*, p. 58.

116. The Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of War, March 5, 1947, *FRUS, 1947: 5*, p. 94.

117. Alec Cairncross, *Years of Recovery: British Economic Policy, 1945–51* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 140; and Robert W. Carden, "Before Bizonia: Britain's Economic Dilemma in Germany, 1945–

The United States then turned to rebuilding British strength as part of a broader plan to reconstitute Western Europe.<sup>118</sup> The solution, elaborated in the European Recovery Program (ERP, known as the Marshall Plan), involved large-scale resource transfers to foster Western Europe's economic growth and the region's economic-political integration to contain a revived Germany.<sup>119</sup> Announced in June 1947, the ERP provided \$13 billion to Western Europe within a four-year period, with Britain receiving more than any other country (\$3.2 billion, or nearly 20 percent more than France).<sup>120</sup>

Worries over losing Britain as a partner against the Soviet Union drove U.S. efforts. As the JCS explained, "Two world wars in the past thirty years have demonstrated the interdependence of France, Great Britain, and the United States in case of war with central or eastern European powers." Ensuring that these countries had "economies able to support the armed forces necessary" was therefore "of first importance."<sup>121</sup> Likewise, facilitating Britain's recovery would allow the United States to pass on many of the costs of managing Western Europe to Britain,<sup>122</sup> as a U.S. interagency committee elaborated in mid-1949, "No effective integration of Europe would be possible without U.K. participation because of the belief . . . held by western continental powers of potential German domination if such U.K. participation did not take place."<sup>123</sup>

Seeking to keep Britain "joined with the U.S. in a firm policy counter to that of the Soviets," the United States also revised its military policy.<sup>124</sup> Reversing its earlier reluctance to coordinate military plans with Britain, U.S. officers started developing joint war plans with British planners in October 1947 and,

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46," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July 1979), p. 550, doi.org/10.1177/002200947901400309.

118. Director of the Policy Planning Staff to the Under Secretary of State, May 23, 1947, *FRUS, 1947: The British Commonwealth, Europe*, Vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972), pp. 223–230, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=header&id=FRUS.FRUS1947v03&isize=M>.

119. Timothy P. Ireland, *Creating the Entangling Alliance: The Origins of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981), pp. 35–37; and McAllister, *No Exit*, pp. 124–141.

120. Figures from Alfred Grosser, *The Western Alliance: European-American Relations since 1945*, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: Continuum, 1980), p. 79.

121. Enclosure to Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, May 12, 1947, *FRUS, 1947: General: The United Nations*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1973), pp. 739–740.

122. McAllister, *No Exit*, pp. 149–150; and George F. Kennan, "Review of Current Trends: U.S. Foreign Policy," February 24, 1948, PP/23, in Anna Kasten Nelson, ed., *The State Department Policy Planning Staff Papers*, Vol. 2: 1948 (New York: Garland, 1983), pp. 104–106.

123. Quoted in Ireland, *Entangling Alliance*, pp. 164–165.

124. Joint Strategic Plans Committee (JPSC), "Estimate of Probable Developments in the World Political Scene up to 1957," JSPC 814/3, December 11, 1947, in Thomas Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, eds., *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 292.

by April 1948, were working on integrated approaches for a European war.<sup>125</sup> And unlike U.S. plans in 1945–46 that emphasized flexibility and the possible withdrawal of units in the event of hostilities, U.S. policy now directed U.S. forces to fight alongside British units against the Soviet military. The plans also called for the deployment of additional U.S. assets, including nuclear-capable aircraft, to assist Britain in wartime.<sup>126</sup>

Soon, a formal U.S.-British alliance began to emerge. Already in mid-March 1948, Secretary of State George Marshall cabled British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin that the United States was prepared to discuss “the establishment of an Atlantic security system.”<sup>127</sup> In response, Bevin played to U.S. fears of Britain bandwagoning with the Soviets, cabling that “it would be very difficult to be able to stand up to [an aggressor] again unless there was a definite worked out arrangement for the Western area.”<sup>128</sup> Thereafter, negotiations began in earnest for what became the North Atlantic Treaty, signed in April 1949.<sup>129</sup> Although its decline continued, Britain now at least had a rising-power patron.

#### THE SOVIET UNION’S STRENGTHENING STRATEGY, EARLY–MID 1947

Like the United States, the Soviet Union responded to the military collapse of Britain by offering extensive support. By late 1946, Soviet officials recognized Britain’s military problems. From Washington, Ambassador Nikolai Novikov warned that Britain faced growing competition from the United States; in Moscow, Stalin obliquely noted Britain’s strategic dilemma, asking a Danish delegation whether Britain could afford to pay troops stationed in their country.<sup>130</sup> At a time when British leaders faced pressure from many Labour Party members to avoid U.S.-British collaboration against the Soviet Union, the moment seemed right for a Soviet-British understanding: as Stalin protégé Andrei Zhdanov emphasized, elements of the Labour Party “wanted to pre-

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125. John Baylis, *The Diplomacy of Pragmatism: Britain and the Formation of NATO, 1942–1949* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993), p. 82.

126. Robert A. Wampler, “Ambiguous Legacy: The United States, Great Britain, and the Foundations of NATO Strategy, 1948–1957,” Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1991, pp. 3–9; and Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, Vol. 2: *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), pp. 156–163.

127. The Secretary of State to the British Ambassador, March 12, 1948, *FRUS, 1948: Western Europe*, Vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1974), p. 48.

128. Paraphrase of a Telegram from the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, *FRUS, 1948: 3*, p. 80.

129. Ireland, *Entangling Alliance*, p. 95.

130. The Novikov Report, September 27, 1946, in Ralph B. Levering et al., *Debating the Origins of the Cold War*, p. 160; and Record of the Conversation of Comrade I.V. Stalin with Rasmussen, Denmark Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prince Axel, Chief of the Trade Delegation, June 6, 1946, in Christian F. Ostermann, ed., *Stalin and the Cold War, 1945–1953* (Washington D.C.: WWICS, 1999), p. 323, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/stalin-and-the-cold-war-1945-1953>.

pare the ground for the moment when, should they be in a tight spot, they would have some support from the Soviet Union."<sup>131</sup>

Accordingly, Stalin used a January 1947 visit by British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery to propose a military alliance. At the time, Montgomery was involved in U.S.-British military talks; other British officials were exploring options for a West European alliance.<sup>132</sup> Stalin may have known of these developments, telling Montgomery that he had no objection to a U.S.-British alliance provided it was not directed against the Soviet Union.<sup>133</sup> Still, in an apparent effort to prevent Britain from associating too closely with the United States, Stalin proposed revising the 1942 Anglo-Soviet alliance in light of post-war conditions.<sup>134</sup>

Although worried about antagonizing the United States, British policymakers decided to explore the Soviet alliance offer.<sup>135</sup> In advance of a March–April 1947 meeting with British, Soviet, and U.S. foreign ministers, the British Cabinet authorized treaty negotiations “going as far as . . . the Anglo-French Treaty.”<sup>136</sup> Considering that the British-French treaty pledged cooperation against a resurgent Germany, a similar treaty with the Soviet Union meant that Britain and the Soviet Union would come to the other’s aid if war with Germany erupted.<sup>137</sup> The Soviets, however, sought a broader arrangement that would keep Britain out of the U.S. camp; they tabled a revised treaty proposing Anglo-Soviet “military and other” cooperation in the event of hostilities associated with Germany (e.g., the United States), and holding Britain and the Soviet Union “not to conclude any alliances . . . directly or indirectly directed” against one another.<sup>138</sup> British policymakers recognized the Soviet objective, but still considered pledging support “against any other power which may join with Germany” in “an attack in Europe.”<sup>139</sup>

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131. Quoted in Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 76.

132. Knight, “Labourite Britain.”

133. Vojtech Mastny, “NATO in the Beholder’s Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies, 1949–1956,” Working Paper No. 35 (Washington, D.C.: WWICS, March 2002), pp. 9–11, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/nato-the-beholders-eye-soviet-perceptions-and-policies-1949-1956>.

134. Defence Committee, “The Anglo-Soviet Treaty, the Question of an Anglo-Soviet Military Alliance; and Anglo-American Standardisation, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,” Annex I, January 30, 1947, DO (47) 18, NA.

135. Defence Committee, “The Anglo-Soviet Treaty”; Defence Committee, “Confidential Annex,” January 31, 1947, DO (47) 18, NA.

136. Cabinet, “Revision of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty: Memorandum by the Prime Minister,” March 16, 1947, CP (47) 93, NA.

137. John Baylis, “Britain and the Dunkirk Treaty: The Origins of NATO,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1982), p. 244, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402398208437111>.

138. Prime Minister, “Revision of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty,” appendix B, April 20, 1947, CP (47) 129, NA.

139. Prime Minister, “Revision of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty,” April 20, 1947, CP (47) 129, NA; and

THE SOVIET UNION'S PREDATION STRATEGY, LATE 1947-49

Following the failure of the foreign ministers' meeting, however, the British Cabinet concluded on April 22, 1947, "that it would be inadvisable to extend the military clauses on the lines discussed."<sup>140</sup> Negotiations lapsed, as Britain sided with the United States and decried apparent Soviet moves against Germany and the rest of Europe.<sup>141</sup> Concurrently, U.S.-British cooperation accelerated as negotiations for the ERP began. And although the Soviet Union initially expressed interest in joining the ERP, interest waned once Western European leaders emphasized that ERP aid would require the Soviets and their Eastern European clients to coordinate their economic policies with the United States. With Soviet diplomats reporting that U.S. and British policymakers intended the ERP to also foster a "West European bloc" against the Soviets, the price was too steep.<sup>142</sup>

The Soviet Union thus had significant evidence by mid-1947 that Britain was no longer available as a partner. Internal Soviet assessments captured the change: where analysts argued even in mid-1947 that the United States was as focused on "the need to stop Britain from escaping from the dependent position established during the war" as on isolating the Soviet Union, by autumn, Soviet leaders were removing references to "Anglo-American friction" from strategy documents and portraying Britain as a "vassal" of the United States.<sup>143</sup> Nor was it likely that British policy would soon change; by the summer of 1947, Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Secretary Bevin had silenced critics of British policy in the Labour Party.<sup>144</sup>

Accordingly, the Soviet Union moved to challenge Britain (alongside the United States). In September 1947, Stalin created the Communist Information Bureau to direct the activities of Europe's communist parties.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore,

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"Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet Held at 10 Downing Street, on Thursday, 17th April, 1947," CM (47) 37th conclusions, NA.

140. "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet Held at 10 Downing Street on Tuesday, 22nd April, 1947 at 11 a.m.," CM (47) 38th Conclusions, NA.

141. Knight, "Labourite Britain," pp. 279-282; and Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, pp. 357-392.

142. "The Soviet Ambassador to the USA, Nikolai Novikov, to the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov," June 9, 1947, printed in Galina Takhenko, "Anatomy of a Political Decision: Notes on the Marshall Plan," *International Affairs* (Moscow), July 1992, p. 116; and Mikhail M. Narinsky, "The Soviet Union and the Marshall Plan," in Scott D. Parrish and Narinsky, "New Evidence on the Soviet Reaction to the Marshall Plan, 1947: Two Reports," Working Paper No. 9 (Washington, D.C.: WWICS, March 1994), pp. 45-46, <http://legacy.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ACFB73.pdf>.

143. Anna Di Biagio, "The Marshall Plan and the Founding of the Cominform, June-September 1947," in Gori and Pons, *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-1953*, pp. 213-215.

144. Knight, "Labourite Britain," pp. 280-281.

145. Grant M. Adibekov, "How the First Conference of the Cominform Came About," in Giuliano Procacci et al., eds., *The Cominform: Minutes of Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1994), pp. 3-4.

instead of discouraging communist parties from challenging Western reconstruction, Soviet leaders now urged confrontation, resulting in a wave of strikes throughout Western Europe.<sup>146</sup> As Zhdanov and others explained, the new policy was necessary, as “the Anglo-American imperialists have shown their unwillingness” to accommodate Soviet interests and were preparing “for attacking Soviet Russia.”<sup>147</sup>

Deepening U.S.-British cooperation in 1948–49 reinforced Soviet opposition, though with important limits as Stalin sought to avoid provoking a war.<sup>148</sup> Faced, for instance, with warnings that a communist seizure of power in Italy could “lead to a big war,” Stalin cautioned Italian communists against activities that might provoke the West.<sup>149</sup> Still, Soviet predation continued. In Germany, for example, Soviet officials accelerated preparations for a separate state in the Soviet occupation zone and pushed the German communists to expand their influence throughout the country.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, the Soviet Union deepened its efforts to control Eastern Europe, concluding security and economic alliances with states in the area. Soviet military preparations also increased as budgets expanded and rearmament began.<sup>151</sup> As Stalin explained in March 1948, at a time when Britain and other European states “follow America out of necessity,” the Soviet Union would offset the U.S.-British bloc by increasing its own strength and undercutting opponents.<sup>152</sup> Having sought to keep Britain a potential partner, the Soviet Union was resigned to its loss by 1949.

### *The Decline of the Soviet Union and the U.S. Response, 1984–90*

To further test predation theory, this section briefly examines the United States’ response to the Soviet Union’s decline. After summarizing the core theoretical predictions, I report the principal results.

Waning Soviet economic productivity and technological backwardness, combined with an economically resurgent United States, led to the Soviet Union’s relative decline in the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>153</sup> By the mid-1980s,

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146. Scott D. Parrish, “The USSR and the Security Dilemma: Explaining Soviet Self-Encirclement, 1945–1985,” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1993, pp. 222–223.

147. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 220–221.

148. Mastny, *NATO in the Beholder’s Eye*, p. 6; and Zubok, *Failed Empire*, p. 75.

149. Quoted in Zubok, *Failed Empire*, p. 76.

150. Wettig, *Stalin and the Cold War in Europe*, pp. 160–166.

151. Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars*, p. 361; and Mastny, *NATO in the Beholder’s Eye*, p. 13.

152. Stenographic Record of a Speech by Comrade J.V. Stalin at a Special Session of the Politburo, March 14, 1948, in Christian F. Ostermann, ed., *Stalin and the Cold War, 1945–1953*, pp. 430–431.

153. On the overall power shift, see Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*.

Soviet GDP dropped to below 40 percent of U.S. GDP for the first time since the early Cold War and continued falling; by 1989, analysts had further concluded that the Soviets were unable “to compete in high technology.”<sup>154</sup> Efforts by Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev after 1985 to reform the Soviet system caused additional dislocations, leaving the state approaching collapse by 1991.<sup>155</sup>

Predation theory expects the United States to have responded to Soviet decline differently from that predicted by the alternatives. Ideological and interdependence arguments suggest that the United States should have offered support to the Soviet Union by 1987–88 in reaction to Gorbachev’s reforms, some of which included Soviet domestic liberalization (e.g., embracing elections) and economic integration with the West. By this logic, the United States should have preyed on the Soviet Union through 1987–88 and then offered support, whether based on ideological changes or economic opportunism, or both.<sup>156</sup>

Although these arguments are plausible, recent historical research instead shows that U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union was persistently predatory. Not only did the Ronald Reagan administration embark on a strategy designed to challenge Soviet power and influence globally, but scholars such as Mary Sarotte and Jeffrey Engel emphasize that, under President George H.W. Bush, the United States aimed to expel the Soviets from Eastern Europe.<sup>157</sup>

Predation theory explains this evolution. As the other superpower in a bipolar system, the Soviet Union had low strategic value to the United States. Yet because the Soviets maintained a robust military into the late 1980s, anchored by large, highly trained forces in Eastern Europe, it follows that U.S. assertiveness should initially be limited and that the United States should pursue a weakening strategy. Only after the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 undercut Soviet military strength in the area did it make sense for the United States to pursue a relegation strategy.

154. Central Intelligence Agency, *The Soviet Economy in a Global Perspective*, March 1989, p. 19. GDP calculated from Maddison, *Statistics on World Population*.

155. Christopher Miller, *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

156. Mark L. Haas, “The United States and the End of the Cold War: Reactions to Shifts in Soviet Power, Policies, or Domestic Politics?” *International Organization*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 145–179, doi.org/10.1017/S002081830707004X; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 225; and Copeland, *Economic Interdependence*, pp. 310–319.

157. Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 123; Mary E. Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Jeffrey A. Engel, *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2017).

Indeed, as the Soviet Union's decline began, the United States tried to exacerbate Soviet strategic problems without overturning the status quo, embracing an approach that mixed "toughness and inducement."<sup>158</sup> During the mid-to-late 1980s, the Reagan administration pursued a conventional arms buildup to shift the military balance toward the United States, while using arms control to adumbrate Soviet nuclear advantages.<sup>159</sup> It also tightened economic sanctions and extended clandestine assistance to opposition movements within the Soviet bloc.<sup>160</sup> At the same time, U.S. policymakers acknowledged the need to limit such efforts to avoid a hostile Soviet response. As Secretary of State George Shultz summarized in 1987, U.S. policy was "to keep the Russians behind us, but not so far that they become desperate and dangerous."<sup>161</sup> With time on its side, the United States was willing to let pressure build on the Soviet Union.<sup>162</sup>

The United States continued with its weakening strategy as problems mounted in Eastern Europe, threatening Soviet control over its Warsaw Pact allies. With growing unrest in Poland, Hungary, and East Germany throughout 1989, the United States sought to "exploit" developments in the region "in a prudent way."<sup>163</sup> In Poland, for example, the Bush administration welcomed challenges to Soviet and communist influence. Nevertheless, it moderated the pace of change by encouraging anti-communists to back the incumbent communist regime and by signaling that the United States had no desire to pull Soviet clients toward the West.<sup>164</sup> As a senior U.S. diplomat explained, the United States recognized "the risks of instability" and had "no interest in encouraging it."<sup>165</sup> Similarly, as East Germany's problems grew, the United States

158. Non-Paper Prepared by Secretary of State Shultz, November 18, 1987, *FRUS, 1981–1988: Soviet Union October 1986–January 1989*, Vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2016), p. 530.

159. Brands, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 119, 131–133.

160. Michael Mastanduno, "CoCom and American Export Control Policy: The Experience of the Reagan Administration," in Helen V. Milner, David A. Baldwin, and Martha J. Chinouya, eds., *East-West Trade and the Atlantic Alliance* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 195–196; and Gregory F. Domber, *Empowering Revolution: America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), pp. 188, 319 n. 132.

161. Non-Paper Prepared by Secretary of State Shultz, November 18, 1987, *FRUS, 1981–1988*: 6, p. 530.

162. George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner's, 1993), pp. 154–156, 265–268.

163. Brent Scowcroft, "Getting Ahead of Gorbachev," March 1, 1989, CF91117, Scowcroft Files, George Bush Presidential Library (hereafter GBPL); and George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), pp. 38–40, 132–181.

164. Gregory F. Domber, "Skepticism and Stability: Reevaluating U.S. Policy during Poland's Democratic Transformation in 1989," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Summer 2011), pp. 68–72, doi.org/10.1162/JCWS\_a\_00142.

165. USMission USNATO, "Presentation by DAS Simon at April 13 NAC on Poland," box 35, Soviet Flashpoints Collection, National Security Archive, George Washington University (hereafter SF/NSA). On resulting policy dilemmas, see Fritz Ermarth, "Possible Topic for Discussion with



looked to “maximize” its leverage without exacerbating the Soviet Union’s problems. After all, the loss of East Germany—the lodestone of the Soviet alliance network—would eviscerate the Soviet security position and raise the specter of a reunified Germany aligning with the West.<sup>166</sup> Soviet opposition to this possibility was intense and, given the Soviet Union’s robust military posture, U.S. strategists were compelled to proceed cautiously. As the National Security Council (NSC) staff warned, “The instrument of last resort is still available to the Soviet Union and there are no guarantees that the Soviet empire will go quietly into the night.”<sup>167</sup> Thus, despite the opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and subsequent collapse of East German communism, the United States focused narrowly on preventing a Soviet crackdown that could escalate into a U.S.-Soviet confrontation while sustaining the possibility of eventual reunification.<sup>168</sup>

In early 1990, however, U.S. predation intensified.<sup>169</sup> By the start of the year, noncommunist regimes had taken power (or were doing so) throughout Eastern Europe, inhibiting the Soviet Union’s ability to project and sustain military power.<sup>170</sup> These developments, NSC staffers argued in January, had dramatically altered Europe’s security environment, suggesting that “it will be impossible within a few years for the Soviet Union to do anything about the changes” without all-out invasion.<sup>171</sup> This timeline proved too long: U.S. analysts soon noted that Soviet forces were “fast being pushed out of the region,” leading the NSC’s senior staffer for the Soviet Union to conclude at the start of February that the country “is . . . unable to reextend its tentacles into Eastern Europe.”<sup>172</sup>

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Scowcroft and Gates,” September 20, 1989, NIC 00981–89, online via CIA Freedom of Information Act, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/home>.

166. Raymond Seitz, “The Future of Germany in a Fast Changing Europe,” October 10, 1990, box 38, SF/NSA.

167. Brent Scowcroft, “The Future of Perestroika and the European Order,” undated, CF00717, Rice Files, GBPL. See also Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *To Build a Better World: Choices to End the Cold War and Create a Global Commonwealth* (New York: Hachette, 2019), pp. 172, 190–191.

168. Engel, *When the World Seemed New*, pp. 258–259, 271–280; and Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider’s Account of U.S. Policy in Europe, 1989–1992* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997), pp. 94–103.

169. Zelikow and Rice, *To Build a Better World*, pp. 213–214.

170. Testimony by CIA Director William Webster and Defense Intelligence Agency Director Harry Soyster, Senate Armed Services Committee, Threats Facing the United States and Its Allies, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., January 23, 1990, pp. 58–63.

171. Brent Scowcroft, “Objectives for U.S.-Soviet Relations in 1990,” January 13, 1990, 30547, Blackwill Files, GBPL.

172. Robert Hutchings, “Your Breakfast with Kissinger: Managing the German Question,” January 26, 1990, CF00182, Blackwill Files, GBPL; and Condoleezza Rice, “Showdown in Moscow?” February 1, 1990, CF00719, Rice Files, GBPL. See also Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 160.

Recognition of Soviet military weakness galvanized U.S. policy. Abandoning caution, the United States moved to quickly reunify Germany and bring it into NATO—in effect, gaining influence over all of Germany.<sup>173</sup> Considering that Germany was the Cold War's great strategic prize and that Soviet opposition to reunification remained adamant throughout 1989, this action constituted a significant intensification of U.S. predation.<sup>174</sup> In taking this step, U.S. leaders also ignored Soviet entreaties to keep reunified Germany neutral or first construct a post-Cold War European security system to prevent Soviet strategic isolation;<sup>175</sup> they further separated the Soviets from the diplomatic processes around reunification, presenting them with a series of faits accomplis and blocking Soviet efforts to inhibit the process.<sup>176</sup> Making matters worse, the United States later pressured allies not to extend economic assistance to the Soviet Union in exchange for Soviet concessions on Germany.<sup>177</sup> Against this backdrop, Soviet leaders had few options except to agree to U.S. terms. When Germany formally reunified within NATO in October 1990, the eviction of the Soviet Union from Central-Eastern Europe was complete.<sup>178</sup> In moving from weakening to relegation, not only is the trajectory of the case uniquely consistent with predation theory, but the timing of U.S. policy adjustments and the rationales offered by U.S. leaders comport strongly with the logic of the argument.

## Conclusion

Far from universally working to maximize power at declining great powers' expense, rising states vary their strategies toward declining states across time and space. All things being equal, when rising states can use a declining power

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173. Robert Blackwill, "Germany," January 30, 1990, and enclosure, "A Plan for German Reunification," 900092, NSC PA Files, GBPL; and Shiffrinson, "Deal or No Deal?" pp. 21–22.

174. Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999).

175. Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, pp. 242–250; and James A. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: Putnam's, 1995), pp. 248–254.

176. No author, "Our Objectives for Chancellor Kohl's Visit," undated [c. February 24, 1990], CF00182, Blackwill Files, GBPL; and Robert Zoellick, "Two-Plus-Four: Advantages, Possible Concerns, and Rebuttal Points," February 21, 1990, box 38, SF/NSA. Also Engel, *When the World Seemed New*, pp. 349–358; Sarotte, 1989, pp. 120–176; and Timothy A. Sauley, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2019), pp. 227–228.

177. No author, "Points to be Made with President Mitterrand," undated [c. July 10, 1990], CF00290, Wilson Files, GBPL; Memcon, "First Main Plenary Session of the 16th Economic Summit of Industrialized Nations," July 10 1990, [https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-07-10—Mitterrand%20\[1\].pdf](https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-07-10—Mitterrand%20[1].pdf).

178. Sauley, *Enduring Alliance*, p. 233.

to offset other challengers, they are primed to offer it support. But when using a declining state to offset such challengers is not a plausible option—whether for political, geographic, or systemic reasons—rising states are likely to pursue a predatory strategy. The level of assertiveness, meanwhile, varies based on a declining state’s military posture: rising-state support and predation tend to intensify when declining states lack the military power to protect themselves from external challengers. A review of the strategies of two rising powers—the United States and the Soviet Union—toward a declining Great Britain after World War II, and of the United States toward the Soviet Union in the 1980s and 1990s, supports these propositions; along the way, the empirical record also shows that the argument outperforms alternate arguments that stress the roles of economic interdependence and ideological compatibility as drivers of rising-state policy.

More broadly, the article makes three contributions to international relations research. First, it underscores the need for additional work on the behavior of rising great powers. Although a range of assumptions underlie scholarly and policy discussions surrounding the policies adopted by rising states, these assumptions—with few exceptions—have not been sufficiently scrutinized.<sup>179</sup> More research is needed on rising-state calculations vis-à-vis an extant international order, how rising-state behavior affects crises and diplomacy, and the ways in which shifting power influences rising states’ assessments of international threats.<sup>180</sup> Second, the article contributes to important debates over the sources of international conflict and cooperation.<sup>181</sup> At root, explaining when and why rising states prey on or support declining states offers insight into the conditions under which great powers—even in seemingly propitious circumstances—engage in power-seeking or conciliatory behavior. Third, the case studies highlight the need for scholars to engage more directly with historical research on postwar great power relations while using the results to refine and advance international relations theory.

Equally important, this article has implications for contemporary debates

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179. Exceptions include Schweller, “Managing the Rise of Great Powers”; David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2017); and Stacie Goddard, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018).

180. Recent works along these lines include Goddard, *When Right Makes Might*; Paul K. MacDonal and Joseph M. Parent, *Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018); Evan B. Montgomery, *In the Hegemon’s Shadow: Leading States and the Rise of Regional Powers* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2016); and T.V. Paul, ed., *Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

181. Robert Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Summer 1999), pp. 42–63, doi.org/10.1162/016228899 560040.

surrounding the relative decline of the United States and the rise of new great powers—especially China. For several decades, analysts expected that economic interdependence, the promotion of China’s internal liberalization, and steps to embed China within international institutions would dampen the risk of Chinese predation.<sup>182</sup> This view is changing, however, as U.S. strategists increase calls for military buildups, alliances, and economic competition to limit the risk of Chinese aggrandizement;<sup>183</sup> some analysts have even advocated a “new Cold War” to contain a rising China.<sup>184</sup> In contrast, this study suggests that the United States’ relative decline is more manageable than many analysts assume but may require solutions different from those proposed thus far. Using predation theory logic, the questions for strategists seeking to chart a course for the United States are instead: Does China face incentives to prey on or support a relatively declining United States? And how can the United States affect these calculations? And here, there are reasons that the United States should be able to reduce the chances of China resorting to a relegation strategy for some period of time; more optimistically, China could even decide to adopt a support strategy.

At first glance, China’s rise and the United States’ relative decline might portend a return to bipolarity, with the United States and China vying for dominance.<sup>185</sup> Even in bipolarity, however, the United States should be able to limit Chinese predatory efforts. Despite China’s rise, U.S. military capabilities are still the global gold standard, buoyed by cutting-edge technology and extensive operational and logistical experience.<sup>186</sup> Considering, too, that China’s rise is likely to threaten many of its neighbors, the United States should be able

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182. G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (January 2008), pp. 23–37, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2008-01-01/rise-china-and-future-west>; and Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, “The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (April 2018), pp. 60–70, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>.

183. Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, December 2017), pp. 25–26, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>; and Aaron L. Friedberg, “Competing with China,” *Survival*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (May 2018), pp. 7–64, [doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1470755](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1470755).

184. See, for example, Charles Edel and Hal Brands, “The Real Origins of the U.S.-China Cold War,” *Foreign Policy*, June 2, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/02/the-real-origins-of-the-u-s-china-cold-war-big-think-communism/>.

185. Øystein Tunsjø, *The Return of Bipolarity in World Politics: China, the United States, and Geopolitical Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

186. Andrea Gilli and Mauro Gilli, “Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet: Military-Technological Superiority and the Limits of Imitation, Reverse Engineering, and Cyber Espionage,” *International Security*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Winter 2019), pp. 141–189, [doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00337](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00337); and Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why the United States Will Remain the World’s Sole Superpower* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 62–97.

to retain bases in the region for the forward deployment of its forces. In fact, given that it currently deploys forces around the world, the United States may be able to reduce its global military footprint and still contain a rising China by retrenching from other areas and allocating freed-up capabilities to Asia. To cap Chinese predation, the United States could delineate a defensive perimeter, backed by forces, either to raise the costs of Chinese aggrandizement or to defeat Chinese efforts. A prudent defense should suffice to keep Chinese predation limited.

On the other hand, China's rise could lead to multipolarity, rather than bipolarity. In this situation, China might have incentives to support the United States, as the presence of other great powers, the United States' latent potential, and its geographic position could increase its strategic value to China. To increase the odds of Chinese support, however, the United States might also need to enhance its strategic value by avoiding commitments to an anti-China coalition—for instance, loosening its alliance with Japan, or dampening efforts to position India against China. Under these conditions, China would have incentives to bid for U.S. assistance against its other adversaries and to intensify this assistance if U.S. military power waned by, for example, offering the United States advantageous economic concessions.

In conclusion, analysts focused on the problems associated with great power decline should pause before assuming the worst of rising states, and instead focus on the security constraints and opportunities that rising powers confront. At root, rising powers often have compelling reasons for limiting the challenges they pose to declining states; under certain conditions, they may even be motivated to support declining powers. Applied to policy debates, this framework provides reasons for optimism: the United States' relative decline not only may be more manageable than many analysts assume, but there may be fewer challenges coming from rising states along the way. By adapting its policies in response to rising states' constraints and opportunities, the United States can position itself to advance its security, while garnering as many benefits as possible from shifts in the distribution of power.