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Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin. *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018. ISBN: 9781501725050 (hardcover, \$45.00).

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## INTRODUCTION BY DAVID EDELSTEIN, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

In *Rising Titans, Falling States: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts*, Joshua Shiffrin offers an essential contribution to the renaissance literature in international relations on rising great powers.<sup>1</sup> While much of this literature has focused on the strategies that declining powers adopt toward rising powers, Shiffrin flips this question on its head, inquiring about the strategies that rising powers pursue toward declining powers. Based on a combination of two different variables—the declining power’s strategic value and its military posture (i.e., its military capability as it declines)—Shiffrin predicts four different types of strategies ranging from most supportive to most predatory—strengthening, bolstering, weakening, and relegation. After developing his theoretical argument, Shiffrin offers two extended case studies to test his arguments as well as shorter case studies in the conclusion to augment his empirical analysis. First, he examines Great Britain’s decline after World War II and the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union over Britain’s fate. Second, he examines U.S. strategies toward a declining Russia at the end of the Cold War. What one takes away from Shiffrin’s book is a fuller appreciation of the ways in which great powers are often not simply content with the power they have at the moment but are, in fact, always seeking ways to exploit changes in the international system to their advantage. Whether it be through strengthening or predation, rising great powers never let a good crisis—or power transition—go to waste.

All three of the reviewers find much to like in Shiffrin’s volume. They admire the novelty of his question within the broader literature on power transitions. They praise the simple, yet powerful, theoretical argument. And, most of all, they admire the empirical work that Shiffrin presents to evaluate his argument against the alternatives. The book is a model of how to conduct robust, rigorous empirical tests of arguments using qualitative evidence. Paul MacDonald calls the case studies “meticulous and well-structured” while Kyle Lascurettes identifies the book as an “unusually strong work of qualitative historical analysis.” The next time a graduate student asks for an exemplar of case study methodology in international relations refer them to this book.

That said, and not unexpectedly for a book that makes such a simple and provocative argument, the reviewers offer a number of important critiques. The most incisive of these criticisms focus on Shiffrin’s variables. Lascurettes asks why Shiffrin’s two key variables are portrayed as being of equal value when it seems that one of them, strategic value, is doing most of the heavy lifting in the argument. Lascurette goes further, suggesting that the military posture variable ultimately comes off as “squishy”—difficult to measure in a way that would ultimately be falsifiable or, as he calls the variable, “an open-ended and nebulous concept.” As for the strategic value variable, Lascurettes asks whether this variable is simply reducible to polarity. Put simply, in bipolar systems, one would expect rising powers always to pursue strategies of predation whereas multipolar systems might invite more variation.

Meanwhile, MacDonald challenges whether the potential strategic value of a declining power ought simply to be reduced to its attractiveness as an ally. As he asks, if a declining power is both unattractive as an ally and also has little economic or strategic value, then why would a rising power even bother trying either to support or predate? What is to be gained for the rising power? Approaching the book from a different perspective, Evan Braden Montgomery asks a similar question: why would a rising power pursue potentially costly and risky strategies to prey upon a power that is already in decline? Why not just wait until that state has hit bottom without needing a push from any other actor?

Both MacDonald and Montgomery are also somewhat dissatisfied with Shiffrin’s dependent variable, the choice of a rising power either to support or to predate. The sharp distinction that Shiffrin draws between support and predation often breaks down in practice, and Shiffrin’s analysis pays insufficient attention to the muddy and mixed reality of these

<sup>1</sup> David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); Stacie E. Goddard, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Evan Braden Montgomery, *In the Hegemon’s Shadow: Leading States and the Rise of Regional Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

strategies. Both also question the ease of measuring the intensity of these different strategies and, indeed, whether intensity is necessarily the most telling characteristic of these strategies. Instead, MacDonald suggests that one might focus on different forms of implementation, distinguishing between “full court press” and “Vulcan nerve pinch” variations of predation.

Finally, both Lascurettes and MacDonald challenge the sparse, structural nature of Shiffrinon’s argument. Both insist that one cannot construct a satisfying account of the alignment decisions of great powers without recognizing key non-structural variables, including ideology and domestic political contestation, that critically influence those alliance decisions. Underplaying those variables may allow Shiffrinon to cling to the parsimony of his theory, but this comes at the expense of the explanatory power that might be added by openly acknowledging the important ways in which domestic political variables shape alliance decisions, even in the midst of dramatic great power transitions.

Shiffrinon responds to his critics by engaging them on both the theoretical and empirical critiques that they present. He notes that there can be challenges in generalizing about rising power strategy across space and time, but he also defends the theory he presents and the logic of his argument. Shiffrinon’s work is a beginning, not an end, to the study of rising power strategies.

In the end, all of the reviewers agree that their critiques do not take away from their bottom-line conclusion that Joshua Shiffrinon has written an important book that is likely to become a standard work in the literature on power transitions. As one thinks about the potentially looming power transition between the United States and China, Shiffrinon’s book provides the tools for considering the strategies that China might eventually pursue toward the United States and the circumstances under which some of those strategies are more likely than others. Scholars of great-power politics will improve their own work by taking Shiffrinon’s book seriously while practitioners are likely to better understand their own predicaments by engaging with this important book.

#### **Participants:**

**Joshua Shiffrinon** is Assistant Professor of International Relations at Boston University’s Pardee School of Global Studies. A graduate of MIT and Brandeis University, his research focuses on international security, U.S. foreign policy, and great power politics. *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts* is his first book. He is currently working on a new project exploring great power efforts to suppress prospective challengers before they emerge, drawing heavily on U.S. grand strategy since the 1990s.

**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*.

**Kyle M. Lascurettes** is Assistant Professor of International Affairs at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, where he specializes in global order, international institutions and IR theory. His recently-completed book manuscript investigates why powerful actors have promoted vastly different visions of international order throughout history.

**Paul MacDonald** is associate professor of political science at Wellesley College. His most recent book *Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment*, coauthored with Joseph M. Parent, was published by Cornell University Press in 2018. His articles have appeared in *International Security*, *Security Studies*, *International Organization*, *Review of International Studies*, *Political Science Quarterly*, and the *American Political Science Review*, and his first book *Networks of*

*Domination: The Social Foundations of Peripheral Conquest in International Politics* was published by Oxford University Press in 2014.

**Evan Braden Montgomery** is a Senior Fellow and the Director of Research and Studies at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington, D.C. He is the author of *In the Hegemon's Shadow: Leading States and the Rise of Regional Powers* (Cornell University Press, 2016), as well as articles in *International Security*, *Security Studies*, and the *Journal of Strategic Studies*.

REVIEW BY KYLE M. LASCURETTES, LEWIS & CLARK COLLEGE

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Joshua Shiffrin's excellent new book, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants*, asks a crucial but thus far under-explored question: what strategies do rising states adopt toward declining great powers? While power transitions have been one of the most studied elements of great power politics, surprisingly little work has systematically examined how rising powers deal with declining ones. Shiffrin ably explores this important question by developing a realist theory to explain when risers will support or prey upon decliners, arguing that predation is most likely when decliners have low strategic value to risers.

*Rising Titans, Falling Giants* is an unusually strong work of qualitative historical analysis. Too often, the empirical components of IR monographs feel a bit like afterthoughts in service of a theory, mere 'plausibility probes' meant to demonstrate the argument's potential power rather than serious attempts to advance historical understanding. Much to its credit, Shiffrin's book does not fit that pattern. It is as much a work of diplomatic history as it is of IR theory, one that engages primary sources as much as secondary ones. As a result, it advances the historiography of its case studies in their own right and not simply in the service of the book's theory.

With this in mind, Shiffrin succeeds in breaking new historical ground in both of the book's two extended case studies. In the first, regarding Great Britain's decline after World War II, he convincingly describes the competition between the United States and Soviet Union in the critical years of 1945-1947 to earn Britain's favor. Interestingly, he finds much more similarly supportive superpower policies toward the UK in this period of courtship than existing scholarship on the early Cold War recognizes. Only after it became apparent that Britain was siding with the United States by late 1947, Shiffrin ably argues, did the Soviet Union shift from a supportive to predatory strategy against it.

Even more impressive, however, are Shiffrin's findings in the second case. *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* joins a growing list of scholarship showing that the United States was decidedly not the magnanimous actor it is often portrayed to be in the waning days of the Cold War. Instead, it played the role of predator, deftly taking advantage of the declining Soviet Union at almost every available opportunity. Shiffrin breaks particularly important new ground on the subject of German unification, offering the clearest and most comprehensive account of American dominance over the structure as well as the process of the 2+4 talks that resulted in a reunified Germany fully joining the NATO alliance (see especially 140-152). He shows how the U.S. position subtly changed in the first half of 1990 from feigning accommodation for the Soviet point of view to strong-arming the entire 'negotiation' process to ensure that the Soviets were left with zero leverage. Though only a small part of the larger case study, Shiffrin's analysis is better documented than any other account I have seen of the negotiations over Germany's fate in 1989-90.

Two of Shiffrin's findings are particularly important for understanding geopolitical tensions between the United States and Russia today. The first is a larger finding of the book: though many rising great powers prey upon declining ones, not all of them do. Second is the principal finding of the Soviet decline case: America clearly acted more as a predator than a friend to the USSR in the critical years that constituted the Cold War's end. Putting these findings together creates a damning indictment of U.S. behavior at the moment that the Soviet Union and its empire crumbled. If offensive realists were correct and it was simply the case that all risers always take advantage of all decliners, we could chalk American behavior up to simply doing what any riser naturally does. That *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* demonstrates that this is not the case casts the United States' actions in the late 1980s and early 1990s in an especially undiplomatic light.

The book also methodologically shines in the structure of the case studies. Shiffrin very clearly separates theoretical expectations from outcomes and evidence. In both of the book's extended case studies, he devotes an entirely separate chapter to establishing the expectations for both his own predation theory as well as for the competing hypotheses of alternative arguments. After doing so, he saves his analysis for a second, weightier chapter devoted to assessing the actual historical record and discussing how it supports or challenges the various hypotheses established in the prior chapter. This separation is very useful. Establishing and then evaluating numerous hypotheses in qualitative historical IR work can often very quickly become confusing and overwhelming for both writer and reader when they are done all at once. By separating these important tasks into distinct chapters, Shiffrin spares us this confusion. The reader goes into the analysis chapters of

his case studies armed with clear expectations for both predation theory and the alternative arguments. More IR work should use this template as a model. I know I will.

These strengths notwithstanding, the book's theoretical framework raises four questions.

*First, why are the two identified causal variables given equal weight in the theoretical argument when one of them does almost all of the heavy lifting?* The core argument uses two dichotomous independent variables—the decliner's strategic value (IV1) and its military posture (IV2) at the time of its decline—to predict which of four possible policies—Strengthening (most supportive), Bolstering, Weakening, or Relegation (most predatory)—a riser will adopt toward a decliner. Yet what quickly becomes apparent is that IV1, strategic value, does much more work than IV2, military posture. It is the strategic value valuable, after all, that answers the question at the heart of the book: when do risers support rather than prey upon decliners? As Shiffrinson freely admits from the outset, IV1 alone allows us to fully answer this core question: “Strategic value affects whether a rising state pursues a predatory or supportive course by determining whether, on balance, it is more advantageous to a state's own security to keep the decliner as a great power or eliminate it from the great power ranks.” (24). IV2, by contrast, does comparatively minimal work: “Military posture, meanwhile, shapes the assertiveness of the rising state's predatory or supportive efforts by clarifying the security problems it faces from employing limited or intense means when pursuing either goal” (24). Yet in comparison with whether or not risers prey on decliners, the question of whether they do so to a limited or intense extent seems far less relevant. In other words, IV1 does all the work in determining the main effect in question, while IV2 merely pinpoints the intensity of that effect. IV2, in sum, seems clearly subordinate to IV1 even though they are presented as coequal halves of Shiffrinson's theory.

*Second, is Shiffrinson's military posture thesis falsifiable?* In theory it is. “Military posture,” he writes, “refers to a state's extant military capabilities in the most likely or salient theater of reference” (29). Decliners with weak postures will be unable to pose a meaningful deterrent or challenge to rising predators (allowing them to adopt the most aggressive strategy, Relegation). Decliners with robust postures, by contrast, will be able to prevent this worst-case scenario even where they are still dealing with rising predators (who will forego Relegation in favor of Weakening).

Operationalizing military posture, however, is where things start to feel squishy. Posture depends on a decliner's “ability to field capable” and “efficient” forces (29), and on “the quality and quantity of a state's existing forces and their ability to perform required military missions in an envied domain” (30). Furthermore, a robust posture doesn't even necessarily mean standing a credible chance of defeating an opponent in a relevant theater, and could instead simply entail imposing “meaningful costs on an opponent if conflict erupts” (30-31). While possessing nuclear weapons would obviously seem to clear this bar, they are actually “less useful for threatening other states or protecting interests beyond a state's borders” (30). Much of this seems arbitrary and not particularly helpful for generating falsifiable empirical tests. This is not to imply that Shiffrinson's discussion of military posture is naive or undertheorized. To the contrary, I suspect he does about as well as one can with such an open-ended and nebulous concept. Instead, it is the usefulness of the concept itself that I question.

To demonstrate more clearly what I mean here, it is helpful to look at military posture in the case studies. In the case of Soviet decline, for example, Shiffrinson uses the Soviets' apparently weakening posture around the beginning of 1990 to explain why the United States shifted from a strategy of Weakening to one of Relegation. He argues, quite logically, that it was “the ‘collapsing’ Soviet military position as the changes in Eastern Europe following the Revolutions of 1989-90 began to tell” (140) that led to this American policy shift. He posits that U.S. policymakers recognized “Soviet forces retreating from Eastern Europe” (141). Yet critically, I do not believe he does very much—even in the prior chapter 4—to convincingly show that Soviet posture was in fact rapidly collapsing at this point, or, crucially, that American elites perceived such a dramatic collapse (at least compared to only a few short months earlier when these same elites “had erred on the side of gradualism and tried to avoid directly threatening” the USSR for fear of its still-robust posture) (142). In a book that doesn't skimp on empirical details, the lack of specificity here is striking.

Military posture appears especially squishy in the shorter cases on French and Austrian decline that are discussed in the concluding chapter. Even though Austria and France decisively lost wars to Prussia in 1866 and 1870-71, for instance, both

at the time had, and were subsequently able to keep, robust military postures in spite of those rapid defeats (170). One wonders, then, why such strong postures did not aid them in fighting against Prussia. And yet within decades, by the 1890s, both powers' military postures had collapsed even though neither had suffered anything nearly as traumatic as their defeats by Prussia in the meantime (173-174). Conveniently or not, these fluctuations between strong and weak postures align precisely with the intensity of other great powers' support for or predation against Austria and France in the subsequent period (174). Perhaps this simply demonstrates the strength of Shiffrinon's argument. However, the fact that I am never able to identify what precisely determines whether decliner military postures are weak or robust outside of Shiffrinon offering case-specific details leaves me at least a little suspicious about its independent value as a causal variable.

A third question returns to the concept of "strategic value," the primary independent variable. Shiffrinon argues that four factors determine a decliner's strategic value to a riser: the presence of other great powers; the geographic positioning of the decliner vis-a-vis these other great powers; the decliner's latent potential to help the riser; and the political availability of the decliner to help the riser (24-27). *Yet can't "strategic value" be almost entirely reduced to polarity?* Though Shiffrinon presents the four factors as if they were equal, it quickly becomes apparent that the first is doing the vast majority of the work: while decliners *might* be able to avoid predation in multipolar systems (more on that later), under bipolarity predatory behavior will be inevitable. The other three factors entirely drop out in bipolar systems, because the rising state will face no other threat for which it might seek to evaluate the decliner's geography, latent potential, and political availability to help against such threats.

This point has important implications for the coming Sino-American power transition. Shiffrinon provides what I find to be a surprisingly optimistic conclusion on this front, arguing that "the United States can at least prevent China from pursuing Relegation" so long as American leaders remain committed to a robust military posture (183). His optimism is curious, however, because it masks the most important implication of the book's larger argument: assuming this power transition will occur under bipolarity, there is little to nothing the United States can do to prevent China from engaging in predatory behavior. Whether China does so via Weakening or Relegation seems far less significant than the fact that Chinese predation is already structurally predetermined. And yet this important (if depressing) finding gets masked, to my mind, by a treatment of strategic value as if it is determined by four factors equally rather than mostly by polarity as I believe it to be.

If bipolarity produces the most structurally-determined outcome—the decliner will inevitably be preyed upon because there are only two great powers—multipolarity creates more contingency: some great power will be preyed upon, but which one, by whom, and exactly when said predation will occur are not inevitable. In multipolarity, the additional factors that make up strategic value in the book's theory—the decliner's geography, latent potential, and political availability—should presumably come to the forefront. Because at least two of these three factors focus on material capabilities, Shiffrinon is still able to categorize his predation theory as realist at its core (see, for example, 161).

Yet this begs a final question: *are the realist material factors that Shiffrinon highlights really doing the causal work in multipolarity?* In multipolar situations most of the strategic variation is explained by the decliner's great power alignment decisions, or what Shiffrinon calls the decliner being "politically available as a partner" to the rising state (27). If the decliner remains uncommitted or aligns with the riser, that riser is unlikely to prey upon it. Predation becomes likely when and where the decliner aligns against that riser and with another great power. Decliner alignment decisions were definitely at the forefront of the major multipolar case Shiffrinon examines, when a rising U.S. and USSR confronted a declining Britain after World War II. As he himself notes, while the USSR did not prey upon a declining Britain immediately following World War II, it was "only after Britain moved decisively into alignment with the United States" that "Soviet support [gave] way to predation" (83).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Of the other two factors—the decliner's latent potential and its geography—I see no case in the book where the former is significant. The latter seems to come up only in the late 1800s/early 1900s European case that Shiffrinon examines in the conclusion, where France being "geographic isolated" from Germany's great power competitors supposedly diminished its strategic value to Germany (170). Yet even in this case, the other factors discussed—especially political availability—appear to be more important and convincing in

Yet because Shiffrinson does not explain the origins of decliners' alignment decisions, it is difficult to conclude that his is definitively still a realist theory. To do so, he would need to show that the decliner's alignment decisions *themselves* were also made for realist (i.e. strategic, material power) reasons. If something like ideological affinity often explains decliner alignment decisions, however, then it would be hard argue the theory is a realist one.

This might sound like petty semantic quibbling, but it matters. Take the crucial alignment choice at the heart of the British case. Shiffrinson argues that the most important instances of variation in this case, when and whether the U.S. and USSR preyed upon the declining UK, can be explained by Britain's strategic value to the superpowers. Yet if a shift in that variable is due almost entirely to Britain's alignment decision between those superpowers, and if Britain's ideological affinity for the United States played an important part in that alignment decision, then labeling this case an affirmation of realism would be fundamentally misleading. Ideology would be a potent causal force in the dynamics surrounding the early Cold War, but one that is not registered or acknowledged by Shiffrinson's analysis. In short, I wonder how 'strategic' and 'realist' Shiffrinson's argument really is when these considerations are taken into account.

These questions notwithstanding, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* is an important book that achieves its largest objectives: demonstrating that there is considerable variation in how rising great powers treat their declining brethren, and initiating an important conversation about the origins of that variation. It is an indispensable contribution to the debates over great power transitions, and it deserves to be widely read.

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explaining France's low strategic value for Germany than this argument about France somehow being too far away from Britain and Russia for its potential support to be useful to Germany.

## REVIEW BY PAUL K. MACDONALD, WELLESLEY COLLEGE

Joshua Shiffrin's *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* is an essential read for scholars of international relations theory and Cold War history. It joins a growing stack of books that reconsider the consequences of shifts in relative power on global peace and stability.<sup>1</sup> The conventional wisdom is that moments of power transition are dangerous.<sup>2</sup> Rising states have strong incentives to exploit declining states, who in turn are tempted to use force to slow or reverse their slide down the great power ranks. Shiffrin demonstrates the problems with these kinds of arguments. He describes the incentives that rising powers sometimes have not just to accommodate declining powers, but even to actively support them.

The highlight of this book is its series of meticulous and well-structured case studies. Shiffrin considers two parallel episodes: the reaction of the United States and the Soviet Union to a declining Great Britain in the mid-to-late 1940s, and the reaction of the United States to a declining Soviet Union in the 1980s and early 1990s. Based on a combination of archival documents and interviews with almost fifty policymakers, he painstakingly reconstructs how dominant states thought about the opportunities and incentives to take advantage of their declining counterparts. During the early Cold War, both superpowers sought—at least initially—to help maintain Britain among the ranks of the great powers. In the late Cold War period, the United States was much more opportunistic and exploitative than is often acknowledged. The upshot is that there is much more variation in outcomes than we might expect. Rising powers are not always vultures circling over their potential prey; they can also be saviors who make common cause with declining powers for geopolitical purposes.

As with any ambitious and wide-ranging book, one can raise questions about many of Shiffrin's claims. To my mind, three sets of questions stand out. The first concerns the main dependent variable: the nature of the rising state's strategy. Shiffrin distinguishes between strategies that are either "predatory" or "supportive" in orientation (18), and that are either "limited" or "intense" in character (19). Yet in practice, these kinds of distinctions can break down. Rising powers often embrace strategies that are mixed in their goals—rapacious on some issues or regional questions, while more accommodating on others. The behavior of the United States towards post-war Britain reflects these complexities. While the United States supported British policy with respect to Europe, it behaved in a more competitive manner in the Middle East.<sup>3</sup> While Washington supported London with economic assistance, it took more imperious stances on issues such as convertibility and the Sterling area.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also Evelyn Goh, *The Struggle for Order: Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daniel M. Kliman, *Fateful Transitions: How Democracies Manage Rising Powers, from the Eve of World War I to China's Ascendance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Christopher Coker, *The Improbable War: China, the United States and the Logic of Great Power Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); Stacie E. Goddard, *When Might Makes Right: Rising Powers and World Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); and Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, *Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Dale Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). For a recent version of this argument aimed at a popular audience, see Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> See Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); and Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Decolonization," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22:3 (1996): 462-511.

<sup>4</sup> See Scott Newton, "The 1949 Sterling Crisis and British Policy towards European integration," *Review of International Studies* 11:3 (July 1985): 169-182.

Measuring the intensity of a rising power's strategy can also be difficult. Sometimes intensity seems to refer to the scale or scope of the issues a strategy is designed to affect. Other times it refers to the resources a rising state chooses to allocate to support a strategy. Still other times, intensity refers to the speed and decisiveness by which a strategy achieves its intended outcomes (20). One also wonders if intensity is as important as how a strategy is implemented. A rising power could impose sustained pressure on a target across a wide range of areas, a sort of 'full court press' of predation. Tsarist Russia's efforts to compete with Austria-Hungary across the Balkans could be seen as an example of this kind of wide-ranging strategy.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, a rising power could put concentrated pressure on a single point of vulnerability, a kind of 'Vulcan nerve pinch' of predation. Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine could be considered an example of this kind of focused strategy.<sup>6</sup> Each of these approaches to predation might be equally unbearable to a declining power but have much different strategic consequences. The strategies of predation are probably much more nuanced and wide-ranging than can be captured just by looking at their intensity.

A second set of questions relates to the two key explanatory variables: the "strategic value" and the "military posture" of the declining power (3). Shiffrinson uses the former to help explain when a rising power might choose to support, rather than exploit, a declining power. Yet the strategic value of a declining power has little to do with its own attributes, such as its territorial size or economic potential. Rather, it primarily refers to the utility of the declining power as a potential ally. Strategic value, as Shiffrinson uses the term, is similar to German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's concept of "alliance worthiness" (*Bündnisfähigkeit*).<sup>7</sup> This formulation raises all sorts of questions, however. Is it really the case that rising powers choose to engage in predatory behavior solely based on alliance considerations? If a potential target has little value as a potential ally, but also has little economic or strategic value, why would a rising power still choose to exploit it? More broadly, what makes a declining power more or less 'alliance worthy'? Here Shiffrinson lists variety of factors, including the polarity of the system, geographic distance, the declining power's "potential to assist" (26), and the presence of "some political support within the declining state for cooperation" (27). It is unclear which of these factors matters most, or how they might interact with one another. Some may also be endogenous with a rising power's strategy. It might be easier for a declining power to build domestic political support in favor of accommodation, for example, if a rising power chooses to make cooperative overtures.<sup>8</sup>

Some similar issues come up when one considers the 'military posture' variable, which Shiffrinson uses to explain the intensity with which rising power should choose to either aid or undermine a declining power. In a clever move, Shiffrinson argues that there can be advantages to being weak. Declining powers that are alliance worthy, but have weak military postures, are poised to receive greater amounts of support from their rising power allies. One wonders how far this logic can be pushed, however. If a declining power is falling rapidly from the ranks of the great powers so that no amount of assistance could ever make it a valuable ally, why would a rising power still offer to help? From the perspective of a rising power, there would seem to be a kind of 'Goldilocks principle' at work: you want your declining clients to be just powerful enough to be useful, but not so powerful that they can exploit your friendship. This point also suggests that a declining power's decisions to invest in its military may not be entirely "independent" of its efforts to appear alliance worthy to others (31). Declining

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<sup>5</sup> See Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper, 2014), 266-272.

<sup>6</sup> See David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), chap. 2.

<sup>7</sup> William Langer, *The Franco-Russian Alliance 1890-1894* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 119

<sup>8</sup> This is a key theme of Goddard, *When Might Makes Right*, chap. 2.

powers have incentives to modify their military postures in ways that make them attractive partners and allow them to shift burdens on to potential allies.<sup>9</sup>

A final set of questions concerns the empirical standards that we use to evaluate competing theories. In each of his detailed case studies, Shiffrinson is careful to consider alternative explanations and historical interpretations. In the case of British decline in the early Cold War, for example, he contrasts his theoretical predictions with those derived from security dilemmas, ideological distance, economic interdependence, and Marxist theories (61). Shiffrinson ends up dismissing these rival approaches because they cannot account for the subtle shifts in U.S. and Soviet policy from joint support of Britain in 1946 and early-1947, towards Soviet predation and more robust U.S. assistance in late-1947. Yet from the broadest possible perspective, American and British choices during this period appear over-determined. There were persuasive strategic, economic, ideological, domestic, and personality-related reasons why we would expect these powers to come to view their interests as closely aligned. Do we expect our theories to capture long-term patterns of great power alignments or year-to-year shifts in bilateral relations?

In deciding between competing explanations, moreover, much hinges on how we are to interpret the decisive shift in Britain's affections away from the Soviet Union and towards the United States in late 1947. What is interesting here is that the structural variables that Shiffrinson emphasizes—such as the strategic value, which is supposed to be an “inherent feature of states” (31)—are replaced in the narrative by more contingent factors. In particular, cold warriors in the Labour party, most notably Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, were able to tame their more dovish colleagues and engineer domestic political support for deeper Anglo-American cooperation (52, 74-75, 90-91).<sup>10</sup> Should we award Shiffrinson's theory points because it is able to encompass these kinds of domestic shifts within the somewhat capricious variable of ‘strategic value’? Or should we see this as evidence in favor of some alternative theory that stresses party politics and domestic ideologies in the making of Cold War alliances?

While these questions are important, they should not detract from the overall strengths of Shiffrinson's argument. Accounts of the early Cold War must acknowledge the solicitousness the Soviet Union demonstrated toward Britain, at least initially. Historians of the end of the Cold War must grapple with the persuasive evidence Shiffrinson presents that American policymakers understood full well that they were pressing their advantage on an exposed and vulnerable Soviet Union. Whether one accepts that alliance considerations and military posture best explain these choices, Shiffrinson has provided a vivid account of the complex choices that rising and declining powers face when caught in transition.

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<sup>9</sup> This is a key theme of MacDonald and Parent *Twilight of the Titans*, chap. 2.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this drama, see Wayne Knight, “Labourite Britain: America's ‘Sure Friend’? The Anglo-Soviet Treaty Issue, 1947,” *Diplomatic History* 7:4 (October 1983), 267-282; and Peter Weller, “British Labour and the Cold War: The Foreign Policy of the Labour Governments, 1945-1951,” *Journal of British Studies* 26:1 (January 1987), 54-82.

REVIEW BY EVAN BRADEN MONTGOMERY, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND BUDGETARY  
ASSESSMENTS

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**H**ow do rising powers leverage their economic and military advantages when dealing with peers that are losing ground? Do they exploit their strengths to drive less fortunate states deeper into decline or do they provide assistance to help them recover? What factors determine their choices, and their level of effort? These questions highlight a significant but understudied aspect of international affairs. They are especially relevant given the renewed policy focus on great power politics, and theoretical interest in great power shifts.

Joshua Shiffrin's *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* attempts to answer these questions. Introducing what he calls "predation theory," Shiffrin argues that two main factors determine a rising state's policies toward a declining counterpart. The most important variable is the latter's strategic importance. Simply put, if a declining state might prove to be a useful future partner against a common threat, such as another major power in a multipolar system, then a rising state has an incentive to render enough aid so that the declining state is capable of playing this role. Alternatively, if a declining state has little strategic value, perhaps because it is the only other major power in a bipolar system, then the rising state has an incentive to hasten the decline of its competitor.

The second key variable, which shapes the intensity of a rising state's support or predation, is the declining state's military posture. A declining state with a strong posture can still put up a serious fight. Thus, a rising state that wants to assist a potential ally need only offer limited support, while a rising state that wants to prey on a faltering rival will proceed cautiously to avoid provoking a backlash. By contrast, a declining state with a weak posture has little ability to resist its rivals. Consequently, a rising state that would benefit from a declining state's support should offer considerable aid, while a rising state that would like to undermine a declining state should adopt intense forms of predation against its vulnerable opponent. Shiffrin explores these arguments through detailed historical case studies of the U.S. and Soviet responses to Britain's decline in the aftermath of World War II, and U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union during the final phase of the Cold War.

*Rising Titans, Falling Giants* makes a number of important contributions. First, the book helps to flesh out an underspecified aspect of offensive realism. According to this theory, one of the best ways for states to enhance their security is to weaken or eliminate the competitors that could threaten them.<sup>1</sup> Yet states do not engage in revisionist behavior all of the time. What is needed, therefore, and what this volume begins to provide, is a more complete picture of the conditions under which states will act on this impulse, as well as the considerations that will shape how they do so. Second, despite the book's rhetorical emphasis on predatory actions, its arguments about when and how rising states support declining states are just as consequential and serve as a reminder that great powers often need the assistance of weaker actors, even when the former are at the height of their strength. This is consistent with other recent work and is a useful complement to studies that highlight accommodation and burden-sharing as consequences of relative decline and retrenchment instead.<sup>2</sup> Third, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* adds to the historiography of the early postwar and late Cold War periods, both in its detailed description of British and later Soviet decline as well as its assessment of how policymakers in rising states attempted to manage these enormous geopolitical changes.

Notwithstanding these and other strengths, there are some areas where the book's arguments are not completely convincing. To start, the underlying logic that explains the choice between support and predation, which is at the heart of Shiffrin's theory, is intuitively plausible but raises an obvious question: Why should a rising state even bother to prey upon another

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Evan Braden Montgomery, *In the Hegemon's Shadow: Leading States and the Rise of Regional Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 6, 15-16. On relative decline and retrenchment, see Kyle Haynes, "Decline and Devolution: The Sources of Strategic Military Retrenchment," *International Studies Quarterly* 59:3 (September 2015), 490-502; and Joseph M. Parent and Paul K. MacDonald, *Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

actor that is already in decline? Why not forgo the costs and risks of aggressively improving its relative power position when it can sit back and wait as its competitor's strength erodes? Shiffrinson offers a number of reasons why predation should benefit a rising state (28). Yet a reader might reasonably speculate that other considerations are playing a role. For instance, specific attributes of a power shift – such as the source, extent, pace, or durability of decline – might influence a rising state's decision to accelerate and exploit a rival's weakness rather than watch from the sidelines.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, although Shiffrinson deserves much credit for going beyond the support versus predation distinction and attempting to explain when a rising state adopts limited or intense measures of either type, this aspect of his theory faces a pair of challenges. First, appropriately categorizing policies along this dimension is no easy task. Consider, for instance, predatory policies short of war. Many of the measures that Shiffrinson identifies as examples of limited predation, including economic sanctions, arms races, and support for secessionist movements (20-22), might be considered quite intense depending on the circumstances, especially if they manage to undermine a declining state's remaining wealth, military strength, and domestic authority, respectively. Likewise, judging the scale of support can be difficult. In the mid-nineteenth century, for example, Britain pushed economic and military reforms on the declining Ottoman Empire, which had considerable strategic value given its role as a barrier to Russian expansion but a weak military posture that had been revealed in successive battlefield defeats. Whether British efforts could appropriately be categorized as intense, which predation theory would seem to predict, is questionable, although they certainly represented an increase over earlier levels of support.<sup>4</sup> What counts for intensity in one state may not count in another, and this suggests that the theory is not easy to generalize.

Second, the variable that Shiffrinson uses to explain the intensity of supportive or predatory behavior (that is, whether a declining state has a robust or weak military posture) receives mixed backing in his case studies. Notably, the intensity of U.S. assistance to the UK in the late 1940s appears to have been more influenced by the latter's increasingly dire economic situation than its changing military posture (80-82); the shift in U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union from intense predation back to limited predation in 1990-91 is only consistent with the theory thanks to the debatable proposition that Soviet military posture actually became stronger as Moscow's decline became deeper (116); and, in the book's concluding chapter, Shiffrinson explains briefly that a rising Prussia went to war with a declining Austria and then a declining France in the mid-nineteenth century despite the fact that both of Berlin's continental rivals had strong military postures at the time, which should have been a check on such an extreme form of predation (20, 166-167).

These critiques aside, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* is a valuable addition to the growing literature on great power politics, and well-timed given the renewed emphasis on economic, political, and military competition between the United States and its major power rivals. It addresses a largely neglected aspect of power shifts, tackles important empirical puzzles, contributes to the development of realist international relations theory, and offers a window into how a rising power like the People's Republic of China might conduct itself in the years ahead.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On different attributes of power shifts, see Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 20-21; and Montgomery, *In the Hegemon's Shadow*, 17-19.

<sup>4</sup> Montgomery, *In the Hegemon's Shadow*, 44-47. This case points to other factors that could impact levels of support, such as miscalculations regarding the extent of a declining partner's weakness and a declining partner's receptivity to outside assistance.

<sup>5</sup> For an application of the book's arguments to China's future behavior, see Joshua Shiffrinson, "The Rise of China, Balance of Power Theory and US National Security: Reasons for Optimism?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* (December 26, 2018), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2018.1558056>.

## RESPONSE BY JOSHUA R. ITZKOWITZ SHIFRINSON, BOSTON UNIVERSITY

I want to begin with a note of appreciation for Joshua Rovner. Every scholar's hope is to have smart people engage their work, and Rovner's efforts in organizing this roundtable on my *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* mean quite a lot. Thanks also go to David Edelstein for his introduction and—above all—to Kyle Lascurettes, Evan Montgomery, and Paul MacDonald for their generous and thoughtful reads of my volume. Indeed, each of the reviewers has made notable contributions of their own to ongoing debates surrounding the politics of great power rise and decline; my work was heavily informed by issues they raise in their own research, making their feedback all the more meaningful.<sup>18</sup> I deeply appreciate their praise for the project's empirical core—matters I spent years working through in the archives—as well as their questions over aspects of the theory. In this essay, I hope to engage and extend some of their critiques by clarifying what I can while laying the foundation for future research.

My work is motivated by a simple puzzle: although policymakers and analysts often expect states experiencing a rise in their relative power to push declining states further down or even off of the great power ranks—what I call “predation” (3)—rising states actually vary significantly in the strategies adopted towards declining great powers. Some indeed prey, as the American effort to sweep the USSR into the dustbin of history illustrates.<sup>19</sup> Others, however, sometimes pursue supportive strategies and try to keep declining states among the great powers—think of American efforts to protect and rebuild Britain after World War Two.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, there are distinctions in the degree to which states are predatory or supportive: there is a difference, for instance, between the American effort to loan Britain money in 1945-1946, and the United States tending Britain an alliance (via NATO) and sending it the lion's share of Marshall Plan aid in the late 1940s. In short, there is under-theorized and under-explained variation in how rising states deal with declining states.

To explain this, I first developed a typology to capture variation in rising state behavior. Building on the idea of strategy as an ends-instruments chain, I present this in the book as varying along two dimensions: the “goals” a rising state pursues towards the decliner (which are measured as “supportive” or “predatory”), and the “means” it chooses to get there (either “limited” or “intense”).<sup>21</sup> This allows us to categorize strategies relative to four ideal types: Relegation (intense predation); Weakening (limited predation), Buttressing (limited support), and Strengthening (intense support).

More importantly, I then use assumptions common to a range of realist arguments to argue that variation in these strategies hinges on (1) the declining state's *strategic value* to a rising state—whether, based on several criteria, a rising state can use a

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<sup>18</sup> Kyle Lascurettes, “Orders of Exclusion: The Strategic Sources of Order in International Relations,” PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2012; Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, *Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Evan Braden Montgomery, *In the Hegemon's Shadow: Leading States and the Rise of Regional Powers*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Mary E. Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), chap. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Terry Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War, 1944-1947* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981). Other cases discussed in the volume include efforts to assist France and Austria before World War One, and Soviet efforts to backstop Britain in the early Cold War.

<sup>21</sup> Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). For defining strategy, see; Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Nina Silove, “Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of ‘Grand Strategy,’” *Security Studies* 27:1 (January 2018): 27-57.

decliner to oppose other great power threats—(2) and the decliner’s military posture—whether the decliner’s military can secure its interests in a given domain. All things being equal, predation is common when declining states have low strategic value, and especially intense (i.e., Relegation) when they also have a weak military. Conversely, support prevails when a declining state offers strategic value and—counterintuitively—grows intensive (i.e., Strengthening) when a decliner lacks the military tools to protect itself. Under certain conditions, weakness can be a virtue.

Lascurettes, Montgomery, and MacDonald raise a range of conceptual issues with the volume’s dependent variable, independent variables, and causal logic. The first issue concerns the dependent variable. As MacDonald and Montgomery observe, the analytic simplicity of the project’s typology can break down in practice. Rising states, MacDonald writes, can pursue “strategies that are mixed in their goals—rapacious on some issues...while more accommodating on others.” Montgomery adds that categorizing rising state means as intense or limited “is no easy task.” While the reviewers do not do so, one could imagine extending this argument to the contemporary world: is a rising China today preying upon the United States, or supporting it? Is it using intense means, or relatively limited options? The categorization of the dependent variable seems to lose momentum.

These are important critiques, but miss two key issues. First, even if one disagrees with the framework, we need finer-grained ways of discussing a rising state’s treatment of relatively declining states. Again, not only are not all rising states predatory, but there is significant variation in terms of how power-hungry or power-reinforcing their behavior is. By the same token, current scholarly treatments emphasizing risers’ “revisionist” or “status quo” orientations don’t take us very far in this discussion; after all, such orientations usually refer to how rising states treat an existing international “order” as a whole, leaving how a riser will treat any particular declining state within it opaque.<sup>22</sup> The approach offered in *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* is thus to my knowledge the first attempt to carve out a specific niche for a rising state’s policy towards declining states as such while allowing these strategies to vary. If—as MacDonald and Montgomery propose—this effort is only partly successful, this simply underlines the need for future work to revise the typology while building on the underlying puzzle.

More importantly, it is not clear that the current typology is as problematic as the reviewers suggest. Although judging any qualitative concept is difficult, we can still measure state strategy in a rough and ready way that is sufficient to allow its placement within my typology. For example, even if (as MacDonald argues) states can pursue “mixed” goals in different arenas or issue areas, the key question is whether, on balance, the rising state is trying to eliminate or sustain the decliner as a great power. We should be able to analyze this: a rising state pushing a decliner to exit a peripheral region while trying to sustain it in economically or strategically vital areas, for instance, may be predatory on the margins but surely could be judged supportive overall. Likewise, analysts should be able to do the same when assessing the means that states employ: intuitively, we know there is a difference between, say, trying to break a state’s economy or destroy its alliance system, versus imposing fairly symbolic economic sanctions or increasing military spending by a fraction of a percent. In short, measuring large concepts such as “strategy” will always be contested and debated but, critiques aside, it is still possible to use the typology to generate an overall sense of rising state strategy.

A related point applies to the second broad issue raised by the reviewers, namely, conceptualizing and applying the independent variables. This issue manifests in different ways. Lascurettes and Montgomery, for example, argue that military posture seems to be less central to the case studies than the theory argues, while Lascurettes and MacDonald challenge the utility of strategic value as an independent variable.

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<sup>22</sup> Steve Chan, Weixing Hu, and Kai He, “Discerning States’ Revisionist and Status-Quo Orientations: Comparing China and the US,” *European Journal of International Relations* (online first view); Andrew Q. Greve and Jack S. Levy, “Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895,” *Security Studies* 27:1 (January 2018): 148-178; Douglas Lemke and William Reed, “Power Is Not Satisfaction: A Comment on de Soysa, Oneal, and Park,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42:4 (1998): 511-516. For a partial exception, see Randall L. Schweller, “Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory,” in *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1-31.

The latter point is simple to address. Strategic value isn't everything, but it takes us a long way towards explaining rising state strategy. At root, when a rising state needs partners against other great power threats and—critically—it looks like the declining state can help in this task, they have incentives to support it; when rising states don't need allies or the declining states are unable to assist, they have incentives to prey. Of course, as Lascurettes notes, polarity plays a big role here, as states in multipolarity need allies more than those in bipolarity. Still, polarity alone is insufficiently refined—it can tell us *that* a rising state wants allies, but it cannot tell us *whether a given* declining state is a candidate for this role. Instead, we need additional factors such as geography and existing alignment choices to fully account for any particular decliner's alliance worthiness vis-à-vis a rising state.

This further helps address questions as to whether some factors are more or less central in determining strategic value: polarity looms large, but other factors that are listed in the book are all necessary. Take away Great Britain's location as an ideal staging area for confronting the Soviets in Europe, for example, and it is not clear the United States would have felt compelled to bid for British friendship and pursue a supportive strategy when Britain declined after World War Two; likewise, had Britain not decisively swung into the American camp in 1947, it is likely that the Soviet Union would have continued its efforts to cooperate with and support Britain amid mounting tensions with the United States. Still, these are important issues not easily resolved—in fact, an earlier version of the project was entirely based on polarity as the driver of strategic value. Additional research can therefore usefully explore whether different ways of conceptualizing strategic value explain more or less of a rising state's overall decision to prey or support.

My reviewers are also right when arguing that I have failed to develop universal standards for coding military posture across time and space. In truth, the strength of a given state's military posture is context dependent – military capabilities are, after all, judged relative to the scenarios they face.<sup>23</sup> What looks strong in one period can, through changes in politics, technology, budgets, adversary capabilities, level of military effort, and so on, therefore appear much weaker in another. However, this does not make the variable impossible to use or statements about it unfalsifiable. Within a given context, changes that influence a state's military posture are not hard to discern, and indeed, policymakers regularly detect them.<sup>24</sup> Put differently, the variable is fine-grained tool, useful for explaining what MacDonald calls “subtle changes” in the intensity of rising state strategy. Given that we need finer-grained ways of understanding rising state strategy, this is as much of a within-case strength as it is a cross-case weakness. Large, long-run shifts in strategy are composed of specific short-run decisions, and if larger, coarser-grained variables cannot explain these crucial decisions, then we have reason to doubt their explanatory power to explain the broader case. So, although the reviewers are correct that contextual factors sometimes generate cases that are difficult to code using my framework, the utility of posture within cases more than compensates.

Consider some of the interpretative issues raised by Montgomery and Lascurettes with regard to the Soviet decline. Both question whether variation in U.S. predation was due to variation in Soviet military posture and, in particular, whether Soviet military posture was *robust* in 1991 when it had been *weak* in 1990, at least in terms of defending Eastern Europe from American ambitions. Again, context matters. In 1990, the point of contention between the U.S. and USSR concerned the future of reunified Germany, and whether the reunified country would be in NATO. And here, Soviet options to resist the U.S. were heavily constrained. Yes, the Soviet nuclear arsenal was intact, but the effects of the 1989 Revolutions effectively destroyed the Soviet conventional position. This left the Soviets with few options besides directly threatening a nuclear exchange—thereby tentatively attempting extended deterrence with nuclear tools alone—to protect their

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<sup>23</sup> On military capabilities relative to missions and contexts, see John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe,” *International Security* 7:1 (July 1982): 3-39; Caitlin Talmadge, “Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Strait of Hormuz,” *International Security* 33:1 (July 2008): 82-117, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2008.33.1.82>; Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> For illustration of these trends, see Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Norrin Ripsman and Jack Levy, “British Grand Strategy and the Rise of Germany,” in *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World War*, ed. Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Ripsman, Norrin M., and Steven E. Lobell (New York: Cambridge, 2012), 171-192.

interests in the area. Indeed, the Soviets seem to have recognized the resulting insolvency, and negotiated the withdrawal of their own forces from Eastern Europe—including tactical nuclear weapons - early in 1990. Not for nothing, then, did U.S. policymakers conclude, as then-National Security Council (NSC) staffer Condoleezza Rice put it in early 1990, that the Soviets “are probably unable to extend their tentacles into Eastern Europe,” while the NSC staff had concluded only two months earlier that “the instrument of last resort is still available” to the Soviets to “shore up” their interests in the area. Soviet military power relative to Soviet political objectives had declined. U.S. predation intensified as result.<sup>25</sup>

When it came to 1991, however, the issue was whether the U.S. would encourage the breakup of the Soviet Union *itself*. If there is ever an issue for which states might use nuclear weapons, surely the survival of the homeland is it. In that sense, the Soviets *did* have a robust military: they had a large nuclear arsenal that could plausibly have been used to keep American predation in check. This also coupled with remaining Soviet conventional forces that, if not able to control Eastern Europe, could still be used to shore up Soviet influence in the Soviet near abroad and raise the cost of American ambitions. The USSR was not stronger in absolute terms in 1991 than in it had been in 1990, but its military posture looked better on the issues in play.<sup>26</sup> And, as Secretary of State James Baker’s worry about “fascism with nuclear weapons” in the Soviet Union underlines, the resulting recognition of Soviet options checked the scope of U.S. predatory effects.<sup>27</sup> In sum, understanding the domain is key when evaluating military posture – one needs to understand the issues in play in order to assess it.

Finally, what of the causal logic? Here, the reviewers rightly ask why states are often predisposed to predation, limited only by “alliance considerations.” Why, as Montgomery puts it, should “a rising state even bother to prey upon another actor that is already in decline?” Moreover, perhaps the issue is not about a state’s strategic value and posture at all, but rather “the source, extent, pace, or durability of decline.” Why the mechanisms in the volume?

These are weighty issues that merit sustained attention. Overall, though, I think answers come from fully understanding the competitive nature of international relations and the consequences this carries for rising great powers. Living in an anarchic system, even declining great powers often have the potential to harm other powers, either directly, or in the hands of a third party.<sup>28</sup> Structure thus imparts a baseline impulse for predation; this can be modified by the factors identified by the argument, but the impulse is there. Hence, states are reluctant to simply let decline take its course. Rather, they want to respond to the situation in ways that protect and advance their relative position (via forms of predation or support). The “source, extent, pace, or durability” of decline is immaterial—what matters is that a power shift occurs. Consider that even if State A is facing State B in pervasive and sustained decline, A cannot be confident that something won’t make its own position weaken and decline in the future, just as it may worry that some other state will utilize B’s situation to A’s detriment. Conversely, even if A thinks B’s decline is shallow and ephemeral, it faces incentives to get things while the getting is good and gain what it can from B’s situation before B stabilizes. Anarchy generates competition, which produces a predatory impulse, even if this impulse can be ameliorated under certain conditions.

This logic aside, the points raised by the reviewers are invaluable because they highlight paths for future research. As all participants in this roundtable note, research on rising state strategy is in its infancy, since it has in the past been oddly

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<sup>25</sup> See Condoleezza Rice, “Showdown in Moscow?” 1 February 1990, CF00719, Rice Files, George Bush Presidential Library (GBPL); Brent Scowcroft, “The Future of Perestroika and the European Order,” undated [c. 1 December 1989], CF00717, Rice Files GBPL. See also Condoleezza Rice to Brent Scowcroft, “The Soviets and the German Question,” 29 November 1989, box 91116, Scowcroft Files, GBPL, in which Rice argued “the Soviets can use force to stop unwelcome events.”

<sup>26</sup> For contemporary analyses of these issues, see *Rising Titans, Falling Giants*, 156.

<sup>27</sup> “JAB Notes from 9/4/91 Cabinet Meeting w/GB, The White House, Washington, DC,” 4 September 1991, box 110, Baker Papers, Seely Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

<sup>28</sup> The best discussion of this issue is Miranda Priebe, “Fear and Frustration: Rising State Perceptions of Threats and Opportunities” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014).

neglected by the discipline. Questions surrounding how to define and conceptualize rising state strategy, the factors driving this behavior, and the mechanisms linking cause and effect merit additional engagement. More work might productively focus on distinguishing between rising state strategy towards declining great powers and towards an extant international “order,” as well questions surrounding how rising state behavior affects great power wars, crises, and diplomacy. For policymakers, interesting contemporary questions involve how we assess Chinese behavior compared to the counterfactuals (what China could be doing) and in historical perspective (how Chinese behavior compares to other great powers). Ultimately, I never thought *Rising Titans, Falling Giants* would be the last word on rising state strategy. With their trenchant and insightful remarks, Lascurettes, MacDonald, and Montgomery point out numerous areas for expansion with the current framework, and helpfully flag other avenues of inquiry. An author could not ask for anything more.