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Defending *RTIP*, Without Offending Unnecessarily

CHARLES L. GLASER

Maybe the greatest honor that a scholar can receive is for leading scholars to take his work seriously. Thus, I greatly appreciate the time and care that the contributors to this *Security Studies* symposium have invested in providing critiques of my recent book, *Rational Theory of International Politics (RTIP).*

Of course, critiques would be uninteresting if they did not offer incisive criticism. Thus, while I appreciate the commentators’ praise for *RTIP*, I also look forward to this opportunity to respond to a diverse range of issues their essays raise. Because there is little overlap in the essays’ key themes, my response deals with them sequentially, instead of working to integrate across them.

**GOALS FOR RTIP**

To set the stage for my responses, I would like to highlight four of the goals that I had for *RTIP*. First, I strove to construct a comprehensive statement in which individual arguments add up to more than the sum of their parts and can be appreciated as part of a larger whole, which reflects an important lens through which to view international politics. *RTIP* develops a stronger foundation—by motivating its choice and characterization of key assumptions and variables—and a sharper, more fully systematic presentation than is possible in an article or even series of articles. The case for including three

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1 Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), subsequent references cited in text. Some of these essays build on a panel on *RTIP* that was held at the APSA 2010 Annual Meeting. Web videos of this panel can be viewed at http://media.elliott.gwu.edu/video/89.
types of variables—motives, material, and informational—the analysis of the security dilemma and signaling, and my conclusions about the conditional desirability of international cooperation and competition are all stronger as part of this integrated package.

Second, I wanted to make clear the theory’s boundaries and its complementary relationship to other types of theories. I emphasize that the rational theory developed in *RTIP* can be envisioned as sitting in the middle of three layers of theory—between those that explain the inputs to the rational theory and those that explain suboptimal behavior, that is, deviations from it. The layers do not compete with each other. They stand on their own, are complementary, and can be combined to create a more complete explanatory theory.

Third, I tried to emphasize that the core theory quite naturally could be extended to encompass a wider range of theoretical questions and to incorporate greater complexity when more nuanced assessments were required. *RTIP* sketches a variety of what I term “within theory” extensions. These extensions flow directly from the theory’s key variables, allowing for variation within types of states (that is, within security seekers and greedy states), uncertainty about material variables, and changes over time in both material and information variables. Introducing this greater complexity leads toward a richer theory that preserves the defining characteristics of the core theory. This extended theory does not compete with the core theory; it is better envisioned as increasing the core theory’s reach, sometimes at the cost of parsimony.

Fourth, I worked to demonstrate the strength of the rational theory. This task is much less straightforward than usual, because *RTIP* recognizes that states do not consistently adopt rational/optimal policies. As I explain below, this does not reduce the value of the rational theory. But it does mean that we cannot evaluate it by simply exploring how well it explains states’ behavior. *RTIP* employs three approaches instead. I devote a chapter to evaluating the theory “from within”: exploring the adequacy of its assumptions, the completeness of its variables, the feasibility of its decision-making requirements, and the deductive strength of its logic. A second chapter adopts a more familiar approach, demonstrating that the theory provides good explanations for a number of important historical cases. A third chapter employs counterfactual analysis to demonstrate that states that adopted suboptimal arming policies—especially arming when they should have engaged in unilateral restraint or bilateral cooperation—were hurt by their errors. In combination, these approaches provide substantial confidence in *RTIP*’s core theory.

**NARROW BOUNDARIES AND DIFFICULTIES OF SIGNALING**

Robert Jervis divides his critiques into those that plague all realist theories and those that apply only to defensive realism and the more general
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framework developed in RTIP. He identifies a number of ways in which realism’s basic framework is too narrow, including its focus on security-seeking motives—while excluding honor, glory, status, and altruism—and its limited scope for addressing domestic politics and individual ideology. These are important issues for RTIP because if we are going to use its rational theory as a baseline against which states’ actual behavior is judged, then we need to understand whether its assumptions are adequate and whether the relevant variables are included. RTIP addresses some of these issues in chapter 7, which evaluates the theory from within. I explore the theory’s key assumptions and argue that, while the anarchy, rationality, and unitary actor assumptions are adequate, one assumption—black-boxing the adversary—is not. An adversary’s domestic system could influence its ability to extract and convert resources, which could influence its effective power; changes in the adversary’s regime type and domestic institutions could provide the state with information about its adversary’s motives; and the state’s policy could influence the balance of domestic politics within the adversary’s state, which could in turn shift both the adversary’s motives and adversary’s information about the state’s motives. Opening the black box in any or all of these ways would provide a fuller rational theory and, I conjecture, that under some conditions a state’s preferred strategy could be different from the one identified by the RTIP baseline. Consistent with Jervis’s critique, I believe this is likely to be the most important direction for expanding RTIP beyond its current boundaries.

This chapter also explores whether important variables are left out of RTIP, focusing on variables that are not a natural extension of the theory. Among the possibilities are motives other than greed and security—which could include the altruism that flows from collective identities and humanitarian interests—and international norms. Although all of these could influence a rational state’s strategy, I argue that, unlike the black-box assumption, none is especially important for the central questions that RTIP is designed to address. Jervis argues that honor, glory, and status can lead to quite different state behavior; their implications relative to security and greed deserve to be explored as well.

Reflecting on this chapter, I should note that I consider it to be something of an experiment for evaluating a theory—I could not find examples of this type of analysis—and a challenging one, especially to handle relatively briefly. Although undoubtedly biased by having invested enormous effort puzzling through these issues, I do believe the undertaking has been fruitful, while recognizing that it leaves room for the analysis to be pushed further.

Turning specifically to RTIP, Jervis addresses the difficulties inherent in costly signaling, a subject on which he speaks with special expertise. Jervis identifies two separate but related problems: the ambiguity in a state’s signal is often quite large, leaving it open to multiple and often contradictory
interpretations; and states’ and especially their leaders’ assessments are likely to be biased. Jervis raises a large subject that I cannot deal with adequately here, so instead I offer a few quick points.

According to Jervis, standard costly signaling arguments tend to overlook the degree to which actions are ambiguous. His examples of the deeply skeptical reactions that some US leaders had to quite substantial unilateral restraint by Soviet leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev provide a powerful illustration of this problem. At first consideration these actions appear to be quite unambiguous—what could be clearer than unilateral restraint? However, the problem may be less severe than it seems initially.

First, we need to look more closely at the strength of the alternative/skeptical arguments. Examining the specific argument, beyond its general logic, may expose weakness. For example, cutting defense spending does not always contribute much to economic growth, so we need to ask, for example, whether Khrushchev’s force reductions could have fueled sufficient growth to significantly reduce future US security. If not, then a rational actor should reject this interpretation, which greatly reduces the ambiguity of the signal.

Second, we need to ask whether all costly signals are open to such divergent interpretations. It seems likely that certain actions taken in a specific international situation are clearer than these examples of unilateral restraint. For example, what if a state that enjoys a large power advantage agrees to a ratio of deployed forces that is much smaller than its power advantage? This was the policy the United States adopted toward Japan in the interwar years. What if two countries agree to limit offense and these limits will not generate large savings, thereby vitiating the argument that savings will generate economic growth. Limiting multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs) in the 1970s would fit this description. Third, if an action is ambiguous, a state that focuses on one of two or more sound interpretations is not acting rationally. If there are multiple sound interpretations, then a rational decision maker should weigh the probability of the alternative explanations, or at least recognize that there are competing explanations and modify the information the action provides accordingly. In some situations this properly balanced assessment will restore some useful information to the signal.

Biased assessments of the adversary’s actions raise a quite different set of issues. One reaction is simply to dismiss this concern because bias is a form of suboptimality and therefore lies outside of RTIP’s boundaries; some of my defense of the rationality assumption follows this basic tact. However, two additional points are relevant here. First, although Jervis’s work on misperceptions demonstrates the serious limits of individuals’ capabilities, states can reasonably be expected to do significantly better than individuals. Especially for noncrisis decisions, states can rely upon well-established analytic units that are staffed by experts with diverse views, or who are at least well versed in the competing views; can create units across the government that
have different institutional missions and perspectives; and can integrate these perspectives into a balanced state-level assessment. And even if states have often failed to build such sophisticated domestic structures for evaluating their adversaries’ actions, the question from the perspective of the rational theory is whether doing so is within their means.

Second, although a nonrational/biased adversary does not fit within `RTIP`’s boundaries, the theory can be extended to provide useful policy guidance, if a state knows that its adversary’s interpretation of its signals will be biased. This would be a large project, but a couple of examples help illustrate how its arguments might evolve. If facing an adversary/leader that was known to be biased toward exaggerating the extent of the state’s malign motives, the state should recognize that communicating its benign motives will take larger and/or repeated costly signals. In addition, the state should recognize that the adversary’s failure to reciprocate restraint is less likely to be an indication of its own greedy motives, reflecting instead its flawed interpretation of the state’s signals. Of course, none of this is costless. A revised strategy that requires sending larger signals could be too risky, making a competitive strategy the state’s best option, and introducing recognition of the adversary’s bias into the state’s decisions introduces greater complexity into an already challenging analytic task, which could make it unmanageable.

WHAT IF NOT ALL STATES ARE RATIONAL?

John Mearsheimer focuses on what might appear to be an inconsistency in `RTIP”—my theory addresses rational states, but I also acknowledge that actual state behavior has not always met this standard.\(^2\) This latter point reflects recognition of research over the past few decades that has found that states often adopt flawed policies and that has developed a range of theories to explain this suboptimal international behavior. As a result, Mearsheimer offers two broad, related critiques: `RTIP` is of little use because it does not explain state behavior; and `RTIP`’s prescriptions will be dangerous for rational states that in fact live in a world plagued by suboptimal behavior. Both critiques raise interesting issues, but Mearsheimer greatly exaggerates the problems and limitations they create for `RTIP`.

Mearsheimer’s first critique focuses on explanation, arguing that `RTIP` will only be useful if there is a “great transformation in state behavior”
that results in all states becoming rational, which he correctly does not foresee any time soon. Until then, RTIP cannot explain state behavior, so it “simply provides a baseline for assessing how states should think about” their strategic choices. Here Mearsheimer goes astray by focusing too heavily on the standard criterion for evaluating a theory—its ability to explain past behavior—and consequently overlooks other uses of the theory.

First, the value of a rational baseline for contributing to explanations of behavior should not be minimized. Most international relations (IR) theories of suboptimal behavior rely on a rational baseline for determining what policy a state should have chosen. A baseline is necessary because whether a state’s behavior is suboptimal is often not obvious. Bad outcomes may not reflect suboptimal policies; instead, the material and informational constraints facing a state can mean that its best option will lead to a bad outcome. We require a baseline to sort out the bad outcomes from the bad (that is, suboptimal) strategies.

In addition, establishing an agreed upon rational baseline has been the central objective of much of the grand IR theory debate, which can be understood as evaluating rational state versus rational state interaction. Disagreement about how to characterize the international situation that states face—that is, which material and information variables to include—combined with the complexity of the interactions that the international system generates has resulted in a decades-long disagreement over the proper rational baseline. This debate, of course, is the debate over realist and rationalist theories of international relations, including Kenneth Waltz’s structural realism, offensive realism (Mearsheimer), defensive realism, arguably neo-institutionalism, and now RTIP. Mearsheimer finds that states are consistently rational, strategic calculators because he has a different theory—that is, a different rational baseline—than defensive realism and RTIP, which he believes explains the vast majority of state behavior. Obviously, reaching consensus on the baseline is no small challenge and the IR theory stakes are high. As I explain in RTIP, resolution cannot be achieved simply by taking the divergent theories to the historical data.

Second, a rational baseline will often play an essential role in a theory that explains suboptimal state behavior and therefore makes a significant contribution to our ability to explain state behavior. By identifying which variables are important, the baseline theory defines the types of misperceptions, flawed evaluations, and inefficient behaviors that could underpin suboptimal behavior. For example, Jack Snyder and Stephen Van Evera point to exaggerations of offensive capabilities and of the adversary’s hostility as key sources of unnecessary arms racing and war; these exaggerations are

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not even relevant to a theory that excludes these variables, such as offensive realism. Related, by exploring how variations in these variables influence states’ choices, the theory enables us to understand whether these mistakes actually matter: not all flawed assessments of relevant variables lead to suboptimal policies; RTIP enables us to evaluate when they do and how much these errors then cost the state.

In this role, a rational theory can be combined with theories of suboptimality to generate a compound theory that explains suboptimal behavior. In my view, contributions to either part of this compound theory can stand on their own. As I described above, RTIP, which is a strategic choice theory, lies in the middle layer of a full explanatory theory; theories of suboptimality lie in the third layer and can be combined with it. Because the questions that I wanted to cover in RTIP already constituted an ambitious book project, I decided against developing a compound theory of my own. I was further discouraged from pursuing this route both because a range of theories of suboptimality were already well established and because I am skeptical that there is a theory that explains adequately when the various types of suboptimality are likely to occur.

Before leaving this rejoinder I should make one additional point—we should not lose track of the fact that RTIP will by itself explain state behavior when states do act rationally. Although suboptimal behavior is not uncommon, states do often act rationally and in these cases RTIP does explain their behavior. I have sketched a few such cases in chapter 8, where I argue that my theory explains better than the previously established theories.

Mearsheimer’s second critique holds that RTIP cannot be safely used to prescribe a state’s strategy because opposing states may be acting recklessly—that is, not in accord with the rational theory—which renders the theory’s prescriptions dangerous instead of helpful. This concern is more serious than his explanation critique, but again is off the mark. First, RTIP provides valuable guidance if only by correcting misunderstandings about how the international system works, which can themselves lead states astray. For example, if a state believes incorrectly that the international system consistently drives all states into competition, then it will overlook situations in which restraint and/or cooperation may be its best option. The state may well need to consider the possibility that its adversary may adopt suboptimal policies that would undercut the case for cooperation. But without RTIP (and the closely related defensive realist theories) this question will not even arise.

Second, although the possibility of a nonrational state certainly complicates a rational state’s strategic calculations, it does not, as Mearsheimer

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holds, as a general rule require states to pursue competitive, offensive policies designed to increase their power and thereby maintain a hedge against reckless states. It is certainly true that a strategy that is best when facing a rational adversary might not be best when facing an irrational one. However, cooperative or restrained policies could remain a state’s best strategy and a state may have some options for exploring the increased risks. A key factor against competition remains the fact that adversaries that adopt flawed policies can be insecure (a point that Mearsheimer touches on at the end of his essay). In fact, an adversary’s misjudgment of its international environment can make it more insecure both by generating military assessments that exaggerate its vulnerability and by leading it to choose military strategies that damage its political relationships and further increase its military vulnerability. The “cult of the offensive” explanations for the First World War lay out this logic.5 Because the adversary’s insecurity is a source of danger, the state has incentives to adopt policies that reduce this insecurity, even though it is exaggerated, as well as to protect itself against attack. This is the familiar security dilemma, except here it is exacerbated by misjudgments.

A state’s prospects for effectively dealing with this type of situation will be reasonably good when the actual (to be distinguished from the misperceived) security dilemma is not severe. This would include, for example, a case in which defense has the advantage but the state’s adversary incorrectly believes that offense has the advantage or at least that an offensive doctrine is best matched to its strategic requirements. A number of historical examples help to illustrate this point. Before the First World War, both Germany and France adopted offensive doctrines when their international situation actually favored defensive doctrines. Both would have been more secure with a defensive doctrine, even if the other retained its offensive one.6 Similarly, during the Cold War both the United States and the Soviet Union exaggerated the potential of nuclear offense, pursuing highly accurate multiple-warhead ballistic missile systems designed to destroy each other’s forces, even though they had little chance of using these counterforce systems to reduce the damage they would suffer in an all-out war. The United States would have been better off foregoing nuclear counterforce and focusing on increasing the survivability of its forces, even if the Soviet Union continued to pursue its nuclear counterforce systems.7 In these cases, defensive strategies offer two advantages: they have the potential to signal that the state has benign motives; and they promise to provide equal or greater military capability for a given size investment.

5 Van Evera, Causes of War, esp. chap. 7; and Snyder, The Ideology of the Offensive.
Third, when unilateral defensive policies would be too risky, a state may be able to use arms control—either tacit or negotiated—both to determine whether its adversary is rational and to achieve military capabilities that would otherwise be infeasible. For example, offering restraint in the size of forces to an equally powerful state or offering limits on offense when it has the advantage should under a range of conditions generate a positive response. If the adversary rejects the state’s offer, the state may have reasons to question its adversary’s rationality, but in any event is no worse off, because it will not then limit its own forces and risk the accompanying vulnerabilities. Finally, as I touched on in my response to Jervis, RTIP provides the foundation for developing a theory that can prescribe strategies for dealing with reckless states, that is, states that are pursuing suboptimal policies.

2-2-2 AND 2 OBJECTIONS

James Fearon nicely characterizes the core model in RTIP as the 2-2-2 model: two states—the state making the decision and its potential adversary; two types of states—security seeking and greedy; and two actions—cooperation and competition. The theory is, however, significantly richer than this synoptic view might suggest. The types of states are defined along two dimensions, so even RTIP’s most basic formulation identifies four different types, including importantly states that are simultaneously greedy and security seeking. The core of RTIP’s theory deals with these types, with much of its attention going to pure security seekers, but with careful attention also paid to greedy security seekers. In chapter 4, which addresses extensions to the core theory, RTIP identifies the possibility of variation within these types and explores some of the implications. Maybe the most interesting variation is in the value that security seekers place on their security—they could vary in the value they place on protecting their homeland, protecting security-providing allies, and/or acquiring additional territory that would increase their security. This variation is important not only because it should affect the state’s own behavior, but also its adversary’s behavior. Adversaries, however, may be uncertain about the security seeker’s valuation and this uncertainty adds an entirely new information dimension to the theory. Now a security seeker has incentives not only to communicate that it is not a greedy state, but also to communicate the extent of its security interests, that is, to communicate its resolve. This further complicates the security dilemma and enables RTIP to integrate more fully the deterrence and spiral models.

Also potentially quite important is variation within greedy states. Greed can vary in depth (how much a state will pay for nonsecurity expansion) and breadth (whether a greedy state has limited or unlimited aims). Both of
these types of variation in the adversary’s greed influence the risks of cooperation; the question of limited versus unlimited aims plays a central role in judgments about the advisability of appeasement when limited concessions would increase the adversary’s power.

Similarly, RTIP divides cooperation into a variety of different possibilities. For example, a state could cooperate via arms control—engaging in mutual restraint in the deployment of arms achieved through either formal or tacit bargaining; defense emphasis—assigning priority to meeting its military requirements with a defensive strategy, even if this costs more than an equally effective offensive strategy; and unilateral restraint—reducing its military capability below what it believes is required for defense and deterrence. The arms control option is further divided into qualitative and quantitative arms control. RTIP explains the options’ relative risks and benefits, and how they vary with the material and information conditions that a state faces. In short, although I accept the 2-2-2 characterization, it is important to appreciate that RTIP presents a richer set of possible variations and explores their strategic implications.

One of Fearon’s major objections is that pure security seekers rarely if ever exist—that is, all states want to change something about the status quo—in which case RTIP’s heavy attention to this type of state is misplaced. In particular, he worries that small amounts of greed can influence states’ interactions. Although I agree that pure security seekers are likely rare, making them a focus of RTIP is sensible for a couple of reasons. First, whether international structure—traditionally defined in terms of the material conditions facing a state, to which RTIP adds information conditions—can generate competition between security seekers has long been one of the central questions addressed by international relations theorists, who were trying to sort out whether international conflict is rooted in the nature of individual states or instead in the pressures created by the international system. Of course, both could be important sources. Waltz’s answer was that structure is sufficient to generate conflict, but his theory did not provide a fully satisfactory explanation. Work on the security dilemma—as Fearon notes, by Jervis, Andrew Kydd, and me—helped to fill in this important gap. Fearon’s point is not that this is a wasted effort—he sees greater attention to greedy security seekers as an important next step.

8 The latter two options are not strictly cooperation because they do not require the adversary to match the state’s restraint. I note this in RTIP, but nevertheless for ease of presentation decided to use the term cooperation to refer to all forms of restraint (50, n2).

9 In Fearon’s essay in note 3, he argues that RTIP “has little to say about . . . how to think about arms control in theoretical terms, for example, as coordination on one of multiple equilibria in the 2-2-2 model under some parameter conditions.” RTIP does however explore how the incentives for an agreement vary with the offense-defense balance, offense-defense distinguishability, a state’s power, and its information about the adversary’s motives; it also explains the importance of monitoring, reaction time, rearmament rates, and the forces that are allowed by an agreement.
Second, states that can be reasonably approximated as pure security seekers are likely far more common than Fearon suggests. To illustrate his objection, Fearon focuses on the US preferences toward Iraq prior to 2003, Iran, and North Korea and argues that the United States is at least somewhat greedy toward these regimes—it dislikes these regimes and would be willing to pay some prices for regime change. I do not necessarily disagree with this characterization of the United States, but I think these are easy cases for Fearon’s position because they involve states that face a huge power asymmetry. The harder cases, and the ones that are most important for RTIP’s theory, involve powers that are more closely equal in power, especially major powers. In this situation, pursuit of greedy motives will take a dedicated effort, requiring a major power to invest large amounts in arms and/or to risk fighting a very costly war. If the state is only a little greedy (compared to the value that it places on its security), then it should essentially ignore its greedy motives and focus entirely on its security motives. In these cases, the simplifying assumption of pure security seeking enables RTIP to capture the essential features of the state’s decision calculus.

This approach is especially likely to be effective if pursuit of greedy motives would divert scarce resources from military missions dedicated to protecting the state from attack and/or would damage the state’s political relationship by signaling malign motives. This set of considerations captures important aspects of US Cold War policy. Although the United States valued freeing Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union’s grasp, it decided early in the Cold War that using force to roll back Soviet control in Eastern Europe was simply too risky. In addition, acquiring the offensive capabilities required to achieve this goal would have conflicted with NATO’s doctrine, which was restrained partly by the desire not to unnecessarily threaten the Soviet Union. The result was a military doctrine in Europe that did not reflect the United States limited greedy motives. The situation facing the United States after the Cold War is distinctly different, among other reasons because US baseline conventional forces—those that it maintains to perform a wide variety of global missions—are sufficient to severely challenge all small and medium powers and they now lack a major power ally.

None of these comments are intended to suggest that states with mixed motives—that is, greedy security seekers—are unimportant. Accordingly, RTIP addresses them—including considering possible trade-offs between pursuing security and nonsecurity goals—although certainly there is more to be said about cases in which states find this a difficult trade-off.

Fearon’s second major concern is that RTIP gets off on the wrong foot by assuming that states are motivated by security; instead, he argues, security should be considered among the means available to states that are pursuing consumption as their end. I agree that consumption is more fundamental and
therefore has the potential to provide a still more general and solid foundation for the theory.\textsuperscript{10} My choice of security was primarily a pragmatic one: focusing on security is a more direct way to get at most of the key strategy choices that states usually face. Moreover, much of what is lost analytically by not starting with consumption can be captured (albeit less fundamentally) by arguing that states value both security and consumption, and therefore see a trade-off between investing in military forces and consuming these resources. Although I do not run the cost of investing in arms consistently through \textit{RTIP}'s analysis, I do identify its important role in a variety of decisions, including that states may not maximize their security because they also value consumption (37); that states can communicate resolve by purchasing arms because this entails an opportunity cost with consumption (95); that the security dilemma can leave a state worse off, even if it does not reduce its security, due to the costs of arming (60); and that a policy of defense emphasis demonstrates the value a state places on not threatening its adversary, because the defensive posture is more expensive than the comparable offensive one (67).

\textbf{MANY RATIONAL THEORIES?}

Dale Copeland's primary concern is that although \textit{RTIP} presents a “plausible rational theory,” it is not set “against alternative rationalist theories that might challenge either the veracity of [Glaser's] deductive logic or his interpretations of history.” In other words, \textit{RTIP} is only one of many possible rational theories, so how do we know it is the “right” one? As Copeland notes, relying on the wrong theory as the rational baseline against which states' behavior is judged could result in concluding that a state pursued suboptimal policies when in fact it was acting rationally. I agree with Copeland's basic concern.\textsuperscript{11} However, I think he miscasts the challenge, overlooks some ways in which \textit{RTIP} responds to it, and at best misreads my short historical cases of key arms races.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} I do note the alternative formulation (40). One possible complication with envisioning consumption as a state's end is that it does not distinguish between the resources a state currently controls and resources it could control through expansion; in other words, the greedy versus not greedy distinction that is captured by security seeking would have to be reestablished through some other type of distinction.

\textsuperscript{11} I disagree, however, with Copeland's claim that alternative theories are necessary for exploring the veracity of the deductive logic of \textit{RTIP}; this is a question of internal validity.

\textsuperscript{12} In addition, just to avoid confusion, I would like to note that Copeland is wrong on the following. In note 6, he contends that I deal with “state motives” only briefly and that “this extra variable represents a degenerative aspect of Glaser's research program.” However, my treatment of greedy states runs throughout \textit{RTIP} and is intertwined with many of its arguments; see for example the discussion of state types in chapter 2 and the discussion of variation within greedy states in chapter 4. It is true that my discussion of greedy states is briefer than of security seekers; this is largely because security seekers present more puzzles, including why they get into conflicts and how they can signal their motives. Notice, however, that
I address the issue of possible other rational theories in two parts of \textsl{RTIP}. Chapter 7, which I touched on briefly in my response to Jervis’s comments, explores the adequacy of the theory’s assumptions and the completeness of its variables, both of which bear directly on the possibility of alternative rational theories that do not flow from \textsl{RTIP}'s key variables. I argue in that chapter that there are a variety of more general rational theories, with opening the unit-level black box likely being the most important for the key questions \textsl{RTIP} is designed to address. The bigger point in the context of Copeland’s criticism is that \textsl{RTIP} is sensitive to the possibility of other rational theories, and I have in fact identified at least some of the most important possibilities.

The second place that \textsl{RTIP} addresses ways of moving beyond its core theory is in the chapter on extensions, and it is these arguments that are of most concern to Copeland. In contrast to the variables discussed above, I term these “within theory” extensions because they build directly on the core theory’s key variables. The extensions I consider include uncertainty about material variables, and changes over time in material and information variables, as well as variations within types of states, which I mentioned in the previous section. My purpose in this chapter was to sketch a variety of possible extensions of the core theory developed in chapters 2 and 3. I did not attempt to explore them as thoroughly as I did \textsl{RTIP}'s core theory.

My view is that these within theory extensions can be added to the core theory to create a more complex and far-reaching theory, a fuller theory without changing its defining characteristics. I do not see these extensions, either on their own or combined with the core theory, as competing against the core theory. My point is not that adding variables raises no new issues; it certainly does. But these possibilities flow from the same types of calculations, involve the same types of trade-offs, and involve the same variables that lie at the center of the basic model.\textsuperscript{13} I think that it is in the same spirit that formal modelers see the step from complete information to incomplete

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\textsuperscript{13} The one obvious exception is the need to discount outcomes across time.
information as a generalization of a basic model, and adding changes in variables over time can be understood as a generalization of a static model.\footnote{Although he is not addressing this issue, I think my point is consistent with Robert Powell’s analysis; he notes that “chapter 4 [which is on bargaining in the shadow of shifting power] generalizes the model developed in chapter 3 [which is on bargaining in the shadow of power] to examine how two states cope with a shift in the distribution of power.” See Robert Powell, In the Shadow of Power (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 19; see also 116.}

Copeland rejects this formulation, arguing instead that the extensions should be considered alternative rational theories that need to compete against each other and holds that debates between these theories can only be resolved by “in-depth empirical tests.” Copeland focuses on what he terms a “dynamic version of systemic realism,” which allows variation in a state’s future power and in its adversary’s type. In contrast, employing the general logic I described above, I see this dynamic theory as very closely linked to the static theory—the dynamic theory necessarily builds on the static theory. If a state believes that power influences its security today, then it has to believe that power will also matter tomorrow; consequently, if the state expects its power to change in the future, then it must take this into consideration, comparing how its options today compare to its options in the future. How could it be any other way? Copeland disagrees, arguing “none of [Glaser’s] variables are conceptualized in dynamic terms, so it is not clear exactly how his logic could be ‘extended’ to include a state’s expectations of future power and state type.” This is not a problem, however, because the theory does not need to explain why the variables change, but can instead simply assume that they do. Change is exogenous to the extended theory, just like the sources of power are exogenous in the static theory, and future outcomes, which are now influenced by variation across time in key variables, are included in the state’s decision by discounting the future.\footnote{Copeland argues further that my section on dynamic considerations is designed to protect the conclusions offered by RIS’s core theory. However, my purpose was quite different. My goal for this section was to provide a brief survey of how the incentives for preventive war vary with the theory’s central variables. I do point to how certain conditions reduce the incentives for preventive war, and at least implicitly thereby acknowledge that other conditions result in larger incentives.} Moreover, it is less clear than Copeland suggests what we would learn about these theories through empirical testing. If power is changing and the dynamic theory explains a state’s choice of strategy, then this finding can provide support for the static version, because it provides the foundation for the dynamic version; in contrast, Copeland sees support for the dynamic theory undermining the static theory. In addition, if the dynamic version explains many cases, while the static version explains few cases, we may simply be learning about the empirical frequency of different international situations, which is not a fundamentally theoretical issue.\footnote{Unfortunately, space limitations prevent me from responding at any length to Copeland’s position on rational arguments that consider commercial access and trade. Although these considerations do raise new issues, their implications are not nearly as dramatic as Copeland suggests. Needing to protect a}
Finally, I feel compelled to respond to Copeland’s assault on my evaluation of specific arms races. He says that I “simply label” US policy on MIRV suboptimal. In fact, I describe how MIRV was going to affect the offense-defense balance and why offense and defense were distinguishable for this technological innovation. I explain that although MIRV would reduce the degree of defense advantage, the United States would not be able to acquire a damage-limitation capability, even though it enjoyed a power advantage. I then review two considerations that complicated the case for arms control: there were a variety of missions for MIRV, each of which needs to be taken into account in assessing the impact of MIRV on the offense-defense balance; and there was the possibility that a MIRV ban could not be verified adequately. While acknowledging some grey areas, I conclude that banning MIRV was the rational choice. My analysis, while brief, draws on a range of authoritative sources and is not weakened by Copeland’s comment about US concerns about decline and Soviet cheating. His assessment of my evaluation of the German army buildup in the years before World War I is no more evenhanded. Contrary to Copeland’s claim, finding that a state should launch a preventive war does not challenge RTIP’s core theory (or its dynamic extension), so I have no stake either way in judging whether Germany’s buildup was suboptimal. In fact my bottom line is that whether Germany should have launched its army buildup depends on a related, but largely separable, debate over whether Germany required an offensive doctrine. Given the large amount of expertise devoted to this question, I decided that a conditional analysis was more productive than taking sides in this unresolved debate.

GIVE UP ON ESTIMATING THE OFFENSE-DEFENSE BALANCE

Keir Lieber argues that RTIP is flawed because states are unable to assess the offense-defense balance. More specifically, responding to my argument that if states can perform useful net assessments, they have the analytic tools required to assess the offense-defense balance,17 Lieber argues that “net assessment simply cannot yield the kind of precise knowledge necessary for states to make the strategy and force structure decisions called for in Glaser’s theory.” In addition, Lieber argues that my theory cannot be applied when a state faces more than one adversary. I address these arguments in turn.

Lieber’s argument about net assessment starts from the premise that the offense-defense balance needs to be measured precisely, but this is not the case. While more precise and confident estimates would always be helpful, under a range of conditions uncertain estimates of the offense-defense balance will still enable states to make different and better judgments than if their strategic decisions looked only at power. Knowing whether the offense-defense balance is close to or far from 1 is often sufficient for contributing both to explanations of behavior and prescriptions of strategy.\(^\text{18}\) This will remain true if the estimate of the balance is rather uncertain.

Consider for example a state that prefers an offensive strategy and has power that is equal to its adversary’s power. Assume that its modal estimate is that the offense-defense balance equals 2, but has some probability of being anywhere between 1.5 and 2.5, which is a wide spread around the most likely value. This state has very poor prospects for deploying a force that has a decent chance of winning on the offense. In contrast, if this state does not estimate the offense-defense balance and considers only power, its estimate of its prospects for a successful offensive would be greater and misleading.

This of course raises the empirical question of whether states actually face situations in which their estimates are this far from 1 and with uncertainty that does not dwarf this gap. The easiest example is the nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union—numerous detailed reliable net assessments demonstrated that defense (retaliatory capabilities) had a very large advantage over offense (damage-limitation capabilities), with no possibility that balance was close to 1. Nuclear is not the only compelling example, however. There are good examples of net assessments and related historically informed calculations of conventional capabilities that also meet this standard. Before the First World War, German assessments of the requirements for the Schlieffen Plan to succeed suggest an offense-defense balance of 2 or greater. Assessments of the conventional balance in Europe during the Cold War strongly suggested that defense had a substantial advantage, with the tactical balance likely closer to 3 than to 1.\(^\text{19}\) During the interwar period, Japan relied on a variety of considerations—including the required ratio of the attacking to the defending fleets in a local battle and the possibility of destroying US forces as they crossed the Pacific—to settle

\(^{18}\) The offense-defense balance is defined as the ratio of the cost of forces that the attacker requires to take territory to the cost of the forces that the defender has deployed. Thus the offense-defense balance is 1 when the cost of the offensive and the defensive are equal.

\(^{19}\) The theater-wide balance for a war of attrition may have been less favorable to defense, but influential arguments held that this type of war was deterred by its high costs. See John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). Lieber argues that analysts on all sides of the debate over NATO’s conventional capabilities recognized that the outcome of a conventional war would be sensitive to NATO’s warning and mobilization. The balance, however, should be assessed assuming both sides have the opportunity to mobilize, and first-move advantages are then treated separately. See Glaser and Kaufmann, “What Is the Offense-Defense Balance,” 71–72.
on a requirement that Japan’s navy needed to be 70 percent of the size of the US Navy.\textsuperscript{20} Even Lieber’s argument that recent net assessments fail to shed light on the offense-defense balance is unconvincing. Consider Caitlin Talmadge’s assessment of the US ability to counter an Iranian disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.\textsuperscript{21} Although complicated by many uncertainties, Talmadge finds that Iran could significantly disrupt the traffic for weeks, if not months. To restore the full flow of traffic within weeks, the United States would likely rely upon a wide array of capabilities, including at least one aircraft carrier, Aegis cruisers, and DSP satellites, in addition to mine-clearing ships. The cost of these forces would dwarf the cost of Iran’s ship and missile forces. For this mission, disruption of traffic through the Strait, which could be part of an Iranian offensive strategy, has a clear advantage over US efforts to open the Strait, which would be defensive.

Finally, it is worth noting that Stephen Biddle, whose sophisticated analysis of military effectiveness is often invoked as arguing against offense-defense theory, does in effect conclude both that the offense-defense balance can be estimated and that for high intensity ground warfare it favors defense: “Even with modern-system exposure reduction, offensive preponderance cannot create breakthrough against a modern-system defense . . . only the largest invaders outnumber defenders by enough to advance against a modern-system defense without a boost from differential concentration.”\textsuperscript{22} Biddle’s argument is that states’ skill—their ability to employ forces as required by modern military technology—is more important in determining the outcome of battles than is the offense-defense balance and that it is also more important than power. In line with other rationalist and structural theories, \textit{RTIP} assumes that states are highly and equally skilled, and the offense-defense balance is defined in interactions between these types of states. For these states, Biddle finds that the offense-defense balance can be measured and is strategically meaningful.

Leiber’s second argument concerning net assessment techniques addresses what he terms the “Goldilocks strategy”—using net assessments to determine the perfectly balanced force, one that deters without provoking—which he seems to think that \textit{RTIP} prescribes as the force a state should deploy. Unfortunately, on this issue he has misunderstood my argument. As he quotes from \textit{RTIP}, one way to think about measuring the offense-defense balance is to adjust the size of the offensive force such that, according to the net assessment, it is just large enough to defeat the defense; in contrast, a standard net assessment analyzes the forces that are deployed,

\textsuperscript{20} For a brief discussion of these examples and citations, see \textit{RTIP}, 140–42, 197–200, and 244–45.
asking which side is likely to win. How precisely the offense-defense balance can be measured using this approach will depend on the military situation being analyzed. But the issue for Leiber’s Goldilocks strategy is entirely different—he holds that RTIP calls for deploying forces that are just adequate to defend. This is wrong. The passage that he quotes to support this is not about net assessment and measuring the offense-defense balance, but is instead about what security seekers would like to achieve (53). As I wrote in the next sentence, “the severity of the security dilemma influences the difficulty a state will have in balancing these potentially conflicting strategic objectives.”

How to strike this balance depends on a number of variables, including a state’s information about its adversary’s motives and its power, as well as offense-defense variables. RTIP does not call for states to deploy Lieber’s Goldilocks force, and under a wide range of conditions a state will clearly have better options. When offense and defense are distinguishable, a state should not adopt one of these knife-edge force postures; it can deploy defense for highly effective deterrence, while avoiding provocation. When a state enjoys a power advantage, it can improve its deterrent by outbuilding its adversary; especially if its adversary is likely to be a greedy state and defense does not have a significant advantage, a large and more threatening force will be the state’s best option. This said, there are conditions under which a state’s best option could be Lieber’s Goldilocks force—for example, if the offense-defense balance is close to 1 and the states are equally powerful, then the best a state can do may be to deploy forces that are barely adequate for deterrence; its adversary would find itself in the same unsatisfactory situation. Unless their political relations were very good, both states would feel threatened by the other. Depending on a variety of factors, this outcome might be best managed via quantitative arms control or might be produced by ongoing competition. Either way, when the security dilemma takes this form, states do not have a good option, Goldilocks or otherwise.

Lieber’s final key argument is that even if the offense-defense balance can be measured and the Goldilocks force determined, RTIP is undermined because states usually face multiple adversaries. Not only would the state’s force requirements for dealing with each adversary be different, but the state could always combine all of its forces for use against a single state and its adversaries would recognize this, which undermines the individual Goldilocks effect of each force. Although there is an element of truth in Lieber’s concern, his position is overstated. To start, multiple adversaries and especially multipolarity create greater complexity and uncertainty in all aspects of international politics—compare alliance dynamics in bipolarity to multipolarity, with the potential problems generated by buck passing, bandwagoning, chain ganging, alliance security dilemmas, and more. We should hardly be surprised, therefore, that the same is true for the offense-defense arguments developed in RTIP.
In addition, there are many international situations in which the challenges created by multiple adversaries are not as severe as Lieber suggests. Again the easy case is nuclear weapons—a state can maintain the ability to deter many major powers simultaneously without acquiring the ability to undermine their deterrent capabilities. This is both because offense and defense are distinguishable—forces dedicated to retaliation need not pose a threat to adversaries’ retaliatory capabilities—and because defense has the advantage. Bipolarity also creates a relatively easy case—although a superpower will need forces for other contingencies, its force requirements for dealing with the other superpower can dominate its force planning. Especially given that states should not usually be building Goldilocks forces, a state’s ability to concentrate the forces it deployed for dealing with other adversaries will often not add tremendously to its ability to attack the opposing superpower and, therefore, would create at most second-order complications. This was true for the United States facing the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Finally, the most interesting issue may concern how the problems created by multiple adversaries change with variation in the offense-defense balance. Defense advantage can often reduce them. For example, in the years preceding the First World War, defense advantage provided Germany with the option of dealing with its multiple adversaries by defending in both the east and west, instead of adopting an offensive doctrine that threatened France and pressured Russia to mobilize quickly. In contrast, offense advantage, which would have created significant dangers against a single adversary, would have left Germany with still less satisfactory and more threatening alternatives for dealing with a two-front war.

THROW RTIP INTO THE DUSTBIN OF HISTORY

I appreciate Randy Schweller’s spirited critique, but can accept little of it. This is not because I fully reject his characterization of twenty-first century international politics—territory is less valuable, major power war is less likely, and states are relatively more concerned with economic competition than military competition. However, the radical transformation of international politics that Schweller describes needs to be explained, not simply described. If international politics is finally going to be better characterized by peace than war, then we need international relations theories that provide a full understanding of this revolution, among other reasons to assess its robustness. RTIP is well equipped for this task. Moreover, Schweller overstates his case—the possibility of major power conflict is not so diminished that we can afford to ignore it. Closely related, substantial disagreement continues about whether future major-power relations will be peaceful—with much

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concern focused on the implications of China’s rise. Consequently, even if Schweller is correct, we need theories to engage and advance this debate.

RTIP offers three reinforcing explanations for the shift to reduced competition and increased security between major powers. First, defense advantage reduces the threat that major powers pose to each other, which reduces the value they place on gaining territory as a means of achieving security. Nuclear weapons provide all major powers with the potential to meet their requirements for deterring attacks—both nuclear and large conventional attacks—against their homelands, and with a bit more effort against their allies. Geography increases the defense advantage for the US-China dyad, as distance and the Pacific Ocean virtually eliminate the possibility of large direct conventional threats, and water contributes to the US ability to defend Japan. This defense advantage ripples favorably through the states’ interactions, enabling them to avoid damaging their political relations by allowing them to avoid arms competition that would signal malign motives. An alternative argument is that the reduced salience of security concerns since the Cold War reflects US unipolarity, not the offense-defense balance. The distinction matters because unipolarity will pass, while defense advantage remains. RTIP finds that the offense-defense balance is more important than the US power advantage, both because the advantage of defense more than offsets the power advantage and because China is not as insecure as a purely power-focused explanation would suggest.24

This line of argument raises the obvious question of why security concerns played a significantly larger role during the Cold War. The key material variables were similar—both superpowers had capable nuclear arsenals and they were separated by the Atlantic Ocean. Part of the answer lies in the different alliance arrangement—the Warsaw Pact and NATO shared a long land border. More important, however, were flawed assessments. Both the United States and the Soviet Union failed to appreciate the extent of security provided by their nuclear arsenals, because they failed to appreciate fully the implications of the nuclear revolution. Making matters still worse, the Soviet Union maintained an offensive conventional doctrine in Europe, when a less costly and provocative defensive option was feasible, which communicated malign motives and increased NATO’s defense challenges. There is a warning here for US-China relations—even if RTIP and Schweller are correct about the potential for avoiding intense competition, realizing this potential depends on both countries choosing the “right” policies.

Second, the fact that territory is less important for wealth is recognized by the major powers, which reduces their insecurity by reducing the probability that other powers are greedy. Although the causes of this reduced value lie outside of RTIP, its implications are captured in states’ expectations

24 For a fuller discussion of these issues see Charles L. Glaser, “Why Unipolarity Doesn’t Matter (Much),” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20, no. 2 (June 2011).
about others' motives. Other drivers of nonsecurity expansion are possible, but the greatly reduced value of territory for wealth certainly reduces the probability of facing a greedy adversary. Third, and related, the major powers began the post-Cold War era either with excellent political relations or at least relationships that were still to be determined. Excellent political relationships between the EU countries and the United States go a long way toward explaining why they have not considered balancing against US power advantages. Less good, but not severely strained political relations between the United States and China—neither believes the other is likely to be a highly greedy state—have reinforced the impact of defense advantages, thereby further increasing security, which in turn reduces the value of territory.

Beyond these issues of explanation, Schweller has overstated his case by arguing that major-power war is even less likely than it actually is, or at least overlooking a continuing debate on this critical issue. This is belied by Schweller's recognition that "control over resources and access to routes (e.g., sea lanes vital to the transport of oil and projecting military power) will continue to be strategic objectives for the great powers. And disputes over territory and regional influence will continue to fuel rivalry among the emerging powers themselves and with the United States." Of course this could be true even if at the same time the value of territory is greatly reduced, and this is Schweller's position. But acknowledging the continuing existence of the seeds of traditional interstate competition means also that we need theories that can guide states about how best to manage them.

Finally, there is the debate over a rising China. While Schweller and RTIP reach similar optimistic conclusions, the US debate remains deeply divided and promises to continue for decades. As Schweller strolls into his post-realist digital age, I hope that RTIP will contribute to clarifying and narrowing this debate, and guiding US policy.