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David M. Edelstein. *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers.*

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Contents

Introduction by Joshua Rovner, American University	2
Review by Jeff D. Colgan, Brown University	4
Review by Francis J. Gavin, Johns Hopkins SAIS	9
Review by Stacie E. Goddard, Wellesley College.....	12
Author's Response by David M. Edelstein, Georgetown University.....	15

Introduction by Joshua Rovner, American University

How do great powers respond to rising challengers? Few questions generate as much attention among international relations theorists and historians. This is not surprising, given the stakes. Pessimistic accounts play up the danger of great power war, as ambitious rivals seek to upend the existing order. Flush with nationalism and brimming with confidence, rising powers may be willing to take extraordinary risks that lead to terrible violence. The existing leaders, for their part, may be unwilling to watch passively as their advantages diminish, and they may gamble on preventive war rather than wait to be overtaken. Other scholars are more sanguine, noting a number of possible factors that mitigate the chances of conflict. It may be possible to integrate a rising power into existing international institutions and create deep economic ties that give it a reason to choose cooperation.

These longstanding debates over power transitions have resurfaced recently with the rise of China and the uncertain U.S. response. David Edelstein's new book, *Over The Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers*, is animated by the U.S.-China question, but it also makes much bigger theoretical claims. Leaders' short-term focus can lead to cooperation if it makes them less concerned about long-term power transitions. Uncertainty can also be a force for peace, because leaders are less willing to risk war until there are sure their enemies are hostile and implacable. These ideas provoke new questions about traditional IR theory, and they challenge a few policy shibboleths. The nuanced argument about uncertainty, for example, is contra the received wisdom that uncertainty is inherently bad for practical statecraft.

The participants in this roundtable agree that Edelstein has written an important book about a critical question. It will definitely prompt creative new ideas about an enduring problem. Indeed, the book has the reviewers thinking about everything from Marxism and the Monroe Doctrine to 'Downton Abbey' and the Philadelphia 76ers. They applaud Edelstein's contribution to theory as well as his attention to historical detail, though they are not persuaded that his argument beats the alternatives. Jeff Colgan, for example, believes the book would be stronger if it engaged the international political economy literature in more detail, especially claims that cooperation results from complementary financial interests among elites in different countries. He similarly challenges the book's rational unitary actor assumption. According to Colgan, both issues reflect enduring weaknesses in security studies.

Frank Gavin also explores how core concepts in the book reveal deep epistemological issues about how we understand world politics. He asks what time horizons really mean to leaders, using a sports analogy to illustrate Edelstein's argument and reveal its limits. Second-rate franchises (especially that in Philadelphia, which until recently was a frequent loser) have reason to cooperate with league rivals in the short-term. They may trade established players to more competitive teams, with the hopes that developing younger players and stockpiling draft picks will pay dividends later. Great powers on both sides may operate according to the same logic, finding reason to cooperate today even if there is reason to believe they will compete in the future. The difference is that politics do not end when the clock stops, the way that basketball games do. Time-horizons are fuzzy for great powers, and their leaders may not draw a clear distinction between short-term and long-term goals.

Stacie Goddard concludes the roundtable by raising a basic question about causality. Goddard is impressed by the book's sophisticated treatment of uncertainty in international politics, though she finds some ambiguity in Edelstein's theory. It is unclear whether time influences great powers' threat perception, or whether threat perceptions increase their sense that time is short. The book's causal logic is powerful but the causal arrow

H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 10-12

points in both directions. Goddard also suggests that a more consistent definition of “aggressive” behavior would help, as would more attention to the agency of rising powers.

Participants:

David M. Edelstein is Vice Dean of Faculty in Georgetown College and an associate professor in the Department of Government, the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, and the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown University. He is a scholar of great power politics, military intervention, and the causes of war and peace. His most recent book, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Cornell University Press, 2017) examines how states have responded to the rise of new great powers. He is also the author of *Occupational Hazards: Success and Failure in Military Occupations* (Cornell University Press, 2008). His work has also been published in *International Security*, *Security Studies*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Survival*. He has held fellowships at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation, Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. He is currently researching the implications of the rise of China for the prospects of peace and security, the ways in which states exit unsuccessful military interventions, and alliance dynamics in contemporary international politics.

Jeff Colgan is Richard Holbrooke Associate Professor at the Political Science Department and the Watson Institute of International Studies of Brown University, where he also serves as the Director of Security Studies. His research interests include international order, political economy of international security, and energy politics. His most recent book is *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). His research has been published in *International Organization*, *International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *World Politics*, *Foreign Affairs*, and other journals.

Joshua Rovner is Associate Professor in the School of International Service at American University. He is author of *Fixing the Facts: Intelligence and the Politics of National Security* (Cornell, 2011), and co-editor of *Chaos in the Liberal Order: The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (Columbia, forthcoming in 2018).

Francis J. Gavin is the Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor and the inaugural director of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins SAIS. In 2013, Gavin was appointed the first Frank Stanton Chair in Nuclear Security Policy Studies and Professor of Political Science at MIT. Before joining MIT, he was the Tom Slick Professor of International Affairs and the Director of the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas. From 2005 until 2010, he directed The American Assembly's multiyear, national initiative, The Next Generation Project: U.S. Global Policy and the Future of International Institutions. Gavin's writings include *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

Stacie Goddard is the Jane Bishop '51 Associate Professor of Political Science, Wellesley College. Her book, *Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy: Jerusalem and Northern Ireland*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. Her articles have appeared in outlets such as *International Organization*, *International Security*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Theory*, *Security Studies*, as well as in the *New York Times*. Her second book, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order*, is forthcoming with Cornell University Press.

Review by Jeff D. Colgan, Brown University

In his new book, *Over the Horizon*, David Edelstein investigates a vitally important question in international relations: why have incumbent great powers been so willing, historically, to cooperate with rising powers that they might have to fight in the future? The book is the product of a scholar who has been mulling over a tough problem for most of his career. The insight on display proves that the book's long gestation period was well worth the wait.

Edelstein very clearly identifies the core puzzle and his answer to it. He provides various examples of incumbent powers cooperating with rising ones. One is First Consul (later Emperor) Napoleon Bonaparte's decision to sell the Louisiana Territories despite the worry that the Americans "might be found too powerful for Europe" (3) over the long run—as indeed it did. Likewise, the United Kingdom accepted the Monroe Doctrine in the nineteenth century and accommodated the rise of the United States peacefully. Today the U.S. cooperates with China's economic integration into the global economy, even though that cooperation is part of what permits the Chinese economy to grow rapidly, soon overtaking America's total GDP. Why?

Edelstein argues that the answer is driven principally by states' time horizons. Leaders with "short time horizons are less concerned with the effects of their current behavior in the long term," while leaders with long time horizons are more concerned (5). Edelstein treats states as unitary actors, meaning that for him, a state's time horizon and its leaders are the same thing.¹ States face a "now or later" dilemma, in which they can act now to address some long-term threat, while paying a short-term cost, or they can opt to put off dealing with the threat. Cooperation between rising and existing powers is most likely to emerge when existing powers focus on the short term while rising powers focus on the long term.² In turn, the time horizons of existing powers are shaped by three considerations: "other realized threats that they face in the short-term, the opportunities for short-term gains through cooperation with the emerging threat, and their level of concern about the long-term intentions of an emerging potential threat" (6). The tightly drawn theory exhibits parsimony as well as novelty.

The book challenges several pieces of the conventional wisdom among scholars of international relations, two of which stand out. First, most scholars view long time horizons, or "the shadow of the future," as facilitating cooperation, in comparison to one-off or short-run situations. In the classic Prisoner's Dilemma, players'

¹ Though Edelstein dismisses variation in discount rates across individuals and regimes, such as revolutionary ones, there is evidence of systemic differences: see Jeff D. Colgan, "Domestic Revolutionary Leaders and International Conflict," *World Politics* 65:4 (2013): 656-690; Valerie Bunce, *Do New Leaders Make a Difference? Executive Succession and Public Policy Under Capitalism and Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Michael Horowitz, Rose McDermott, and Allan C Stam, "Age, Regime Type, and Violence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49:5 (2011): 661-885; Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Sarah E. Croco, *Peace at What Price? Leader Culpability and the Domestic Politics of War Termination* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2015).

² On this point, Edelstein might have made greater use of a superb PhD dissertation by Miranda Priebe, "Fear and Frustration: Rising State Perceptions of Threats and Opportunities" (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015), <http://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/99826>; as well as the insights in Dale C. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

expectations about future iterations of a game provide incentives for them to cooperate in the present.³ Edelstein directly challenges this notion, arguing that cooperation sometimes occurs precisely because of short time horizons by the existing power.

Second, the book challenges the idea that existing powers react to a rising state's latent power and military capabilities rather than their intentions. By contrast, John Mearsheimer and other 'offensive realists' expect states to assume the worst about each other's intentions, which are hard to assess reliably, and thus focus most of their attention on military capabilities. In this view, buck-passing is the most likely explanation of any cooperation between existing and rising powers. Edelstein argues against buck-passing as a viable explanation, however, suggesting instead that existing powers pay considerable attention to a rising power's intent and ideology. For example, "the Cold War finds its origins less in ominous developments in Soviet capabilities and more in alarming warnings about Soviet intentions" (31). The evidence Edelstein brings to bear in support of his argument on this point is compelling. While it is true that military planners often plan for the worst-case scenario,⁴ political leaders tend to see things differently since they are aware of the high costs of behaving in a constantly fearful manner.

All books have limitations, and this one has two, in my view. First, it almost completely ignores any kind of political economy explanation for cooperation between rising and established powers. A single footnote states that "there might be a Marxist explanation for cooperation with a rising great power. To the extent that the United States and China both benefit from the current global international system, it may be pursuit of economic benefit above all that has driven Sino-U.S. cooperation" (17, note 41). One does not need to be a Marxist to think that this idea deserves far more attention, especially given the book's aim to shed light on the contemporary U.S.-China relationship. There is strong evidence that capitalist elites in the United States, and the West more generally, have profited disproportionately from the West's embrace of Chinese economic integration.⁵ Wall Street has benefited far more than Main Street. Non-elites in the United States have probably benefited from lower consumers prices due to cooperation with China, but that (relatively small) gain appears to have come at the expense of jobs and wage growth.⁶ Trade alone, of course, is not responsible for American wage growth stagnation; other factors, like automation, certainly play a role, probably a much larger one.⁷ Still, there is little doubt that U.S. economic cooperation with China, including the decision to admit China as a permanent member of the World Trade Organization, has benefited wealthy Americans

³ Robert M. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); and Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁴ Robert J. Art and Kelly M. Greenhill, *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

⁵ Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, "The Liberal Order Is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It Wither," *Foreign Affairs* 96 (2017): 36.

⁶ David H. Autor, David Dorn, and Gordon H. Hanson, "The China Shock: Learning from Labor-Market Adjustment to Large Changes in Trade," *Annual Review of Economics* 8 (2016): 205-240.

⁷ Jeff D. Colgan and Sarah Bauerle Danzman, "Robots Aren't Killing the American Dream. Neither Is Trade. This Is the Problem," *Washington Post*, 10 March 2017; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/03/10/robots-arent-killing-the-american-dream-neither-is-trade-this-is-the-real-problem/>

more than the middle or lower class. Given that difference in interests, the book would have benefited from a far deeper engagement with the idea that elite-based economic interests are a big part of the explanation of a hegemon's cooperation with a rising power like China.

A political economy argument might run like this: (a) within wealthy countries, the rich generally benefit more from international economic cooperation than the poor;⁸ (b) the rich have disproportionate ability to set foreign economic policy;⁹ (c) non-elites generally have little knowledge or understanding of foreign economic policy.¹⁰ Consequently, the foreign policy of a state with an advanced economy frequently favors international cooperation (though exceptions exist). Technological change over the last two centuries has deepened the profitability, for capital owners, of global supply chains—even those involving potential rivals. On this view, one can typically expect an established power to be in favor of cooperating with a rising power, unless it is faced with an acute security threat—from Nazi Germany or Soviet Communism, for instance. This argument accounts not only for the current U.S.–China cooperation, but also the British accommodation of the rising United States in the nineteenth century.

Indeed, Edelstein's chapter on the latter case would have benefitted from greater attention to the interests of the wealthy in Britain and the U.S., which turned out to be quite compatible. Social mingling and intermarriage was significant, sometimes so that wealthy Americans could marry into the British aristocracy, à la *Downton Abbey*. More generally, the wealthy in Britain saw economic advantage and opportunity from cooperating with the United States. There were two incentives: the profitability of capital investment between Britain and the United States, and the benefits of Anglo-American cooperation in third-party markets, especially Latin America.¹¹ Edelstein quotes British Foreign Secretary Lansdowne's declaration, "The Monroe Doctrine has no enemies in this country that I know of. We welcome any increase of the influence of the United States of America upon the great Western Hemisphere" (91). This was understandable: British and American investors frequently had common interests in Latin American debt defaults and occasional gunboat diplomacy.¹² Again, the point is that the interests of a particular economic class in the established power (Britain) seem to be a significant part of the explanation for its cooperation with the rising power (the U.S.), possibly at the expense of Britain's nineteenth-century technological and manufacturing advantage.

⁸ Kenneth F. Scheve and Matthew F. Slaughter, "A New Deal for Globalization," *Foreign Affairs* 86 (2007): 34.

⁹ Lawrence R. Jacobs and Benjamin I. Page, "Who Influences US Foreign Policy?" *American Political Science Review* 99:1 (2005): 107-123.

¹⁰ Alexandra Guisinger, "Determining Trade Policy: Do Voters Hold Politicians Accountable?" *International Organization* 63:3 (2009): 533-557.

¹¹ Jeffrey A. Frieden, "International Investment and Colonial Control: A New Interpretation." *International Organization* 48:4 (1994): 559-593. On more recent cooperation between foreign investors, see Rachel Wellhausen, "Bondholders v. Direct Investors? Competing Responses to Expropriation." *International Studies Quarterly* 59:4 (2015): 750-764.

¹² Michael Tomz, *Reputation and International Cooperation: Sovereign Debt across Three Centuries*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Edelstein's relative inattention to political economy reflects and reinforces a wider trend in the field of international relations: the divorce between international security and international political economy. Students of security studies pay relatively little attention to economic explanations for key phenomena – though there are exceptions, like Stephen Brooks and Etel Solingen.¹³ Similarly, students of international political economy often study patterns of trade in quantitative terms without paying sufficient attention to security variables like wars or the arms trade—though again, there are exceptions.¹⁴ One consequence of this division in the field is that we miss competing or complementary explanations for the phenomena under investigation in each sub-field.

The second limitation of *Over the Horizon* is its treatment of the state as a rational unitary actor. Edelstein is keenly aware that it might seem irrational for a hegemon to cooperate with a rising state that it might have to fight in the long term. Political scientists generally dislike arguments that posit irrationality, because they can lead to simplistic analysis. Why did two states go to war? If we say, 'oh, one of them was irrational,' the analysis might end there and we miss the opportunity to see how each actor did things that made sense from its perspective. So Edelstein takes pains to show that cooperation could occur even with rational states. That part of the argument is compelling. But like so much of the IR scholarship that precedes the book, his argument implies that because cooperation between potential enemies can be rational, it therefore is rational (2). That leads to a missed opportunity: to unpack the state, to understand how its component parts (acting rationally, even) might lead the state as a whole to act irrationally and even stupidly.

Rationalists typically defend the rationality assumption on grounds of its usefulness rather than its accuracy. Indeed, there is a mountain of empirical evidence from psychology and behavioral economics showing that rationality is not a terribly accurate description of human behavior.¹⁵ The question then becomes, to what is the rationality assumption being compared, when it is called useful? Perhaps the analysis would be better

¹³ Stephen G. Brooks, *Producing Security: Multinational Corporations, Globalization, and the Changing Calculus of Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century's Dawn* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Solingen, "Pax Asiatica versus Bella Levantina: The Foundations of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East," *American Political Science Review* 101:4 (2007): 757-780; Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Jonathan D. Caverley, *Democratic Militarism: Voting, Wealth, and War*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Kaija Schilde, *The Political Economy of European Security* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Jeff D. Colgan, *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Charles L. Glaser, "How Oil Influences U.S. National Security," *International Security* 38:2 (2013): 112-146; and Kenneth A. Schultz and Barry R. Weingast, "The Democratic Advantage: Institutional Foundations of Financial Power in International Competition," *International Organization* 57:1 (2003): 3-42.

¹⁴ Joanne Gowa and Edward D. Mansfield, "Power Politics and International Trade," *American Political Science Review* 87:2 (1993): 408-420; Jennifer Erickson, *Dangerous Trade: Arms Exports, Human Rights, and International Reputation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Kenneth Scheve and David Stasavage, "The Conscription of Wealth: Mass Warfare and the Demand for Progressive Taxation," *International Organization* 64:4 (2010): 529-561; and Rosella Capella Zielinski, *How States Pay for Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Penguin, 2009); Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011); Brian C. Rathbun, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Mark Paradis, "Homo Diplomaticus: Mixed-Method Evidence of Variation in Strategic Rationality." *International Organization* 71:1 (2017): 533-560.

served to allow the possibility that actors sometimes act in irrational ways. Irrational behavior could even exhibit systematic patterns, making it susceptible to study by social scientists.

In the case of Edelman's book, part of the issue is that a great deal is being smuggled into the concept of a discount rate. A discount rate measures an actor's valuation of things in the future compared to things in the present. There is, of course, no objectively correct or rational discount rate. Yet to implicitly assume that all discount rates are equally rational does not accord with lived experience. Anyone who has ever tried to lose weight or save for retirement knows that one might make the *wrong* choice at one time and live to regret it later. By 'wrong choice' I mean the difference between a careful, deliberative discount rate and a discount rate that the same person might have impulsively while looking covetously at a piece of cake or a shiny new car. If an actor can have different discount rates at different times and still be called rational, then just about any behavior qualifies. And if anything can be called rational, the term loses all meaning.

As with the first limitation, the second one is less about Edelman's analysis per se and more about a problem that runs deep through the entire field of international relations. Most notably, James D. Fearon's classic article on rationalist explanations for war has proved exceptionally successful in scholarly terms.¹⁶ Yet because war is *possible* between rational actors, that does not mean most wars actually *are* rational. Research by Stacie Goddard, Jonathan Kirshner, and others are powerful on this point.¹⁷ The field's fetishization of rationality might actually be holding scholars back from more insightful analyses.

Ultimately, both of these limitations—the absence of political economy and the overemphasis of rationality—are opportunities for further analysis of the difficult intellectual terrain that Edelman has set out to explore. And what terrain it is: the question of how great powers think about long-term challenges in the face of short-term political opportunities is surely one of the most timely and timeless issues in international relations. Anyone struggling to make sense of the changing international order of the twenty-first century would be wise to read it. Edelman's book is profoundly engaging.

¹⁶ James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49:3 (1995): 379-414.

¹⁷ Jonathan Kirshner, "Rationalist Explanations for War?" *Security Studies* 10:1 (2000): 143-150; Stacie E. Goddard, *Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy: Jerusalem and Northern Ireland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); David A. Lake, "Two Cheers for Bargaining Theory: Assessing Rationalist Explanations of the Iraq War," *International Security* 35:3 (2010): 7-52; and Joshua D. Kertzer and Kathleen M. McGraw, "Folk Realism: Testing the Microfoundations of Realism in Ordinary Citizens," *International Studies Quarterly* 56:2 (2012): 245-258.

Review by Francis J. Gavin, Johns Hopkins SAIS

Full-disclosure—David Edelstein is, like me, a long-suffering Philadelphia sports fan. Over the past few years, we have both watched, with a mixture of dread, hope, and curiosity, a controversial experiment carried out by our favorite professional basketball team, the Philadelphia 76ers, undertaken by the since-deposed general manager, Sam Hinkie. To the horror of many sports fans, Hinkie assembled a basketball roster with players far more likely to lose games than win. Why on earth would he do such a thing? Hinkie saw little chance, in the short-term, of matching the capabilities of the reigning superpowers like the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Golden State Warriors. Stockpiling future assets while losing improved the Sixers' chances of grabbing a game-altering superstar in the NBA draft and surpassing the current super-teams in the future as their stars aged. With this system, dubbed 'the Process,' the Sixers sacrificed short-term wins for what Hinkie saw as more valuable, sustainable, and timely long-term success. These kinds of calculations continued after Hinkie left. Seeing their fortunes improve as a result of "the Process," the Sixers' time horizons then shortened. They even traded a valuable future asset to a hated rival—the Boston Celtics—to acquire a talented young star to help the Sixers win now. The process was an extreme version of what all professional sports teams do—balance between the desire to win immediately versus the reality that it may make more sense to prepare for success in the long term, when circumstances are more favorable.

In his terrific book, Edelstein reminds us that great powers make similar calculations about power and time horizons. Just like sports teams, great powers are in fierce competition with each other. Yet this competition takes place over time, with great uncertainty about the future, and varying time horizons produce different incentives about when a state will compete, confront, or cooperate with a rival. Like the Sixers and the Celtics, sometimes rivals will cooperate (trade) despite wanting to eventually overcome the other. Other times they will construct and deploy their capabilities (rosters) to defeat the rival now. Mixing rich case studies and wrestling with competing international relations theories, *Over the Horizon* helps us understand how great powers make calculations about time and uncertainty as they shape their policies towards competitors.

It is clear that much of this study is driven by the puzzle of United States grand strategy towards the People's Republic of China (PRC). With its large population and stupendous growth rates, it has been apparent since the end of the Cold War that the PRC would rise to become a more formidable power on the world stage. But how would China behave as it rose, and more importantly, as its strength approached that of the United States? And how should the United States respond to China's rise? As Edelstein points out, two competing theories framed the debate. Offensive realists believed China's rise made tension and even conflict with the United States inevitable.¹ The intentions of adversaries are impossible to discern, and states are wise to assume the worst. The structure of the international system, with no overarching authority to mediate disputes, dictates that states can trust no one and must rely on themselves to guarantee their security. In a self-help world, states would be foolish not to see the increasing capabilities of rivals as a direct threat.

Liberals, on the other hand, have another view of international relations. While world politics is a place of intense competition, there are natural areas where cooperation provides mutual benefit to states. Institutions and norms can remove at least some of the uncertainty surrounding state intentions and modify the most

¹ The best account of this view is John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 10-12

aggressive instincts of state behavior.² Liberals hoped that China's rise would be mitigated by embedding it within international institutions and an interdependent global economy. China's increasing global strength would be both muted and redirected in positive directions, the argument went, if the PRC embraced the rules and practices of the post-Cold War international system shaped by the United States.

As Edelstein recounts, neither theory satisfactorily explains United States behavior over the past twenty-five years. The United States' economic interactions with China, though mutually beneficial, helped speed China's rise to near peer status. This policy would appear to be motivated by the liberal perspective; offensive realism, with its focus on relative gains, would have eschewed any interactions with a rival that improved a potential adversary's place in the balance of power. Yet as Edelstein points out, the liberal position does not fully explain America's behavior either. Even as it has deepened economic ties, the United States has long developed both military and diplomatic strategies to offset China's power. Nor does either theory help us fully comprehend China's intentions, which at times appear alarmingly aggressive while in other instances are relatively benign. How do we explain the United States's cooperation with a rising power that has long been recognized as a competitor if not an adversary? More broadly, must all power transitions lead to conflict and war?

International relations theorists have long struggled to resolve the tension between the zero sum works of international security, where the relative gains and losses between states are paramount, and the mutually beneficial, often Pareto optimal transactions that mark many other aspects of global life, especially international economics. Trade and financial relations between Great Britain and Germany intensified and interconnected their economies in the decades before the First World War, while arguably leaving an adversary better prepared to win on the battlefield. Has the United States done the same with China in recent decades? If so, how is this to be explained? Dale Copeland's theory of trade expectations is one impressive effort to wrestle with this dilemma.³

Edelstein adds to this debate; his theory focuses less on trade and more on a great power's calculations of when the "short-term rewards of cooperation combine with uncertainty about the future" (2) to make cooperation possible. If both the rising and declining power have long time horizons, hegemonic war is more likely; both powers having short time horizons increases the possibility of preventive war. A declining power with a short time horizon, however, matched with an emerging power with a long-time horizon—one might imagine the United States vis-à-vis China after the 9/11 attacks upon the United States—produces the conditions most likely to lead to cooperation (chart, 28). Great power time horizons are dictated by three conditions: other threats, the short-term benefits of cooperation with a rival, and the long-term intentions of that rival. (6). Edelstein tests his theory with four well researched, nicely constructed cases: Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's Germany, the rise of the United States, interwar Germany, and the Cold War competition between the Soviet Union and the United States.

² For the best insight into this view, see John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³ Dale C. Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations," *International Security* 20:4 (Spring, 1996): 5-41.

Edelstein is right to incorporate time into the analysis of international relations. I would suggest, however, that he might go further in thinking about varying temporal horizons. Tensions are not simply cooled between rivals when there is an immediate threat. One of the most important questions faced by the leaders of a state is whether time is on their side. This can be hard to judge—throughout the Cold War, both the Soviets and the Americans believed that in the long run, their system would prevail, which often moderated their behavior. Only one side was right, and it is rarely clear in real time who that is. What were the betting odds in 1980 that the Soviet Union would not only stagnate in its race to overtake the United States, but collapse? The main quality about time is that it reveals a completely unknown future, with little certainty and less predictability. Events do not unfold in a linear manner. My favorite example involves a country that in three short decades, went from being an insecure, illiberal, militaristic state with the world's 8th or 9th largest economy surrounded by threats, to become a peaceful, secure democracy with the world's second largest economy. That country was, of course, Japan between 1940 and 1970. It only arrived at its exalted status after pursuing one of the most disastrous grand strategies in history, pursuing a path no one could have imagined and never would have advised.

Edelstein touches upon this kind of uncertainty but this is a great topic for future work. Will China continue to rise and surpass the United States, stagnate, or perhaps even collapse? No one can possibly know. That reveals the differences between sports and world politics. Games end, seasons finish, but international politics goes on. In sports, even though the outcome is unknown, the basic rules and narrow parameters of the competition are well understood, the crucial variables recognized and constant, the probabilities easier to assess. Little of this is true for statesmen and strategists navigating the treacherous, unpredictable world of international relations. This is an area where the risks are far too high for the process and is no place for a Sam Hinkie. As Walter McDougall, quoting Samuel Huntington through James Kurth, points out, “the most a wise statesman can do is imagine his ship of state on an infinite sea, with no port behind and no destination ahead, his sole responsibility being to weather the storms certain to come, and keep the ship on an even keel so long as he has the bridge.”⁴ By incorporating variables such as time horizons and uncertainty, Edelstein wisely reminds us how complicated statecraft can be.

⁴ Walter McDougall, “Can the United States do Grand Strategy,” 13 April 2010
<https://www.fpri.org/article/2010/04/can-the-united-states-do-grand-strategy/>

Review by Stacie E. Goddard, Wellesley College

In *Over the Horizon*, David Edelstein tackles what ranks among the most important questions in international relations theory: why is it that some rising powers emerge peacefully, while other power transitions lead to conflict, even hegemonic wars? Edelstein argues that conflict is not an inevitable outcome of power transitions; indeed, great powers often choose to cooperate with a rising challenger, even when doing so facilitates the growth of a potential adversary.

But why and when will cooperation occur? Edelstein's basic argument is a straightforward one: it is leaders' time horizons—the value that great powers and rising powers place “on present as opposed to future payoffs”—that make power transitions cooperative or conflictual (5). On the one hand, while great powers recognize that an emerging challenger might become a threat in the future, the uncertainty about intentions means that it is more likely to focus on the short-term benefits of cooperating with the rising power. A great power's tendency to favor short-term cooperation is increased if it faces other threats in the short-term, or if the great power sees benefits to immediate cooperation with the rising power. Only if the rising power behaves in ways that make it clear it is a threat will the great power turn its eyes towards the future, and seek to contain the rising power. The rising power, for its part, should prefer a policy of patience, forgoing revisionist behavior in the short term, and instead waiting until it is strong enough to assert any expansionist demands. For these reasons, as long as the existing great power is focused on the short-term, and the rising power is willing to wait to assert its might, cooperation is likely.

Edelstein's book is an impressive contribution to international relations theory and our understandings of war and peace. It is a welcome correction to recent “Thucydides Trap” arguments that portray power transitions as invariably tragic affairs, doomed to end in hegemonic conflict.¹ Edelstein rightly argues that great powers understand that balancing is a costly policy, one that should only be adopted when a rising challenger presents a significant threat. *Over the Horizon* also pushes back on recent realist arguments that intentions do not matter, and that states will always assume the worst about emerging challengers. As Edelstein argues, states certainly care about their relative power, and they are not blind to the threats an emerging challenger might pose down the line, but he rightly notes that all great powers must make tradeoffs; for that reason, they formulate strategies from a place of prudence, not paranoia, and will seek cooperation if the benefits seem to outweigh the costs.

Perhaps most satisfying about Edelstein's book is his sophisticated discussion of uncertainty (18-19). Edelstein notes that scholars often conflate two types of uncertainty: risk, which one can assess using probabilistic estimates; and uncertainty (which some scholars call ‘true’ or ‘ontological’ uncertainty), which suggests that, in complex social systems, outcomes may be unknowable, as they are unpredictable emergent properties. And unlike scholars who argue uncertainty always increases conflict, Edelstein suggests that true uncertainty is likely to diminish conflict. When great powers are truly uncertain about a rising power's intentions, they are more likely to focus on the present, and less likely to commit blood and treasure towards containing an emerging power. It is only when great powers become *certain* that rising challengers are a significant threat that they will commit to costly policies of containment and confrontation.

¹ See e.g., Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

Of course all interesting books raise as many questions as they provide answers, and *Over the Horizon* is no exception. Here I want to raise questions about how Edelstein treats the role of time in shaping outcomes; the way in which states read signals and reduce uncertainty; and the role of agency in Edelstein's theory. First, I was somewhat confused about the actual role that time plays as an independent variable in shaping the outcomes of power transitions. Edelstein contends that most theories of international relations lack a temporal dimension to their causal dynamics. And at moments, time seems to be central to explaining the outcomes of Edelstein's cases: the United States cooperated with the Soviet Union throughout World War II, for example, because its eyes were fixed firmly on defeating Germany and Japan. After the war, as it looked towards building order in the long-term, it was more likely to consider the Soviet Union as a threat. But in other cases, time seems only to matter in so far as the great power understands the rising challenger to have relatively benign intentions. It is this sense of threat that creates urgency—if this is the case, time horizons are then a product, not a producer, of a great power's perceptions.

If it really is the perceptions of threat that are driving great power strategies, then thinking about how these perceptions are formed becomes a central problem for this book. This raises a second question, namely, how exactly do great powers resolve uncertainty about a rising power's intentions? Edelstein argues that it is a rising power's behavior that signals intentions and that, in particular, aggressive and provocative behavior can cause great powers to become certain enough about a challenger's revisionist intentions to turn to containment and confrontation. But in both the theory and empirical chapters, it is never quite clear what constitutes an aggressive behavior. In many ways, Edelstein adopts an ecumenical attitude in this book, noting that myriad factors might increase or resolve uncertainty about intentions, and that great powers rely on a "composite of all available indicators at their disposal" (22). While this pluralism is admirable, it does make certain aspects of the argument unsatisfying; at moments, cases risk becoming 'just so' stories. Why was Germany's Chancellor Otto von Bismarck able to convince the great powers that earlier expansionist behavior was limited, for example? Edelstein notes that Bismarck's gestures were often 'cheap talk,' so why should these words speak louder than actions?

Likewise, in his case on the United States Edelstein notes that beliefs about a shared identity between the United States and Britain assured that relations would remain cooperative, even as U.S. behavior grew more revisionist. But arguably U.S. expansion was as aggressive, perhaps even more so, than the behavior of imperial Germany, and the sudden significance of identity in Edelstein's theory is not really explained. To remedy this, Edelstein might have done more in these cases to build on his discussion in the conclusion of different conceptions of uncertainty (drawn from Brian Rathbun's work),² to think whether uncertainty is resolved through 'costly signals,' as rationalists might claim; through salient signals, as psychological approaches might argue; or through meaningful signals, as constructivists would contend.

Finally, Edelstein could have done more to clarify the role of agency in his theory, especially the ability of the rising power to shape perceptions of its intentions. Edelstein does a nice job explaining how rising powers, even though they should value patience, are at times forced prematurely into aggressive behavior, often because of pressures on the home front. But it seems that some leaders are better able to manage these domestic pressures than others. It was not that Bismarck, for example, face no domestic pressures to expand; it was that he was able to manage them without provoking a response from the great powers. Edelstein is right

² Brian Rathbun, "Uncertain About Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory," *International Studies Quarterly* 51:3 (September 2007): 533-557.

H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 10-12

to reject 'great men' explanations as insufficient but, without a richer account of the conditions under which individuals are able to juggle domestic and international audiences, we are left wondering why some leaders are successful and others pushed to expand even at great cost.

Despite these questions, *Over the Horizon* is an important book. It is cogent, creative, even well-written, and offers important insights both into historical cases, as well as into contemporary relations between the United States and China. It is likely to make a significant contribution to critical debates in international relations theory.

Author's Response by David M. Edelstein, Georgetown University

I am grateful to Joshua Rovner for introducing this forum and to Jeff Colgan, Frank Gavin, and Stacie Goddard for their thoughtful reviews of *Over the Horizon*. I have enormous respect for all three as scholars of international relations, and I am flattered that they took the time not only to read the book but also to critically engage with it. I will first summarize what I try to do in the book. Then, I will respond to a variety of issues raised in the reviews: what role does time play in the argument and international relations more generally; the rationality of different time horizons; the origins and dynamics of threat perceptions; and the role of different types of actors in the argument. I conclude by suggesting some areas for future research that flow from the reviews.

The Argument

In *Over the Horizon*, I aim to explain variation in the level of cooperation and conflict between existing and rising great powers. Great powers do not always attempt to forestall the rise of potential peer competitors. In fact, they often play a considerable role in fueling that rise through economic and diplomatic cooperation. Existing arguments attempt to explain this cooperation either as buckpassing or as liberal engagement, but neither of those arguments is fully satisfying nor can they account for observed variation both within and among cases. Instead, I contend that cooperation and conflict are the products of the interaction of states' time horizons. Existing great powers face pressures to focus on the short term, and these pressures limit their ability to pay short-term costs in order to address a potential long-term threat. Uncertainty only amplifies these pressures as states are reluctant to pay high and potentially irreversible costs to address a truly uncertain and potential threat. Meanwhile, rising powers generally have longer time horizons as they recognize that their brightest days are ahead. Patience is a virtue for rising great powers who are in position to benefit from cooperation with other powerful states.

The interaction of these time horizons—shorter in declining powers; longer in rising powers—explains the observed cooperation. But when time horizons grow *longer* for declining powers, either because they are secure in the short-term or because of ominous indicators of the rising power's intentions, then competition and conflict become more likely. As declining powers place more value on the long-term, they also become more concerned by potential long-term threat posed by a rising power. Alternatively, when rising powers' time horizons are shortened because of domestic political pressure or provocative behavior by other states, then the prospects for conflict and cooperation increase. I assess the argument in four different cases: late nineteenth-century Germany, turn of the twentieth-century United States, interwar Germany, and the Soviet Union at the outset of the Cold War.

The argument has significant implications for international relations theory and contemporary international politics. Theoretically, the book points to an important, but understudied, dimension of international politics: time. The “now-or-later dilemmas” that I identify are common across a variety of issue areas in international politics. States must often decide whether to pay a short-term cost to deal with an uncertain and potential long-term threat, or to defer acting on that threat until later when it may be more costly to do so. From a policy perspective, not only does the book help make sense of the pattern of U.S. cooperation with a rising China over the past few decades, it also highlights the conditions under which that relationship is likely to shift either in a more cooperative or a more contentious direction.

The Role of Time

H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable 10-12

All three reviewers, in different ways, raise questions about my treatment of time and time horizons. Frank Gavin writes, “One of the most important questions faced by the leaders of a state is whether time is on their side.” He then notes how uncertainty about the future—not just about future threats, but about how the future is going to unfold, in general—is one of the great challenges of statecraft. Whether or not China will be able to sustain its growth going forward is one of the most important unknowns in contemporary international politics. I take Gavin’s observation less as a challenge to my argument than as a complementary, but complicating, addition. While my argument focuses on uncertainty about future threats, Gavin’s addition draws attention to the underlying uncertainty about the future that is pervasive in international politics. How actors think about the future in international politics is critical, and Gavin’s line of questioning suggests an important avenue for future research on the role of time in international politics.

Rationality

Colgan asks a fundamental question about the rationality of different time horizons. I contend that no time horizon is inherently non-rational. Based on this claim, my argument insists that while cooperation with a rising power may not always be smart, that does not mean it is non-rational. But Colgan fears that if any behavior can be taken as rational, then rationality ceases to have any useful definition, and his review raises a more general objection to the “fetishization of rationality” in some corners of international relations scholarship.

Colgan’s concerns are profound, and they certainly deserve more discussion among IR theorists, but I am not certain that they damage the core argument of the book. That is, even if we accept the premise that not all time horizons are equally rational, it does not necessarily mean that leaders will choose what turns out to be the right choice. Misunderstanding the future is not the same as making an irrational strategy today. Rational states choose what appears to be the best strategy given limited and sometimes unreliable information about trends in the balance of power. As Gavin points out, uncertainty about the future necessarily confounds any attempt to make rational strategy in the present. What Colgan’s insight suggests to me, then, is the need for even more research on what constitutes rational behavior in the face of uncertainty.

Time and Threat Perceptions

Stacie Goddard challenges whether time horizons are truly an independent variable in the analysis, suggesting that in some cases “time horizons are...a product, not a producer, of a great power’s perceptions.” I would note in response that they are both. In the book, I make the case for why I think it is commonly the case that rising great powers have longer time horizons while declining powers have shorter time horizons. These time horizons, however, are dynamic, influenced by both the behavior of each other and domestic political pressures in their own states. In fact, one of the implications of my argument is that both rising and declining powers have incentives to try to manipulate the time horizons of each other in order to generate either more or less cooperative behavior by the other. The relationship between time horizons and threat perceptions is interactive, which admittedly raises methodological challenges, but also reflects the reality of interactions between rising and declining powers.

Goddard goes further to ask about how exactly states form beliefs about others’ intentions, given that those beliefs are a critical influence on a state’s time horizons. What is it that leads to perceptions of aggressive intentions? And how are those perceptions shaped by various actors? These are the terrific and challenging questions with which the field of international relations has long struggled. For better or for worse, my answer

defies parsimony. My own sense is that beliefs about intentions are a composite of various possible indicators, ranging from behavioral signals to shared or opposed identities to domestic political characteristics. Viewed this way, my discussion of shared Anglo-Saxon identity in the case of British perceptions of the rise of the United States is perhaps less surprising. Identity mattered in that case, but not necessarily in others. Moreover, these indicators of intentions are not simply additive. Instead, they are interactive. Seemingly aggressive behavior by a democracy may look different to another democracy than to an authoritarian regime. Efforts to identify keystone indicators of intentions are likely to be unsatisfying. On the one hand, this is frustrating, as there is value in parsimony. On the other hand, it better reflects the manner in which states actually assess in a probabilistic manner the intentions of other states.

Alternative Actors

Jeff Colgan takes me to task for underplaying the role of economic factors in potentially explaining cooperation between rising and declining powers. In some cases, it may be that economic considerations overwhelm any security concerns. Colgan is correct to note that I do not discuss these factors as explicitly as I might have, but they are, indeed, implicit in much of my argument. The immediate payoffs from economic cooperation contribute to the pressure on political actors to focus on the short-term benefits of cooperation as opposed to a long-term uncertain threat. Political leaders who are worried about the fate of their declining country are unlikely to be able to resist the appeal of economic cooperation that can sustain their status as a great power.

Colgan also raises a deeper point about the influence of various actors on the dynamic discussed in the book. What if one disaggregates the unitary state and considers the various class, economic, and identity interests that might be at stake in a decision to pursue either more cooperative or more contentious strategies? Drawing upon the example of 'Downton Abbey,' Colgan suggests that cooperation between the United States and Great Britain at the turn of the twentieth century may have been as much a product of aristocratic interests as of great power politics. An argument of similar logic might be made about the interests of certain U.S. companies in sustaining their ability to access inexpensive labor in China to manufacture their products. In both cases, actors within a state, not the state itself, are a critical player in driving cooperation forward. But in both cases, the pressures exerted by interest groups were also consistent with the inclination of the central government as predicted by my temporal argument. Harder to find are cases in which interest groups shifted states toward other strategies in defiance of the temporal dynamics presented in *Over the Horizon*.

Conclusion

Frank Gavin begins his review by noting that I am a (until very recently) long-suffering fan of Philadelphia sports teams. Receiving the critical engagement of scholars as talented as Jeff Colgan, Frank Gavin, and Stacie Goddard is the academic equivalent of facing down Rocky Balboa, and I am grateful that the pummeling has not left too many sore spots. I would close by noting that I will ultimately view *Over the Horizon* as a success to the extent that it produces a research agenda focused on the dynamics of time in international politics. As I note in the book, discussions of time and time horizons are at least implicit in all corners of international relations, from environmental policy to technology transfer to decisions about military intervention. The field would be well-served by a debate that takes time horizons seriously, asking hard questions about both the origins and consequences of time horizons. *Over the Horizon* is a start, but scholarly agendas, like international politics, often play out over lengthy periods of time with much uncertainty to be resolved along the way.