Sebastian Rosato. *Intentions in Great Power Politics: Uncertainty and the Roots of Conflict.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-25302-3.

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Strategic competition with China and continuing concerns with Russia and other autocratic nations have renewed questions regarding the Thucydides Trap and the security dilemma. These questions stem from how to determine a state's intentions in the international world order. Whether a state is status quo or revisionist, benign or belligerent, it must inform accurate foreign policy.

Sebastian Rosato has added a new perspective on the security dilemma to the world of international relations. In his book *Intentions in Great Power Politics*, Rosato does not simply assume that what makes one state secure creates a sense of insecurity in another. Instead, his "intentions pessimism" theory examines why this dilemma occurs. The book's design leads the reader to understand what "intentions" are from a state's perspective and how they drive actions, or inactions, within the world order. He proposes that what drives states to compete is not simply the structure of an anarchical system but rather the inability to access reliable information about another state's benign intentions.

In chapter 1, Rosato breaks down his theory of "intentions pessimism." He divides information into two main categories: firsthand and secondhand. Firsthand information comes directly from the executive and outlines specific intent. Secondhand information may come from reliable sources surrounding the executive but still yields credible information regarding intent.

The basis of Rosato's theory is that it is difficult for great powers to access information to prove benign intent. He explains this by looking at two main problems: access and reliability. Rosato builds the case that information about someone's intentions is generally in their head and rarely any place else. Since firsthand details are hard to come by, states must resort to secondhand information or may look to infer another's intentions from how the other state acts. However, this could be misleading as states may intentionally lie about their intentions. This information may not lead to a definite conclusion of either benign intent.

Chapter 2 is a rebuttal to the first chapter. It argues a perspective called "intentions optimism" based on the belief that states can find reliable information about another state's intentions. Rosato breaks the chapter into the same structure as chapter 1 to address his critics: access and reliability. This structure provides a solid map and allows the reader to easily compare and contrast the two viewpoints.

The access problem, according to optimists, can be countered because democracies are by nature more truthful; therefore, access to firsthand information is more available. Rosato argues against this by showing that democracies are no more honest than other forms of government, despite the apparent openness of debates and elections. To address the problem of reliability, Rosato breaks the argument into three areas: reputation, rhetoric, and regime variants. Optimists claim that there is a way to gain reliable information in each area. However, Rosato points out the faults in their logic. He argues that each of these does not hold to be more truthful than any other form of government communication. States, in general, are not concerned about reputation, nor are they regulated by domestic politics to abide by their rhetoric. Lastly, communication between diplomats has not proven to be reliable.

In chapters 3 through 6, Rosato engages with optimists on five examples where great powers have assessed intentions: Germany-Russia in the Bismark era (1871-90); Britain and the United States during the great rapprochement (1895-1906); France and Germany and the United States and Japan during the interwar period (1919-30); and the United States and the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War (1985-90). Rosato shows that there was still competition and mistrust despite a more restrained competition between Germany and Russia during the Bismark era than in the lead-up to the First World War. Similarly, with French-German and US-Japanese relations before the Second World War, the competition was fierce for arms and allies and, at times, aggressive because of an inability to interpret intentions. Rosato concludes that material concerns drove the Soviet Union to reduce forces in Eastern Europe, not trust in the US.

The final chapter looks at how intentions pessimism applies to the interaction between the US and China. This chapter could be a stand-alone article. Rosato walks the reader down the same path as chapters 1 and 2; however, he also includes a summary of US-China relations from 2000 to 2020 to give the reader context of how relations have changed in two decades. Unsurprisingly, Rosato points out that access to firsthand or reliable secondhand information about Chinese intent is nearly impossible and will continue to be in the future. Looking at China's declarations of intent is unreliable as statements are not always truthful. Rosato looks at the potential for Chinese weapons reductions and expansion of memberships in international organizations as potential indicators of benign intent. However, as in early chapters, he notes that these too are hard to indicate as either benign or malign intent and are therefore unreliable.

In summary, Rosato takes a realist's view of US-China relations. His theory resolves that there will be an ever-growing need to fight for security because benign intentions are hard to determine between the two states. This ambiguity will drive US and China into another Cold War similar to that between the US and Soviet Union. However, US alliances in the Indo-Pacific make conflict much more likely in this case.

In the struggle to understand international relations, we cannot forget the humanity that intertwines us. The first step toward interpreting our adversaries' intentions is to understand, or at least acknowledge, that trust builds on information and a credible relationship over time. I like the layout and flow of the book; Rosato provides well-articulated points throughout each chapter and skillfully sums them up. The book provides students of international relations with a fresh look at an age-old problem.

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