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## Abstract:

Since the beginning of the modern state system only a few select nations have achieved great power status. But what can account for their rise? The presence of existing great powers would suggest that aspiring states should encounter formidable obstacles that would render their success implausible. In some cases extant great powers sought to counter the rise of a new peer, but the historical record also reveals that incumbents sometimes did not contest the rise of potential competitors. Thus, great powers have pursued two divergent strategies: contestation and nonintervention. How then do great powers decide on which policy to implement? This dissertation advances the argument that a great power's military strategy is premised on its national interests. It argues that the reason incumbent powers rarely preempt the rise of aspiring powers is because of the low level of threat they pose to states. Incumbent great powers are far more concerned about contemporary rival powers since they possess the immediate capacity to undermine a state's interests.

The Preemptive Paradox:  
The Rise of Great Powers & Management of the International System

by

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

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# I. Introduction

Since the beginning of the modern state system only a few select nations have achieved great power status.<sup>1</sup> But what can account for their rise? The presence of existing great powers would suggest that aspiring states should encounter formidable obstacles that would render their success implausible.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, existing great powers have an inherent security interest to foil the rise of peer competitors (Mearsheimer 2001, 236-237). The emergence of new powers is also assumed to usher in geopolitical uncertainty and instability as a result of systemic transformation.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore puzzling to find that many chose not to contest the rise of a new peer or take any countervailing action whatsoever.

This dissertation therefore seeks to answer the following question: *how do great powers respond to rising challengers?* All great powers should have been compelled to thwart the rise of potential competitors given the threat they pose within the anarchical international system.<sup>4</sup> As a state augments its power it becomes more capable of launching a major war in order to satisfy its interests. “Simply put, the stronger and richer a state becomes, the more influence it wants and the more willing and able it will be to fight to further its interests” (Schweller 1999, 3). A counterstrategy would be to contest the rise of aspiring states as power differentials predict that incumbent forces should be fully capable of blocking new entrants. Even if a rising power was benign and

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<sup>1</sup> The state system is conventionally dated to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I refer to a state that seeks great power status as a candidate great power (CGP) or an ‘aspirant.’ Meanwhile, the term ‘incumbent’ will often be used to refer to an existing great power (GP).

<sup>3</sup> Zakaria (1998, 3) remarks that “almost every new addition to the ranks of the great powers has resulted in global instability and war.”

<sup>4</sup> This notion is even reflected in other fields such as industrial organization theory: “Because competition destroys industry profits, an incumbent has more incentive to deter entry than an entrant has to enter” (Tirole 1989, 350).

sought to maintain the status quo, existing great powers can not be certain of future intentions. Although a state that aspires to achieve eventual great power status may not represent an immediate threat, long term security risks remain unpredictable.

There is some evidence supporting this argument. Austria sought to counter Prussian expansionism just as Russia attempted to suppress increases in both Prussian and Japanese power. But the historical record also reveals that incumbents sometimes did not contest the rise of potential competitors. For example, Britain and France both opted not to take any action as Prussia emerged as a great power in the mid-eighteenth century and instead focused on balancing against one another. In other cases, great powers demonstrated indifference to the emergence of a new peer. For example, the United States achieved regional hegemony without encountering any resistance from the existing powers. *Thus, great powers have pursued two divergent strategies: contestation and nonintervention. How then do great powers decide on which policy to implement?*

This dissertation advances the argument that a great power's military strategy is premised on its national interests. Threats to existing interests or opportunities to advance its objectives influence a state's military strategy. In this regard, existing great powers are most concerned about threats emanating from rival powers since they inherently possess the immediate capacity to undermine the security of others. In contrast, the rise of a new peer is less of a concern given they possess relatively weaker military capabilities. *Thus, this dissertation will argue that the reason incumbent powers rarely preempt the rise of aspiring powers is because of the low level of threat they pose to states.* Incumbent great powers are far more concerned about

contemporary rival powers since they possess the immediate capacity to undermine a state's interests.

The most perplexing task is providing an account for the absence of war between existing great powers and rising peers which alter the global distribution of power. In many respects, the absence of war is more puzzling and difficult to explain than the occurrence of war. "Identifying nonevents and then finding evidence to explain why they didn't happen is challenging, and in some cases quixotic," argues Jeffrey Meiser (2015, xi). Indeed, an objective of Meiser's research is to provide an account as to why the most powerful state today – the United States – never faced any opposition to its initial rise to great power status. This dissertation not only builds up existing research concerning the absence of war with the United States but briefly examines other nonevents such as the failure to prevent the rise of China in the mid-twentieth century.

There is a scarcity of research as to how existing powers responded to the rise of new peers. Related theories concern great power reaction to the hegemonic aspirations of their contemporaries but do not address earlier periods of relative growth. For example, much analysis is devoted to Bismark, Wilhelm II, and Hitler revisionism but not before such hegemonic attempts. Given this lacuna in the literature, my project seeks to shed light on the foreign policy decisions of great powers (GP) toward rising peers or what I call candidate great powers (CGP). These candidate great powers are marked by increases in military power, broad regional or global aspirations, and more assertive behavior on the world stage. How extant great powers respond to the emergence of these candidate great powers can help us understand varying incidents of peace and war.



An overarching goal of this study is to assess the general dynamics between great powers and rising states. Current theories of international relations do not provide adequate explanation of the relationship between these two state types. Most theories are restricted to interactions among great powers themselves and omit candidate great powers from consideration. Therefore, a fundamental objective of my research is to develop a generalizable theory of relations between great powers and candidate great powers. The temporal scope of the study focuses on the emergence of new great powers since the formation of the modern state system (conventionally dating back to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648) and without regard to geographic limitations.

The findings of this study contain significant consequences for 21st century policymaking. The United States now faces the prospect of a rising challenge to its unipolar hegemony with potential confrontations stemming from other great powers such as China, or even aspiring powers such as India. Is war or peaceful accommodation the most likely outcome between these two competitors? Practitioners can therefore evaluate lessons of the past to mitigate conflict and manage any potential change in the international system.

## **Theories of Great Power Politics**

Given the rise of great powers over the past several centuries, the existing international relations literature contains several interrelated deficiencies. First, it lacks any serious treatment of the relationship between great powers and candidate powers, with most realist theories instead restricted to interactions among the great powers themselves. "Concern with international politics as a system requires concentration on

the states that make the most difference,” argued Kenneth Waltz, adding that “a general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers” (1979, 73).

Other theories of international relations have been similarly concerned with the great powers. The second deficiency of existing scholarship is its inability to account for the rise of new powers from the perspective of the prevailing powers.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, most theories have trouble explaining why an incumbent state would permit the entrance of a peer competitor among its rank, especially since initial power differentials favor extant powers.

## Power Transition Theory

Power transition theory resides within the larger research program of ‘rise and fall’ realism.<sup>6</sup> The primary focus of the theory is predicting system stability by examining power differentials among states.<sup>7</sup> In particular, differential growth rates in terms of political, economic, and technological developments between states serves as the primary mechanism for destabilization. Power transition theory contends the international system is most stable when one state is more powerful than all others, while instability and conflict are more likely when two states approach power parity.<sup>8</sup>

According to A.F.K Organski and Jacek Kugler, the “even distribution of political,

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Kennedy (1987) and Zakaria (1998) both consider the emergence of new powers only from the perspective of the rising state. Layne (1993) does address policy alternatives available to the United States as a unipolar hegemon, but does not offer a theoretic framework that can be extended to other cases. This shortcoming has long been observed among historians including Robert Middleton (1968, xiii) who found, for example, that those who study the rise of Prussia have failed to address diplomatic policy from the French point of view.

<sup>6</sup> See Elman & Jensen (2014, Chap. 7) for a brief overview and discussion of rise and fall realism. For a description of the hard core and more recent extensions of power transition theory see DiCicco & Levy (1999).

<sup>7</sup> “The essence of systemic change involves the replacement of a declining dominant power by a rising dominant power” (Gilpin 1981, 43).

<sup>8</sup> There is much debate among scholars, however, whether the rising state or the declining hegemon initiates war. See A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler (1980), Robert Gilpin (1981), and Copeland (2000).

economic, and military capabilities between contending groups of nations is likely to increase the probability of war” (1980, 19).

Unfortunately, power transition theory faces two limitations in its ability to provide an accurate account of how great powers respond to candidate great powers. First, the parameters of power transition theory are restricted to great powers and the power differentials among them. Indeed, Douglas Lemke (1997, 31n22) seems to acknowledge that power transition theory lacks any serious treatment of major-minor power interactions.<sup>9</sup> It is instead limited to jockeying among existing great powers as the dependent variable of interest is often major hegemonic war.<sup>10</sup> “From this point of view,” Karen Adams claims, “attacks are more likely among states of relatively equal power, such as great powers, than between great powers and less powerful states” (2003/04, 64).

Power transition is largely concerned about a global hierarchy in which challenges to the dominate state result in conflict. The relationship between greater and lesser powers therefore lies outside the scope conditions of the theory. However, Lemke (2002) does offer a modest yet important emendation that considers subregional hierarchies. Rather than a single monolithic pyramid, he proposes sub-hierarchies in which local actors vie for supremacy.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately his multiple hierarchy model simply exchanges great powers for minor powers, in other words, it is now limited to minor-minor power interactions. Indeed, Lemke (51) acknowledges that his model does

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<sup>9</sup> Lemke (2002) has also noted that much of the existing international relations literature in general is limited to great power interactions. Montgomery (2011) offers a similar critique of both power transition and long-cycle theory.

<sup>10</sup> Power transition theory is unable to shed any light on the rise of candidate great powers since its sole focus is on hegemonic war (Braumoeller 2012, 57).

<sup>11</sup> Levy (2003, 141) does issue a word of caution regarding attempts to extend theories of great powers to regional powers, arguing that “behavior in systems that are nested within larger systems may differ from behavior within the larger system.”

not contain hypotheses for great power interference in sub-hierarchies. Instead his depiction of great power 'interference' in minor power affairs resembles that of a referee between weak actors.

The second drawback of power transition theory is that it can not explain noninterventionist strategies which prove to be puzzling for the theory. Changes in relative power that approach parity do not always precipitate conflict and can in fact give rise to constructive relations between states. Indeed, England forged positive ties with a rising Japan and helped it modernize its economy and military during the Meiji period.<sup>12</sup> Even Gilpin (1981, 234) has acknowledged that under certain conditions power parity does not necessarily lead to hegemonic war and that peaceful accommodation is possible.<sup>13</sup> "Potentially destabilizing developments," observes Gilpin, "are balanced by the restraint imposed by the existence of nuclear weapons, the plurality of the system, and the mutual benefits of economic cooperation" (1981, 244).

## **Realist Theories**

### **Balance of Power**

There are many different variants of what constitutes a balancing of power, but most definitions entail countervailing actions in response to significant accumulations of

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<sup>12</sup> Although his central research question focuses on preventive wars, Levy (1987) does acknowledge that conflict is not always inevitable. In particular, he argues that power transitions are "neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for war" (105).

<sup>13</sup> Writing during the later stages of the Cold War, Gilpin points to five factors that could undermine the possibility of peaceful change: decline of mutually assured nuclear destruction, emergence of a tripolar system, increased sensitivity to zero-sum issues, volatile entanglements with minor allies, and an inability to adapt to socioeconomic developments.

power by one state in the international system.<sup>14</sup> Two distinct manifestations of balancing behavior are often described by scholars: external balancing is the collective formation of alliances against a shared aggressor, while internal balancing entails the buildup of a state's military and economic strength (Waltz 1979, 118).

To be fair, balance of power theory represents a major contribution to our understanding of international relations and does enjoy some empirical legitimacy. Quintessential examples of balancing behavior include the various coalitions that were formed in response to increases in power by Napoleonic France and Nazi Germany, as well as the actions of both the Soviet Union and United States during the Cold War.<sup>15</sup> Balancing behavior is even apparent in some of the cases under consideration in this dissertation. For example, Charles XII was determined to thwart Russia's rise to great power status in the early 18th century. In similar fashion, Russia would later express consternation over increases in Prussian power and balanced against them during the Seven Years' War (Van Evera 1999, 187).

Various strands of the theory have hypothesized that unless a state has amassed at least 50 percent of the system's resources a balancing coalition is not likely to form against it (Rosecrance 2001, 137-138). Other empirical studies have found that

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Inis Claude (1962) and his 1989 piece for a reflection on his original seminal work. A.F. Pollard also famously remarked on the proliferation of potential definitions, finding that "balance of power may mean almost anything; and it is used not only in different senses by different people, or in different senses by the same people at different times, but in different senses by the same person at the same time" (1923, 58). Finally, for a list of canonical literatures reference Levy & Thompson (2005, 2n2).

<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, even these supposedly typical cases also contain anomalous behavior that seem to undermine balance of power theories. For example, some states actually allied with Napoleon and Hitler rather than balance against them. Furthermore, balance of power theories do not specify the timeframe in which it is hypothesized that balancing coalitions will form, thereby making it unclear as to how some cases, including the United Kingdom's actions in the lead up to both World War I and II, satisfy the theory (Levy and Thompson 2005, 2n3). Balancing theorists also confront the anomaly that the United States achieved regional hegemony in the absence of any counterbalancing alliance. But while these are certainly valid criticisms of balance of power theory they have been discussed ad nauseam elsewhere and the debate is not central to this dissertation (c.f. Elman and Vasquez 2003).

balancing is more probable when “one state has acquired a third or more of the total military capabilities in the system, but not at lower concentrations of power” (Levy and Thompson 2005, 4). This may help explain some instances of non-balancing since, by their very nature, rising powers never achieved such a degree of power accumulation, but this interpretation can not then simultaneously account for actual instances of balancing against new powers.<sup>16</sup> In other words, evidence of both balancing and non-balancing can be found against a single state with low levels of military capacity. For example, Austria attempted to repress the unification efforts of Italy in the 19th century while Russia chose a noninterventionist strategy. One of the objectives of this dissertation is to shed new light on this variation.<sup>17</sup>

When examining the responses of existing great powers toward the rise of new peers we also find that many chose not to balance against the aspirant. Even in cases when great powers fought against rising powers it was tangential to their real objective – countering other great powers.<sup>18</sup> For example, the primary intention of the British during the Seven Years’ War was to ensure a counterbalance against French power and were less concerned about an ascendant Prussia (Anderson 1995, 107-108). So while in some cases incumbents may have implemented a countervailing strategy consistent with balance of power theory, in other situations their foreign policies did not constitute a

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<sup>16</sup> Contra Levy & Thompson (2005, 25) who conclude that “great powers tend to balance against hegemonic threats but not against lesser threats,” the historical record does indeed reveal that great powers balanced against lesser powers. On the other hand, it should be recognized that their study stipulates a different set of scope conditions than this dissertation, i.e. the examination of the potential transition from great power to hegemonic status in Europe rather than the a priori transformation of a lesser power into a great power.

<sup>17</sup> Levy (2003, 136) issues a similar call for a more nuanced coding scheme of balancing to better capture the variation found in the historical record.

<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the conventional notion of balancing as occurring when weak states forge a coalition in face of an aggressor is also problematic considering that great powers inherently constituted a stronger position relative to rising powers.

balancing strategy. Consequently, in many instances balance of power is unable to account for the outbreak of war between incumbents and aspirants. According to Levy, “Balance of power theory is more concerned with explaining national strategies, the formation of blocking coalitions, the avoidance of hegemony, and the stability of the system than the origins of wars, which are under determined” (1998, 147). As such, defensive realists have either emphasized the security dilemma or incorporated additional explanatory variables such as offense-defense balance to help account for war onset. Ultimately variation in the outbreak of war is difficult for neorealism to obtain without the introduction of additional variables or turning to other levels of analysis.

The most salient limitation of balance of power theory is its omission of instances of nonintervention. John Vasquez’s (2003, 91) observation that “certain actions would not be balancing” is quite appropriate. Indeed, the very rise of great powers seems to challenge the conventional wisdom of balancing behavior considering that extant powers acquiesced to the materialization new peers. The incumbents’ commitment to deterrent strategies was belied by their willingness to switch alliances or join forces with the rising state. For example, Paul Schroeder (1994, 141) avers that Russia’s emergence as a great power “defied neo-realist predictions” since the European great powers failed to establish a countervailing bloc while the lesser powers bandwagoned with the threat of Russian aggression, not against it.

### **Balance of Threat**

Defensive realism incorporates additional variables in order to formulate more fine-grained predictions, most notable being Stephen Walt’s (1987) balance of threat

theory.<sup>19</sup> Walt examines material capabilities, intentions, and geographic proximity as factors that states consider when assembling countervailing alliances. In contrast to balance of power theory, he argues that a state's perception of these variables and whether an opponent poses a security threat can better account for balancing behavior.<sup>20</sup>

Upon a cursory review, the notion is certainly plausible and appears to have some merit given that it can explain instances of non-balancing. If balancing coalitions are a reaction to a common fear of another power, then an absence of balancing may suggest that great powers did not consider lesser powers to be a threat. This result seems rather intuitive. For example, Layne (1993, 43) argues that Britain was willing to accommodate America's rise since it did not constitute any meaningful threat. Minor powers had not yet acquired the requisite military and economic prowess that would have jeopardized the security of neighboring states. Alternatively, it is conceivable that a military build-up was not considered to be malign because great powers may have appreciated the desire of lesser states to bolster security in light of their relative weakness (Glaser 2010, 69). In such situations balancing may not have been the most prudent response.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile the security dilemma, another research tract of defensive structural realism, generally did not trigger reciprocal fear among incumbents. In fact, great powers often aided the growth of a rising state's military power. Other instances reveal that great powers did not respond to the increasing accumulation of power by minor states. For example, Russia and the United States gobbled up their respective regions without any objection, while Japan and Prussia received military aid from select benefactors.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Walt's balance of threat theory differs from Waltz's neorealism via an explicit reliance on rationality as a microfoundation. Moreover, balance of threat theory is dyadic by being a function of state interactions. Defensive structural realism also differs from Waltz's neorealism in its willingness to make foreign policy predictions (c.f. Elman 1996). Such discrepancies suggest that an investigation into rising powers and the foreign policymaking of incumbent states constitutes a slightly different research question than what purely structural variants of neorealism tend to address.

<sup>21</sup> Other scholarship recognizes, however, the possibility that rising states may have feigned their military capabilities and intentions (Van Evera 1999, ch. 4). But Van Evera (1999, 187) does call attention to the Prussian king's overt desire to expand. It is also possible that minor powers may have been cognizant of their neighbor's threshold for expansion (i.e. Bismark), and therefore exercised caution in an effort to avoid provoking their more powerful rival.



Balance of threat theory can also be used to account for those countervailing blocs in which great powers deemed aspiring peers to be threatening and thus choose a strategy of contestation. An obvious existential threat is one in which an aspiring power launches an offensive attack against an incumbent. For example, Maria Theresa was forced to defend the security of the Austrian empire in response to Prussia's Silesian invasion. Indeed, Anderson concludes that the invasion of Silesia threatened the very survival of the Habsburg monarchy (1995, 72, 82). This relationship, however, offers little insight since the result is not an interesting empirical puzzle – states that are attacked or invaded (i.e. Austria) will obviously regard their opponent (i.e. Prussia) as a threat.

Balance of threat faces several other drawbacks when applied to the study of rising powers. First, incumbent powers were often not threatened by rising powers despite increases in aggregate power, relatively close geographic proximity, and aggressive policies. For example, both the United Kingdom and France primarily balanced against one another during the War of the Austrian Succession and did not regard not Prussian expansionism as a threat. Randall Schweller (2006, 28) seems to concur, asserting that “rising powers do not necessarily threaten others.” Additionally, given the uncertainty that characterizes the rise of most new powers, threat also struggles to explain sudden shifts in strategic behavior. In particular, the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756 demonstrated the readiness with which states exchanged alliance partners without a corresponding change in the composite threat variables.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, balance of threat can not account for reversals in a state's foreign policy stemming from

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<sup>22</sup> For example, Britain decided to suddenly align with Prussia despite its history of aggressive intentions toward its allies and without any change in its capabilities or geographic proximity.

a change in leadership as occurred, for example, with the succession of Tsar Peter III to the Russian empire. We must therefore turn to other variables in order to account for how great powers selected their strategy since threat perception alone does not provide sufficient explanatory leverage over our cases of interest.<sup>23</sup>

## **Underbalancing**

Randall Schweller (2006) undertakes a laudable attempt to fill a lacuna in realist literature with his notion of underbalancing. His neoclassical realist interpretation turns to domestic level variables, specifically elite and social fragmentation, to account for variation in foreign policies. Schweller finds that higher levels of fragmentation correspond to instances “where threatened countries have failed to recognize a clear and present danger or, more typically, have simply not reacted to it or, more typically still, have responded in paltry and imprudent ways” (1).

Although his study does fill an important void in the literature and helps explain cases in which incumbents chose not to contest the emergence of a new candidate great power, Schweller’s treatment of regime type must also contend with empirical discrepancies. He suggests that nondemocracies are more effective than democracies at balancing, in particular, that fascist states can better extract and mobilize resources (Schweller 2006, 48; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 284). But upon a cursory review, most incumbent great powers were largely nondemocratic and ruled by

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<sup>23</sup> Balance of threat also faces various methodological drawbacks. According to Layne (2006, 20), the theory fails to draw a clear distinction between ‘threat’ and ‘power’ given that “three of the threat variables used by Walt – aggregate capabilities, geographic proximity, and offensive capabilities – correlate closely with military power.” Many scholars have also argued that the conception of threat is malleable and susceptible to manipulation by elites (c.f. Katzenstein 1996; Levy and Thompson 2010; Zakaria 1998). In fact, Zakaria advises that a “theory of foreign policy should eschew the concepts of threat and security: these terms are highly malleable and have been manipulated in the past by both statesmen and scholars” (1998, 185).

individuals without consultation with a broader electorate. Monarchical foreign policymaking was not predicated on national legislatures or public opinion (Lobell et al. 2009, 27). This is not to suggest that their authority was uncontested, simply that their leadership was for the most part disencumbered from domestic consultation that would necessitate compromise or bargaining coalitions. For example, during the mid-eighteenth century England, France, and Spain were all tightly controlled monarchical regimes with a small coterie of decision-makers, yet all three powers chose not to contest the rise of Prussia. Based on Schweller's own typology, these states should have formed an effective balancing coalition, however, in many cases they elected not to balance against the new entrant. One of the tasks of this dissertation is to address this discrepancy and provide an alternate account as to why autocratic regimes sometimes opted not to contest the rise of a new peer.

### **Buck-Passing**

In addition to balancing, Glenn Snyder suggests that states may also choose to pursue an alternative strategy of buck-passing when faced with a rival power. "Buck-passing is to hold back and take no action," observes Snyder, "with the intent of shifting the burden of resistance onto an ally or some other state" (2002, 161). It is regarded as a potential policy option to great powers and is largely based on the perceived vulnerabilities of a state and whether it feels threatened by a rival.<sup>24</sup> According to

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<sup>24</sup> Mearsheimer offers a clean summary of the difference between balancing and buck-passing: "Balancing and buck-passing are the principal strategies that great powers use to maintain the distribution of power when facing a dangerous rival. With balancing, the threatened state accepts the burden of deterring its adversary and commits substantial resources to achieving that goal. With buck-passing, the endangered great power tries to get another state to shoulder the burden of deterring or defeating the threatening state" (2001, 13).

Christensen and Snyder, “the less the vulnerability of states, the greater is the tendency to pass the buck” (1990, 145).

But if we take a brief look at the rise of great powers we only find one instance that could ostensibly satisfy the conditions of buck-passing.<sup>25</sup> During the early twentieth century both Germany and Britain were threatened by the growth in Russia’s power. Kaiser Wilhelm II actively encouraged Nicholas II to pursue eastern expansion as a self-interested means of redirecting the Russian threat away from Germany, while England believed that Japan “would be a useful check to Russian power” which threatened its colonial holding of India and economic interests in China (Bourne 1970, 153). But there is little evidence that either Germany or England deliberately encouraged a war between Japan and Russia, nor is there any indication that either great power would have militarily intervened should Japan have failed in its reputed task of challenging Russia in East Asia (Kowner 2006, 130, 133-134; Westwood 1986, 16).<sup>26</sup>

There is little historical evidence to suggest that great powers would have pursued a balancing strategy in the absence of a buck-catcher, and there is little indication that an incumbent’s decision to eschew military conflict was premised on any future expectation of intervening should another state fail to thwart the rise of a new power. For example, incumbent great powers did not become involved in the Great Northern War when it became apparent that Sweden was unable to curb Russian

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<sup>25</sup> Another potential case could be Britain’s policy toward Prussia in the mid-eighteenth century. According to Kennedy, “France’s enemies had to be given assistance inside Europe, to contain Bourbon (and Napoleonic) ambitions and thus to preserve Britain’s own long-term interests” (1987, 97). Ultimately, the British considered Prussia to be a useful ally in undermining France (Burrows 1895, 125-126). What is problematic about this case, however, is that Britain did not satisfy conditions buck-passing by ‘taking no action’ and was also engaged in direct balancing against France.

<sup>26</sup> It could also be argued that Germany’s behavior more closely resembled a ‘bait and bleed’ strategy in which Russia and Japan weakened one another in conflict while Germany augmented its military power.

expansionism (Frost 2000, 296; Gibler 2009, 32; Sturdy 2002, 383). Even when a buck-catcher struggled in its efforts to curb an aggressor the historical record reveals instances of buck-passers actually pursuing its interests elsewhere rather than intervening in an ongoing conflict. As I will demonstrate later in the dissertation, this is precisely the course of action most existing great powers chose during the mid-eighteenth century as Austria scrambled to counter Prussian aggression. Overall, the cases of rising powers presented in this dissertation demonstrate that incumbents deferred military action – not because they sought to free ride on the efforts of others – but because they simply did not have any vested interest in the outcome and were not threatened by the aggressor state.

Ultimately, with both balancing and buck-passing, the history of rising powers suggests a great deal of variation that is left unexplained by the dominant realist theories. Geographical variables typically employed by defensive realism offer little assistance since we find that states of relatively close proximity chose a variety of strategies. The task is to account for this puzzling variation in behavior between similarly positioned states.

### **Offensive Realism**

While offensive realists concur with defensive realists that states seek security, they disagree with their realist counterpart by arguing that security is best achieved through power maximization. “The international system creates powerful incentives for states to look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of their rivals” (Mearsheimer 2001, 21). Unfortunately the response of existing great powers to the rise

of new peers is incongruent with offensive realism. Contrary to offensive realists who conclude that “states will only resort to appeasement if they have no other choice,” appeasement or accommodative policies were often the *preferred* choice among great powers when confronting rising peers (Labs1997, 18n59).<sup>27</sup> Accommodation also stands in contrast to the precept that states should avoid relative increases in power among competitors.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, John Owen (2002, 398) underscores the dilemma facing offensive structural theories by asking “Why would a rational state spend valuable resources strengthening an ally, knowing that the ally might become its enemy if the distribution of power in the international system were to change?”

Offensive realism also dictates that great powers should try to prevent the emergence of new hegemonies in other regions because they can pose a future challenge to their own security. As such, Mearsheimer (2001, 42) contends that it is preferable that at least two great powers exist together within a distant region where they will assume the burden of balancing against one another. This dynamic would then mitigate the probability that one will emerge as a regional hegemon. Only when it appears that one state is ascendant will others intervene as extra-regional offshore balancers to prevent a peer from dominating a region. “If the local great powers were unable to do the job,” argues Mearsheimer, “the distant hegemon would take the appropriate measures to deal with the threatening state” (2001, 42). In other words, in the absence of another power capable of thwarting the rise of a new peer there should be an even greater incentive for existing great powers to intervene. Yet the historical

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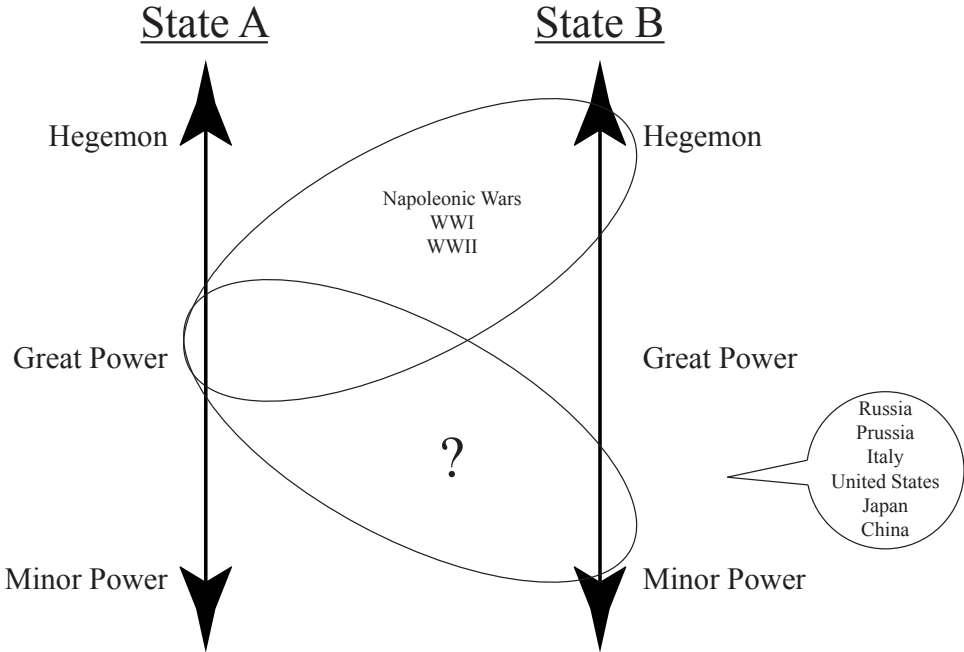
<sup>27</sup> Appeasement is typically accomplished by conceding power to another state but offensive realists stress the strategy should be avoided (Mearsheimer 2001, 163-164). Meanwhile, Robert Rothstein (1968, 27) suggests that appeasement, as well as other strategies including neutrality, would be irrational for great powers to pursue.

<sup>28</sup> See also Gilpin (1981, 88).

record contains a salient anomaly – the United States – which rose to its respective position in the absence of countervailing forces.

**Situating the Puzzle**

As noted above, a deficiency of the realist literature is the lack of serious attention devoted to the foreign policies of great powers toward rising powers. Most existing theories instead concern the relationships among only the great powers themselves, or the behavior of great powers vis-à-vis a rival seeking hegemony. In contrast, my dissertation seeks to account for the strategies of existing great powers toward weaker states that are becoming more powerful and ascending the ranks to great power status. The central puzzle does not concern how great powers behave toward states of similar capabilities, but how great powers respond to the rise of new challengers who aspire to become a peer. In other words, this study seeks to explain a distinctly different outcome than what is commonly found in the existing literature.



### Figure 1.1: Situating the Puzzle

The contrasting outcomes can be graphically represented in Figure 1.1 above. On the left is State A which is the great power whose military strategy we seek to predict when faced with a rival represented as State B on the right. The bulk of the prevailing literature concerns the behavior of a great power toward another existing great power that aspires to become a regional or global hegemon. This dynamic is captured by the top circle and includes cases such as the Napoleonic Wars, World War I, and World War II. The central puzzle of this dissertation, however, concerns the military strategy of State A when faced with a rival State B who is transitioning from a minor or relatively weaker position to becoming a great power. This phenomenon is represented by the bottom circle and designated with a question mark since the historical record reveals variation in great power behavior which includes both contestation and nonintervention. As will be introduced in the following chapter, only six states have successfully navigated the transition from minor power to great power status: Russia, Prussia, Italy, United States, Japan, and China. The task of this study is to therefore fill this lacuna in the literature by providing an explanation as to how existing great powers responded to the rise of these new peers.

## Plan of the Dissertation

As demonstrated above, no single theory of international relations is able to answer the question posed by this dissertation: how do great powers respond to the rise of new peers? The realist literature contains explanatory variables that have advantages and disadvantages, but by themselves are incapable of providing a satisfactory account as to how incumbent powers formulated their foreign policies.



Therefore, the plan of this dissertation is to develop a theory to better account for great power strategies toward rising peers. Rather than looking to systemic variables as the main predictor of a great power's behavior my study emphasizes national interests and the intervening threats and opportunities to these interests. By emphasizing these variables the model provides an explanation as to why the mere shift in material power did not correlate with a change in the dependent variable of great power behavior.

In the next chapter I outline my approach to developing the theory in greater detail. I begin by first defining the characteristics that distinguish a great power from lesser powers. I then specify the independent variables of the model and how they can be used to predict foreign policy decisions of great powers. Subsequent chapters conduct in-depth analyses of two specific cases in order to facilitate theory development. The dissertation concludes with a brief discussion of how the model performs in more recent cases of rising great powers, and speculates on whether the model can be extended to other areas of foreign policy analysis.

## II. Preemptive Paradox Explained

As argued in the introductory chapter, no general theory of international relations offers a comprehensive account of the rise of great powers. Despite the fact that each theory may contain an independent variable that possesses some explanatory leverage, other aspects of the same theory remain incompatible with the empirical record.

“Although regional powers can grow into great powers over time and great powers can help or hinder the emergence regional powers,” observes Evan Montgomery, “few theoretical approaches systematically address the causes and consequences of these interactions” (2011, 10). Given the deficiencies of existing international relations

scholarship on the interactions between great powers and candidate great powers, this dissertation is therefore an endeavor to develop a framework that amalgamates the different viable elements of competing theories into a single model. In doing so, this project also seeks to rectify the limitations of prevailing theories that largely concern relations only among great powers and exclude aspiring powers from consideration.

The model establishes a direct connection between great powers and their rising peers, and shifts the focus to an earlier stage that precedes any attempt by a state to achieve hegemony. That is to say, it determines how and why a candidate power became a great power in the first place. By way of example, whereas neorealism would focus on the wider ambitions of Bismark (and later Hitler) to obtain regional hegemony, this dissertation examines the prior transition of Prussia from moderate to great power status.

In this chapter I define all the parameters of the model that will be developed in this dissertation, including the selection of relevant cases and identification of pertinent variables. I begin by clarifying the distinctive qualities that define great powers and candidate great powers, and explain how to distinguish between the two state types. Once the attributes of great powers have been established I then proceed to identify the cases of rising powers. The main focus of the chapter is to describe the different strategies that great powers have implemented in response to a new peer competitor, and introduce the factors that are hypothesized to influence such strategies.

## **Universe of Cases**

The identification of cases is based on the antecedent condition of a candidate power's expansion using clearly defined parameters that precludes subjective interpretations. This approach also allows the dissertation to avoid the tautological pitfall of defining great powers only on the basis of war outcomes. As will be explained below, great powers are characterized by their relative score on three distinct factors, while rising powers are identified by aggregate increases along these same dimensions. In this section I define the two state types and introduce the cases of interest.

## **Great Powers**

Arriving at a fully satisfactory definition of a great power is notoriously difficult.<sup>1</sup> In general, war outcomes are used to mark the respective decline or emergence of a great

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Waltz (1979, 131) and Wight (1978, 41) both acknowledge that scholars have had difficulty deriving a precise definition of a great power although stress there is a general consensus on which states should count as a

power.<sup>2</sup> According to Joseph Nye (2004, 3), a traditional test of great power status was a state's "strength for war."<sup>3</sup> Mearsheimer (2001, 5) similarly argues that "to qualify as a great power, a state must have sufficient military assets to put up a serious fight in an all-out conventional war against the most powerful state in the world."<sup>4</sup> As illustrated by the cases presented in this dissertation a successful rise of a new great power was marked by some degree of conflict. Zakaria (1998, 159, 174) believes that the US obtained great power status upon its victory in the Spanish-American War and had even become "one of the most powerful nations in the world" by the end of the Roosevelt administration. Similarly, Prussia emerged as a great power with the conclusion of the Seven Years War. An additional example includes Russia which secured its great power status upon defeating the Swedish Empire in the Great Northern War. The Treaty of Nystad (1721) solidified Russia's standing and simultaneously signified Sweden's decline from the ranks of great powers (Kennedy 1987, 107).<sup>5</sup> Japan was similarly thrust onto the world stage with its defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, the first modern war in which a non-European state defeated a great power.

But war is not necessary for a state to become a major power as evidenced by China in the twentieth century, nor is defeating a great power a sufficient condition for becoming a great power. For example, in the Vietnam War a minor power successfully

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great power. Meanwhile, after surveying the literature, Jon Rynn (2001, 11) concludes that there is "no clear consensus on who is a Great Power" and proceeds to catalogue the difficulties scholars have encountered when attempting to formulate a definition.

<sup>2</sup> "The end of a decisive war is the most obvious symbol marking the rise of a new Power or decline of an old one and is used as a primary indicator of change in Great Power status" (Levy 1983, 24).

<sup>3</sup> Nye does acknowledge, however, that capabilities for waging war have evolved over time.

<sup>4</sup> This criteria seems to have been considered among those who witnessed the rise of Prussia to great power status in the eighteenth century. According to Showalter (1996, 321), "Frederick's contemporaries were generally united in agreeing that any state able to hold its own for seven years against three major enemies itself belonged in the first rank." Leonard Cowie similarly argues that Prussia's ability to "withstand a coalition of three great powers" during the Seven Years War meant that it "must therefore be regarded as a great power herself" (Cowie 1963, 192).

<sup>5</sup> Layne (1993, 18) locates Russia's emergence as a great power by 1713. Meanwhile, Schroeder (1994, 141) believes Russia emerged from the Great Northern War as not merely a great power but a hegemon.

defeated a major power but it still could not be considered a great power despite its success in war. Additionally, war outcomes do not capture the defining traits of a great power such as material capabilities, regional interests or ambitions, and the willingness to act upon its international aspirations.

The ability to militarily threaten rivals is referred to as an indicator of a great power status.<sup>6</sup> Yet this factor is neither necessary nor sufficient.<sup>7</sup> A state or even a collection of states may deem its peer to be a threat, but this criteria alone does not mean it qualifies as a great power. A state may constitute a threat simply by virtue of geographic proximity or the hostile intentions of domestic leaders, but without the ability to project power or broader geostrategic interests the state can not be considered a great power. Indeed, nearly all Middle Eastern states in Walt's (1987) study can not be deemed great powers.

Even attempts to identify major states in terms of conventional measures of power are vague. Power can be considered a composite of several factors, predominantly economic and military, but it is unclear whether these indicators must move in tandem with one another. What if a state excels on one dimension but not others, for example, possesses high economic power yet paltry military power? Mearsheimer seeks to provide an answer, arguing that "although all great powers are wealthy states, not all wealthy states are great powers" (2001, 79). Moreover, certain branches of international relations theory such as realism define power in relative rather than absolute terms. According to Hans Morgenthau, "When we refer to the power of a

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<sup>6</sup> As Levy (1983, 13) explains, states that "lack the capability to threaten others or influence security affairs in the system as a whole... would not normally be considered a Great Power."

<sup>7</sup> Even the ability of a state to pose an existential threat to a rival does not mean it can be considered a great power. Indeed, it is quite easy to conceive of a scenario in which a middle power threatens to overrun a weaker power, but in the absence of other essential characteristics the middle power can not be considered a great power.

nation by saying that this nation is very powerful and that nation weak, we always imply a comparison. In other words, the concept of power is always a relative one” (2006, 166).

Even the computation of power is difficult and often not conducive to quantifiable data. For example, several scholars (e.g. Levy 1983; Levy and Thompson 2005; Mearsheimer 2001) contend that land armies are an essential ingredient to achieving great power status. But the precise quantity required will vary among states: those within a large geographic territory are more likely to require a greater number of soldiers for national self-defense than would smaller states. A state’s terrain will also affect the composition of its military power: those with a more rugged landscape may elect to rely on static forces or artillery, whereas states that are surrounded by bodies of water may instead depend on naval power. The requisite quantity of power will also vary over time as new technologies can render certain military formations irrelevant or hardware outdated. For example, horse-mounted cavalry units and muzzle loading cannons became obsolete shortly after the turn of the 20th century. Moreover, intangible factors that encapsulate the quality of military force, including training and leadership, are not quantifiable (c.f. Levy 1983, 14-15). Levy & Thompson (2005, 20) acknowledge that “the army size indicator emphasizes the quantitative dimension while ignoring the qualitative dimension.”<sup>8</sup> For the same reason, Morgenthau (2006, 173-175) concluded that it is a mistake to assume that the mere number of soldiers and weaponry equates to national power.

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<sup>8</sup> Levy & Thompson are willing to accept such a methodological limitation in the absence of any rigorous analysis on the relative quality of great power militaries.

Meanwhile, some scholars insist that power is not simply structural but relational as the degree of influence one state has over another can be equally important in triggering certain outcomes (Dahl 1957; Baldwin 1985).<sup>9</sup> Ernest May, for example, identifies great powers according to their global influence (1961, 263-270; c.f. Zakaria 1998, 49). Unfortunately, a reliance on relational power is simply not feasible as it must face the empirical obstacle of operationalizing a reliable and valid indicator of influence (Rose 1998, 151n15). Sean Lynn-Jones (1998, 169) also counters that it is still important to employ definitions of material power in order to avoid the conceptual trap of whether power is an end or a means in international relations.<sup>10</sup>

Yet another alternative approach to identifying great powers is by observing their participation in important global events. It can be assumed that a state has secured a prominent and influential role when it serves as a signatory on momentous treaties with far-reaching ramifications. The challenge in using treaties as a measurement strategy, however, is that many signatories of major treaties included lesser powers. For example, the Treaty of Paris (1814) included Portugal, Sweden, and Spain – none of which could be considered a major power at the time. Furthermore, cataloging the list of participants does not capture the role they may have played or the degree of influence they possessed during negotiations. For example, Kennedy (1987, 162) characterizes Prussia as only a “marginal participant” in the Congress of Paris (1856). Another complication lies in establishing what constitutes a valid unit of analysis. Treaties that addressed major regional disputes, for example the Treaty of Teschen (1779), excluded

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<sup>9</sup> For a list of canonical literatures that reject conceptualizations of power in terms of military capabilities see Lynn-Jones (1998, 169n28).

<sup>10</sup> Mearsheimer also objects to a reliance on relative power on the basis that it is simply difficult to calculate: “Is twice as much power an appropriate threshold? Or is three times as much power the magic number? The root of the problem,” argues Mearsheimer, “is that power calculations alone do not determine which side wins a war” (2001, 34).

some great powers. Even if observations are restricted to those treaties that may have included all major powers of a specific time period, any measurement strategy would still face the aforementioned challenge of distinguishing signatories as either major or minor states.

Given these measurement challenges, it should not be surprising that scholars arrive at different conclusions as to when a great power actually emerges on the world stage. For example, many consider Bismarck's unification of independent German states as evidence of Prussia's initial emergence as a great power, but others retort that Prussia achieved great power status with the signing of the Treaty of Hubertusburg – nearly a hundred years before Bismarck's campaign (Zakaria 1998, 4; Cowie 1963, 192). Schweller (2006, 22) also suggests that Prussia achieved great power status prior to 1815. Other interpretations cite Frederick William III's reign of 1797-1840 as corresponding with Prussia's entry as great power, albeit the weakest among its contemporaries (Kennedy 1987, 92, 162). Ultimately, any consensus on what constitutes a great power will be difficult to obtain. To be sure, Waltz (1979, 131) appropriately concedes that identifying great powers is a difficult task and acknowledges that "we should not be surprised if wrong answers are sometimes arrived at."<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation will make the methodological decision to primarily rely on two of Jack Levy's (1983, chap. 2) criteria in demarcating great powers: military power and interests.<sup>12</sup> His third criteria of state behavior is also included but presumed to follow

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<sup>11</sup> Waltz's own definition of a great power is rather broad and includes the "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence" (1979, 131).

<sup>12</sup> In general, "The Great Powers can be differentiated from other states by their military power, their interests, their behavior in general and interactions with other Powers, other Powers' perception of them, and some formal criteria" (16).



from assumptions of rationality.<sup>13</sup> Although in doing so there may be some concern that essential characteristics will be omitted there is sufficient overlap among scholars to be relatively confident that we have identified the major powers.

The first and most conventional criteria with which to determine a state's relative rank is military *power*.<sup>14</sup> All great powers must be self-sufficient in the provision of its own security without compromising its independence. "Small powers, on the other hand, must rely on external alliances, aid, or international institutions and therefore do not have direct or primary control over their own destinies" (Levy 1983, 12).<sup>15</sup> But it is not simply enough for a state to have power only for purposes of defense, but a great power must also be able to project its power beyond its borders in an offensive manner. The strongest states in any system must possess the capacity to threaten the security of its peers.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, power is closely related to the other criterion of interests such that a state which enjoys power projection capabilities can advance its interests beyond its own borders.

Economic power and raw resources, however, are not sufficient for great power status.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Levy (1983, 18) declares that "wealth does not necessarily indicate

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<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the rational actor assumption in international relations, see Miles Kahler (1998).

<sup>14</sup> "Power and hegemony are defined in terms of land-based military power" (Levy and Thompson 2005, 11). Even scholars working outside the realist tradition, for example Hedley Bull (1977, 195), acknowledge the necessary role military power serves in defining great powers.

<sup>15</sup> "A small power is a state which recognizes that it can not obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so" (Rothstein 1968, 29).

<sup>16</sup> Paul Senese and John Vasquez (2004, 203) claim that it is "assumed that a major state is able to project its capability beyond its own region." Meanwhile, scholars point out that the ability to threaten peers does not need to be an existential threat: "the candidate need not have the capability to defeat the leading state, but it must have some reasonable prospect of turning the conflict into a war of attrition that leaves the dominant state seriously weakened, even if that dominant state ultimately wins the war" (Mearsheimer 2001, 5).

<sup>17</sup> H.M. Scott (2006, 5) suggests that it is not enough for a great power to possess material resources but must have the ability to also mobilize such resources. There are additional factors that are neither necessary nor sufficient. For example, a large population is not required in order to attain great power status and can even be a hindrance if a state is unable to feed a large number of citizens (Morgenthau 2006, 157). Based on his study of British foreign policy, Sneh Mahajan seems to echo this sentiment by arguing that a state's commercial and industrial strength alone

military strength or generate influence on security issues.”<sup>18</sup> By way of example, he points to eighteenth century Netherlands which may have been influential in global economic affairs but could not be considered a major power. Moreover, there is no guarantee that a state’s economic resources will be successfully harnessed and translated into military power.<sup>19</sup> Kazakhstan, for example, may have one of the largest uranium reserves in the world today but it lacks the extractive and enrichment technologies needed to produce nuclear weapons.<sup>20</sup> Therefore an advantage of referring to a state’s military force as a proxy of national power is that it implicitly encompasses other subsidiary elements of power including natural resources, population, and economic strength. It further implies that a state has the capacity to harness such resources.

The second key dimension to identifying a great power is *interests*. All great powers “think of their interests as continental or global rather than local or regional” (Levy 1983, 16). A research design challenge, however, is in specifying the list of issues which are of particular concern to great powers. Whereas Levy defined interests in generic terms of regional or continental objectives, Gilpin seems to offer a little more specificity by identifying three different types of foreign policy objectives: territorial conquest, establishing spheres of influence, and management of the global economy (1981, 23-25). Still, he does not provide an operationalized variable with which to

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do not confer great power status (2002, 2). Meiser offers the opposing and rather controversial viewpoint, however, that economic power is a better indicator of great power status than military power (2015, xix).

<sup>18</sup> This is reminiscent of the offensive realist, John Mearsheimer, who claimed that “not all wealthy states are great powers” in his discussion on latent power (2001, 79).

<sup>19</sup> This proviso is frequently cited by neoclassical neorealists (c.f. Zakaria 1998).

<sup>20</sup> According to Morgenthau (2006, 132), a state “will not become a great power so long as it is lacking in other factors without which no nation in modern times can attain the status of a great power. Of these factors industrial capacity is one of the most important.”

measure such interests. Meanwhile, Zakaria cites several different avenues through which state interests are expanded: “Political interests can thus be measured by political control over new territories, expansion of the diplomatic and military apparatus, and participation in great power decision-making” (1998, 18).

In an effort to present a more clear specification of the model, this dissertation will refer to two distinct types of interests: territory and economics. Territorial interests refer to the ownership or control of specific areas. Economic interests can concern either interstate trade, investments, or access to resources. Defining interests in terms of these two constituent elements is consistent with the interpretations of other scholars. For example, Paul Senese and John Vasquez (2008, 12) define territorial issues as revolving around “what belongs to whom, where a boundary should be drawn, [and] what rights each actor has regarding its own and others’ territory,” while Benjamin Fordham (2008) defines economic interests in terms of international trade and investments.<sup>21</sup> Of course, territorial and economic interests are often interconnected in some manner, the most obvious being that a piece of territory may contain critical resources or is controlled by a key trading partner.

The simultaneous consideration of both power and interests precludes the perpetual debate among scholars as to which factor precedes the other. While Rosecrance (2010, 13) insists that intentions determine a state’s capabilities and that “power will not entirely determine intentions,” Zakaria(1998,5,9), on the other hand, argues that “capabilities shape intentions.”<sup>22</sup> Other scholars, such as Morgenthau (2006,

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<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Stephen Brooks (1997, 462) defines “economic resources” as encompassing international trade, transaction costs, access to raw materials from suppliers, and internal economic advancements.

<sup>22</sup> Zakaria observes that a state’s “definition of security, of the interests that require protection, usually expands in tandem with a nation’s material resources” (185). This further implies that the two variables can not be disaggregated from one another.

5), rightly consider the two elements as being inextricable, proclaiming that “statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power.”<sup>23</sup> This dissertation concurs, believing that both dimensions are closely interrelated and should be weighted equally.

The third and final distinguishing element of a great power is its *behavior*. Great power behavior is differentiated from minor powers by being more assertive in international relations and aggressively defending their interests.<sup>24</sup> They are more often involved in international treaties, territorial resolutions, and international organizations. Ultimately, to qualify as a great power a state must be considered a major actor in international debates concerning global affairs, especially security-related matters. For this dissertation, behavior is assumed to follow from assumptions of rationality.<sup>25</sup> In other words, state leaders make decisions based on cost-benefit analysis. If the state has the ability to act on its interests and the benefits of action exceed the costs, then it will behave in accordance with its interests.

Behavior is correlated with the other two dimensions of power and interests.<sup>26</sup>

That is to say, great power behavior is conditioned on first possessing the necessary

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Rothstein (1968, 14) similarly argues that smaller powers “have a narrower range of interests and less freedom of activity, but only because they [are] militarily weak.”

<sup>24</sup> H.M. Scott (2000, 157) argues that in addition to material resources an essential quality of being a great power is the willingness of a state to *act* like a great power. In his review of Prussia, Scott finds that a crucial determinant of Prussia’s rise to great power status was Frederick the Great’s willingness to not only expand his state’s interests but to also act upon them. In the late nineteenth century the US Attorney General and Secretary of State, Richard Olney, echoed the sentiment that great powers needed to behave as such and declared that “the mission of this country is not merely to pose but to act” (Herring 2008, 304). Bosworth (1979, 9) also finds that Italy understood the requirement that great powers needed to act in accordance with their lofty status and deliberately set about implementing the appropriate foreign policy.

<sup>25</sup> As will be articulated below, my explanation of the preemptive paradox is based upon the assumption of rationality as a microfoundation (Moravcsik 1997, 517). Moreover, in many of the case studies under investigation in this dissertation historians often highlight how key decision-makers acted in accordance with rationality. Dennis Showalter, for example, describes Frederick the Great’s foreign policymaking as explicitly based on principles of rational calculation (1996, 32).

<sup>26</sup> Morgenthau argues that “a nation may try to play the role of a great power without having the prerequisites for doing so, and will court disaster, as Poland did in the interwar period... Thus the national power available determines the limits of foreign policy” (2006, 156-157). The inclusion of both interests and behavior is also consistent with Walt (1987, 264) who declares that “aggregate power is an important component of threat, but not the only one.”

amount of military capacity and maintaining broad geopolitical interests. Indeed, the great powers are “important because of their military power and potential and the interests and behavior that flow from that power” (Levy 1983, 18). Gilpin (1981, 23) concurs, contending that a state’s interests are influenced by its wealth and power such that “a change in the relative cost of the objectives sought by a state or a change in the capacity of the state to achieve these objectives tend to induce a change in state behavior.”<sup>27</sup>

At this point it is important to stress that a state must score high on all three measures of power, interests, and behavior. For example, a state can not be regarded as a great power if it possesses high levels of military power but no geostrategic interests beyond its borders or lacks the willingness to act upon broader interests. Similarly, even if a state had a large military and broad regional interests it would not be counted as a great power if it did not act in accordance with its strength and interests. For example, Australia is often held as a state that has the requisite military strength and extensive interests in regional affairs to be a great power, yet self-consciously practices ‘middle power diplomacy’ (Carr 2014; Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal 2004; Ungerer 2007).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gilpin goes on to claim that “a change in the relative costs of security objectives and welfare objectives or a change in a state’s power and wealth usually causes a corresponding change in the foreign policy of the state.”

<sup>28</sup> Zakaria (1998, 3) believes that state expansion is fueled by the possession of material power and motivated by the desire to impose preferences: “Over the course of history, states that have experienced significant growth in their material resources have relatively soon redefined and expanded their political interests abroad, measured by their increases in military spending, initiation of wars, acquisition of territory, posting of soldiers and diplomats, and participation in great-power decision-making.”

## Rising Powers

Minor powers are states with little capacity to challenge the major powers of the system. In general, weaker powers “must rely on external alliances, aid, or international institutions” (Levy 1983, 12).<sup>29</sup> Minor powers are marked by an inability to project force beyond their borders for any sustainable period of time. They are predominantly concerned with local matters and unable to pursue regional or global interests, subsequently being less assertive in the international arena (Levy 1983, 10-19). Weaker states are also unable to shape the international environment in accordance with their interests (c.f. Bull 1977, 199).

Thus, rising powers are defined as states that are in the process of transitioning to great power status through increases in material power and interests to the point where they are on par with the relevant cohort of great powers.<sup>30</sup> Rising powers accumulate greater levels of military power, begin to define their interests in terms of regional or global aspirations, and become increasingly more assertive on the world stage.<sup>31</sup> Of course, it should be stressed that the transformation to great power status is not inevitable. In his extensive study of the Northern Wars, Robert Frost argues that it is wrong to assume that certain states are predetermined to rise to the ranks of great powers (2000, 14-15). Such careless historiography, Frost argues, is often written by

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<sup>29</sup> An informal test of minor power status is whether the state fears only great powers or also other minor powers.

<sup>30</sup> Some general ambiguity seems to pervade the international relations literature. Bids for hegemony are sometimes referred to as an instance of a rising power, when in fact the state is already a great power that wishes to become a hegemon. This terminology incorrectly suggests that a state can skip over great power status – a prerequisite rank before hegemony. The unspecified nomenclature means a ‘rising power’ can refer to any state making a hegemonic bid, a weak state that is merely accumulating power, or even a revisionist state. This dissertation therefore seeks to resolve the lack of clarity.

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Meiser similarly defines a “rising power as a nation-state on a long-term growth trajectory that is moving up in the hierarchy of states from secondary power to great power or from great power to hegemon” (2015, xvii). He also makes a valuable contribution to the literature by drawing a clear distinction between an ‘emerging power’ and a ‘potential hegemon.’

nationalist or materialist historians who ignore the perspectives of declining powers.<sup>32</sup>

H.M. Scott seems to concur, finding that the rise of Prussia, for example, to great power status could not have been predicted when Frederick II assumed the throne (2000, 154).

To better understand the conditions that led to the emergence of a new power it is essential to study the actions of both the rising state and existing powers.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Robert Rothstein (1968, 7) argues that any examination of new great powers should consider not only the successful policies of the ascendant state but also the failed counterstrategies of extant powers. A rising power may signal its belligerence through territorial conquest, constitute a latent threat with a domestic buildup of military power, or even exhibit aggressive intentions. Each action may generate a particular counter-response from the great power. How an aspiring state augments its power is an important predictor of conflict. Internal acquisitions of power are less likely to trigger war with an incumbent than external means of power accumulation such as territorial expansion.

In delineating a rising power we must first specify the timeframe for analysis in order to examine the military strategies employed in response to a potential great power peer. In other words, how far back in time should the investigation begin? This dissertation specifies a 25 year time period, that is to say, it examines the 25 years

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Frost insists that “the idea that Russia’s vast human and natural resources ensured that the outcome of the Northern Wars was inevitable should be resisted,” noting that the key to Russia’s success is largely attributed to the defeat of Poland-Lithuania (2000, 321). In his own research on the rise of the United States to great power status, Michael Hunt reaches a similar conclusion by arguing that the ascendancy of states is not “predetermined” and the process often “contingent” (2007, 2-3).

<sup>33</sup> Randall Schweller & Xiaoyu Pu (2011, 42) indicate that the denouement of China’s rapid growth is contingent upon its own actions.

preceding the date at which a state emerges as a great power.<sup>34</sup> This is a generous amount of time to capture any foreign policy adjustments a state may undertake when perceiving the emergence of a new peer.<sup>35</sup> However, in those cases that witnessed the outbreak of war the timeframe is truncated to the initial year of conflict.<sup>36</sup>

## Case Studies

Table 2.1 lists the great powers in twelve time periods. The underlined X's indicate a newly emergent power. From this vantage point, the preemptive paradox becomes even more apparent as rising powers should have encountered formidable obstacles in their quest for great power status.

	1699- 1713	1713- 1721	1721- 1740	1740- 1808	1808- 1861	1861- 1898	1898- 1905	1905- 1918	1918- 1943	1943- 1945	1945- 1949	1949- 1975
Netherlands	X											
Sweden	X	X										
Spain	X	X	X	X								
Austria	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
France	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
England	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Russia			<u>X</u>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

<sup>34</sup> Levy (1981, 591n7) stipulates a 10 year aggregated timeframe when studying the relationship between alliances and war. When attempting to identify necessary and sufficient conditions, however, Levy restricts the timeframe to only 5 years such that only wars that occurred within 5 years of alliance formation are considered. "A shorter period would not be sufficient to encompass the causal effects of underlying structural factors like alliances, while longer periods would exaggerate the duration of these causal effects" (1981, 596).

<sup>35</sup> An alternative approach would have been to adjust the timeframe for each individual case, however, this would make little difference in terms of measuring the outcome (Levy 1983, 26).

<sup>36</sup> Arquilla's (1992, 12) research examines wars as long as the outcome remains in doubt. He alters his coding scheme, however, once there are substantial military battles that alter the prospects for one side to achieve victory. This type research design is certainly applicable to cases of rising powers. For example, once it was apparent that Sweden would be defeated in the Great Northern War the other great powers altered their policies and began to balance against Russia.



Prussia	<u>X</u>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Italy			<u>X</u>	X	X	X			
United States				<u>X</u>	X	X	X	X	X
Japan					<u>X</u>	X	X		
China									<u>X</u>

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Table 2.1: Timeline of great power<sup>37</sup>

As a study with a goal of theory generation, looking at positive cases to investigate mechanisms operating in those cases follows a causes-of-effects approach. It asks the question ‘What made this outcome happen?’ This is not to argue that it was inevitable and that these states possessed some intrinsic qualities that rendered great power strategies irrelevant. Indeed, the concluding chapter briefly discusses several additional cases of rising powers that exhibit variation on both the independent and dependent variables.

## Great Power Military Strategy

This dissertation operationalizes the outcome as a dichotomous variable that consists of two distinct values: contestation and nonintervention. In short, an extant great power can challenge the rise of a new power or choose a policy of inaction such that it does not contest an aspirant. Both strategies relate to the three defining characteristics of great powers – power, interests, and behavior. For example, strategies of contestation might seek to check an aspirant’s growth in military power,

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<sup>37</sup> Table drawn from Levy (1983, 48) and modified to remove those cases beyond the temporal scope of this study. It should also be noted that Levy’s table of great powers is largely consistent with other studies, for example, Waltz (1979, 162) identifies the same emergent great powers and within similar timeframes (albeit less precise). In contrast, Singer & Small (1966, 10n8) have many of the states falling from great power status after WWII, while Baron (2014, 16-17) retains both Japan and Germany as great powers following WWII but largely based on their capacity to influence global market stability.

take issue with expanding regional interests, or actively challenge any behavior that corresponds with growth in power and interests.

Contestation entails active participation in an armed military conflict or interstate war. In such cases the incumbent has fully mobilized its armed forces or has deployed military resources in order to combat an adversary. In essence, the extant great power chooses to use military force to block the rise of a new peer. Meanwhile, nonintervention represents the absence of competitive behavior. The incumbent does not seek to challenge the rise of a new peer nor does it try to prevent an aspirant from expanding its power and interests. This is not to suggest, however, that the incumbent is disinterested in the outcome since it could certainly harbor clear preferences regarding a new entrant, but due to constraints it may be unable to take any action. Thus, nonintervention denotes those cases in which there is no evidence of an incumbent altering its behavior in response to a rising power.

Contrary to balance of power theories that claim a state's inaction in light of a shift in the distribution of power is irrational, this dissertation posits that a great power can actually benefit from nonintervention in several different ways.<sup>38</sup> First, the state can avoid the potentially high costs of war with another state.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the great power could avoid antagonizing new enemies in an already dangerous international environment. In the cases under review in this study it was clear that great powers contemplated whether their actions against a candidate power would provoke a counter-

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<sup>38</sup> See Rothstein (1968, 48) who describes positive and negative benefits of nonalignment. For his part, Arquilla (1992) introduces 'bystanding' in which a state will not respond to a growing threat and instead compelled by the notion of self-preservation to avoid conflict.

<sup>39</sup> To be clear, this outcome is distinct from buck-passing since an incumbent's motivation to eschew conflict is simply to avoid assuming the costs of war. Under this scenario, the incumbent may not be concerned about whether its allies will then assume the burden of balancing.

response by other great powers in the system. Finally, nonintervention allows the incumbent to focus on more pressing matters it must face including domestic affairs or ongoing disputes with other great powers in the system.

Scholars have suggested other policy options that may be available to incumbent powers, however, there is little historical evidence that extant powers considered such alternatives. For example, as argued in the introductory chapter, there is scant indication that great powers contemplated buck-passing or balancing when facing an aspirant. Meanwhile, Schweller (1999) has identified several policy options available to great powers but most are only relevant to relations among the great powers themselves and 'dissatisfied challengers' on the verge of a great power transition.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, such alternatives have little bearing on the cases under investigation in this study.

## **Preemptive Paradox Explained**

I now turn to outlining the central puzzle of this dissertation and introduce the explanatory model that will account for the phenomenon. It is generally presumed that great powers will try to prevent the emergence of another state that could threaten them. This study seeks to explain why many great powers neglected to thwart the ascendancy of a peer to great power status.

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<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Schweller's piece essentially lists all the potential policy responses when facing revisionist great powers, whereas this dissertation is primarily focused on identifying outcomes or actual policies incumbents chose when facing a state transitioning from a middle to great power. To be fair, part of the confusion lies in the lack of specificity as to what constitutes a "rising power." Nevertheless, this dissertation also disputes some of the evidence Schweller cites as examples in describing the various policies he identifies. For example, Schweller (13) contends that Britain pursued a 'binding' strategy with Japan in order to restrain its ally, however, several historians offer the contrary finding that Britain encouraged Japan to attack Russia as a means of weakening its adversary (Bourne 1970, 154; Westwood 1986, 16). Moreover, Kowner (2006, 134) notes that Britain covertly supplied Japan with munitions and forwarded intelligence reports on the location of Russian ships.

As will be demonstrated, the model allows us to account for the onset of war. States first establish their national interests which represent the primary objectives they wish to attain. Threats to existing interests or opportunities to fulfill certain objectives then have an intervening effect that determine an incumbent's military strategy. In general, states will use military force in order to protect existing territory or as a means for future conquest and expansion.

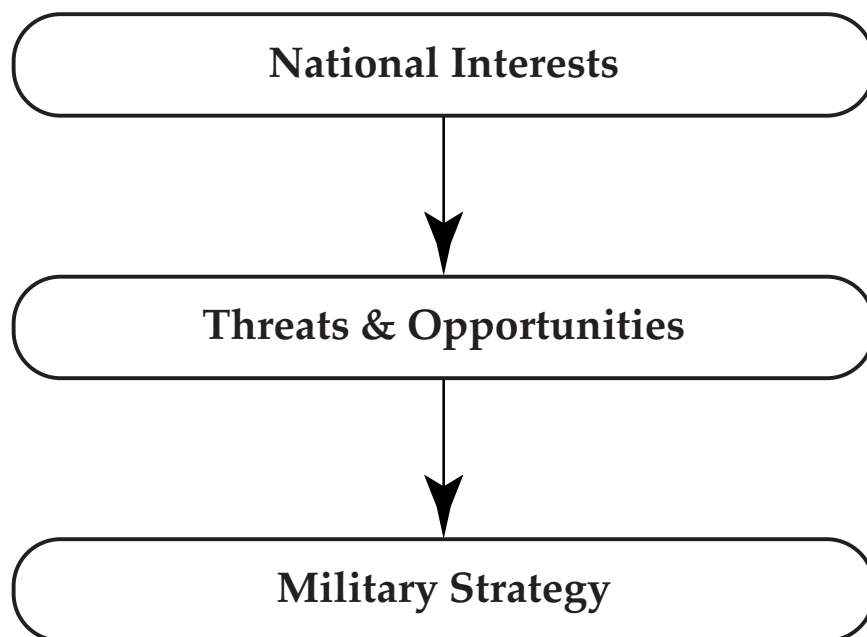


Figure 2.2: Steps to Military Strategy <sup>41</sup>

### **National Interests**

According to H. Richard Yarger and George Barber (1997), national interests are the starting point from which states formulate their military strategy. As discussed above, this study disaggregates state interests into two broad concepts of territory and

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<sup>41</sup> The steps listed above in Figure 2.2 are largely based on H. Richard Yarger and George Barber's (1997) study for the U.S. Army War College. See also Robert Blackwill (1993).

economic matters.<sup>42</sup> Territorial interests are often zero-sum and can lead to antagonistic interactions. There is a long tradition of scholarship that articulates the linkage between security and power maximization through territorial conquest.<sup>43</sup> In seeking a rationalist explanation for war, Fearon (1995, 408) argues:

“The objects over which states bargain frequently are themselves sources of military power. Territory is the most important example, since it may provide economic resources that can be used for the military or be strategically located, meaning that its control greatly increases a state’s chances for successful attack or defense. Territory is probably also the main issue over which states fight wars.”

Others have developed models to better specify the circumstances in which territory can trigger conflict. For example, Paul Senese and John Vasquez’s steps-to-war model posits that “states that dispute territory have a higher probability of going to war with each other than states that have other kinds of disputes” (2004, 196). For Senese and Vasquez, the first step towards war is the presence of a territorial dispute and subsequent steps include internal military buildups or the formation of an alliance.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> It should be acknowledged that states may certainly possess a wider variety of interests than merely economic or territorial matters. In order to formulate a more parsimonious model, however, a simplifying assumption is made to categorize interests into these two broad subtypes. It is also relatively consistent with Gilpin (1981, Chap. 1) who contends that the principle objectives of states are territorial, economic, and political. Neoclassical realists similarly distinguish between relative power and a state’s foreign policy interests (Rose 1998, 151-152). Meanwhile, Stephen Brooks’ (1997, 450-451) review of the neorealist paradigm identifies military power and economic capacity which can be interpreted as a broader form of classification. Brooks also makes the astute observation that while these two types of state interests are not locked in a negative relationship and a great deal of overlap may exist, he does stress that in practice states do face a tradeoff in prioritizing between the two.

<sup>43</sup> In contrast to balance of power theory, this dissertation contends that states do not necessarily balance against power per se, but *how* or *where* that power is applied, i.e. territorial conquest. In other words, it is not the accumulation of power but how that power will be used that drives state behavior. For example, while the Habsburg monarchy certainly appreciated increases in Prussian power it was more concerned about how their power subsequently threatened the territorial integrity of the empire. According to Anderson (1995, 146), Maria Theresa “argued forcibly that so long as Frederick remained as strong as he was her territories could never really be safe.”

<sup>44</sup> Their steps-to-war model rightly considers how domestic constituents will respond to external threats but it identifies decision-makers according to their belief systems regarding the use of force (Senese and Vasquez 2008, 15n9). In contrast, my dissertation examines the agenda setting process and how elites define the state’s interests which, in turn, determine whether force will be used. It’s not that elites object to the use of force on the basis of some moral principle but rather that force may not be the most effective means of dispute resolution.

In contrast, neoliberal theorizing proposes that interstate trade reduces the likelihood of war. “Economic interdependence,” Dale Copeland explains, “lowers the likelihood of war by increasing the value of trading over the alternative of aggression: interdependent states would rather trade than invade” (1996, 5). Rosecrance (1986, 25) offers a more straightforward dichotomization of interests, hypothesizing that “states recognize that they can do better through internal economic development sustained by a worldwide market for their goods and services than by trying to conquer and assimilate large tracts of land.”

This dissertation accepts the pacifying effects of trade and contends that interstate disagreements over economic matters are less likely to lead to conflict. However, the model does not focus so much on the degree of interdependence but instead emphasizes the less competitive nature of economic disputes. Whereas conflicts over territory are regarded as being zero-sum in which one side’s gain represents the opposing side’s loss, economic matters are viewed as variable-sum such that gains and losses do not necessarily parallel one another. According to Charles Lipson, “Security issues and economic issues lend themselves to quite different types of strategic interaction. According to this view, economic games often involve relatively simple coordination or mutually beneficial exchange. Security issues, by contrast, are inherently more conflictual and their equilibria less stable” (1984, 12). Disputes over trade barriers, exchange rates, and non-discriminatory access to markets are not likely to threaten a state’s national security interests and hence are less likely to precipitate war between states. As Keohane and Nye (2012, 21) argue, security affairs do not always dominate a state’s agenda and different issue areas may require a state to

pursue its interests by means other than military force: “Military force is not used by governments toward other governments within the region, or on the issues, when complex interdependence prevails... Military force could, for instance, be irrelevant to resolving disagreements on economic issues.”<sup>45</sup>

My preemptive paradox model does permit a spectrum of interests ranging from purely territorial to economic matters, with an allowance for those issues that fall somewhere in between the two ideal types. It is quite possible to conceive of a situation where conquest entails control of natural resources within a specific territory in order to bolster a state’s economy.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, not all territories are weighted equally – a state’s immediate homeland is assumed to have greater importance than its colonial possessions. These types of situations would likely see moderate amounts of contestation, albeit less than that associated with strict territorial conflicts of interests motivated by national security concerns.

By disaggregating state interests into two broad concepts of economics and territory we can develop more accurate predictions as to whether conflict or peace is more likely between the incumbent and aspirant. In doing so, the model is able to incorporate insights from both neorealism and neoliberalism. “Neoliberals and neorealists agree that both national security and economic welfare are important,”

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<sup>45</sup> Brooks (1997, 462-463) contends that defensive realism also does not believe that states will always employ military force. Indeed, he argues that nonmilitary strategies are sometimes a more cost-effective means of enhancing national security.

<sup>46</sup> Such circumstances are reminiscent of mercantilism that typically promotes an expansionist policy of territorial acquisition. Gilpin (1981, 67) also notes the close interplay between economic and power-oriented interests, remarking that the “struggle for power and the desire for economic gain are ultimately and inextricably joined.” Ultimately mercantilism “considers relative gain to be more important than mutual gain” and eschews interdependence in favor of independence (Gilpin 1987, 33). This stands in sharp contrast to neoliberal theories that “posit a radically different choice – the pursuit of economic prosperity through free trade and open economic exchange versus the pursuit of power by the means of military force and territorial expansion” (Jackson and Sørensen 2013, 163).

observes David Baldwin, “but they differ in relative emphasis on these goals” (1993, 7). The model I propose recognizes that different issues often compete with one another for inclusion on a state’s agenda and that in certain situations military force may not be the most efficacious means of dispute resolution and can in fact be counterproductive.<sup>47</sup> Contingent upon its goals, a state may wish to pursue strategies other than war. Economic interests, such as market access or high levels of interstate trade, are included and correspond with neoliberal theories of interstate relations. The consideration of such variables can provide insight as to whether great powers always use force in the pursuit of security, or whether they obtain their objectives by employing alternative tactics.<sup>48</sup> I believe this pragmatic approach to research design is warranted given that equally valid explanations of war and peace have been derived across different levels of analysis and diverse paradigms. Indeed, Mansfield (1994) argues that a combination of neorealist and neoliberal variables are required to account for incidents of war.

Finally, since this study examines how states behaved toward one another the model will rely on *perceived* rather than *actual* interests.<sup>49</sup> In other words, it is more important to consider the interests and goals that incumbents believe an aspirant seeks to achieve. An incumbent power may revise its military strategy if it believes another

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<sup>47</sup> As noted above, Keohane & Nye (2012, 20) challenge the traditional neorealist position by arguing that an absence of hierarchy exists among issue areas such that “military security does not consistently dominate the agenda.”

<sup>48</sup> This dynamic is particularly salient to contemporary global affairs that is best characterized by a high degree of interdependence. The inclusion of both territorial and economic interests may also allow the model to better travel across broad spans of time. The decline in the number of territorial disputes and the intensification of complex interdependence among states may correlate with the overall decline in interstate conflict. “As the complexity of actors and issues in world politics increases, the utility of force declines” (Keohane and Nye 2012, 27).

<sup>49</sup> A reliance on perceptions further allows the model to capture the dynamic rather than static nature of international affairs. Moreover, it incorporates misperceptions that may be derived from simple miscalculations or even cognitive biases (Fearon 1995; Jervis 1976). The inclusion of perceptions is also consistent with other defensive realists including Glaser (2010, 24) who declares that “the international environment should be characterized in terms of both material variables and information variables.”



state has territorial ambitions and is willing to act on them, irrespective if that state does not actually have any desire to pursue territorial gains. Scholars working in different paradigms have all expressed the utility in measuring perceptions. Jervis (1976, 29) stresses the importance of establishing “generalizations about how decision-makers perceive others’ behavior and form judgments about their intentions.”<sup>50</sup> “If ‘power’ influences international relations,” adds Wohlforth, “it must do so through the perceptions of those who act on behalf of states” (1987, 353).

### *Origins of National Interests*

Reference to national interests, however, has a long and turbulent history. Indeed, Alexander George and Robert Keohane have argued that the concept of a ‘national interest’ has become so ambiguous that “its role as a guide to foreign policy is problematical and controversial” (1980, 217). In an attempt to rectify the confusion and lack of clarity in the literature, George and Keohane distinguish between three different types of national interests: self-regarding interests refer to the national security of the state in terms of its physical survival and general well-being; other-regarding interests describe benefits conferred upon others; and finally collective interests benefit all actors (although sometimes unequally). Consistent with this dissertation, George and Keohane argue that states generally prioritize self-regarding interests.<sup>51</sup> They acknowledge, however, that subsequent foreign policies are contingent upon the judgements of top-level officials and decision-making elites within a state.

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<sup>50</sup> Jervis subsequently defines intentions as the “actions [an actor] will take under given circumstances (or, if the circumstances are hypothetical, the actions he would take if the circumstances were to materialize)” (1976, 48).

<sup>51</sup> George and Keohane (1980, 223) also introduce a typology that outlines the different types of state interests. Interestingly, their typology appears to serve as the foundation for Donald Snow’s (2017) typology of national security interests.

Stephen Krasner (1978) describes two methods of studying national interests. A deductive approach assumes that all states will seek to obtain certain objectives, in particular, the preservation of its territorial integrity. In contrast, an inductive approach holds that the idiosyncratic statements and preferences of leaders will determine a state's national interest. While Krasner is interested in using the latter approach to determine a state's economic policies, he acknowledges that deductive theorizing is particularly useful when a state's territorial integrity is threatened. "Despite the criticism to which it has been subject," Krasner concedes, "this kind of reasoning has provided the most powerful theoretical orientation toward the study of international politics" (1978, 40). When a state is not facing a territorial threat or pursuing military conquest, however, Krasner believes that inductive approaches are better suited to determining a state's national interest.<sup>52</sup>

Peter Trubowitz (1998) also acknowledges the difficulty in defining national interests, classifying most scholarly attempts in terms of either cultural or institutional arguments. He instead proposes an alternative approach that national interests are the culmination of domestic regional politics. "Regions defined 'the national interest' in different ways," observes Trubowitz, "because they faced different economic and political incentives, both at home and abroad" (1998, 6). In doing so, however, his framework conflicts with other scholarship by concluding that there is no single, monolithic national interest. Instead, Trubowitz's regional framework emphasizes the

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<sup>52</sup> To be clear, Krasner does acknowledge that the inductive method to studying national interests also faces its share of drawbacks. In order to address potential objections he imposes certain conditions upon the statements and preferences of domestic leaders (1978, 42-45).

competitive nature of domestic politics as different coalitions compete for control of a state's foreign policy.

In contrast to the aforementioned scholars who all define national interests in terms of domestic politics, Martha Finnemore (1996) takes a far different approach by arguing that state interests are the result of social interactions.<sup>53</sup> "States' redefinitions of interest are often not the result of external threats or demands by domestic groups," Finnemore argues, "rather, they are shaped by internationally shared norms and values that structure and give meaning to international political life" (1996, 3). According to Finnemore, the international system of shared norms and values determine state interests.<sup>54</sup> While Finnemore makes an important contribution to the existing literature, I adhere to an internally-driven conception of national interests that is also consistent with neorealist and neoliberal paradigms which this dissertation seeks to address.

### *Domestic Sources of International Politics*

By incorporating state-level interests the model opens up the 'black box' of states and does not treat them as 'billiard balls.'<sup>55</sup> Domestic elites oversee internal decision-making processes and subsequently establish a state's policy priorities. My study conceptualizes the state as being led by an executive who develops foreign policy with

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<sup>53</sup> See also Katzenstein (1996).

<sup>54</sup> In particular, Finnemore's study focuses on the roles of international organizations and institutions in shaping state interests. Unfortunately, in the cases of great powers studied in this dissertation, international institutions had a limited presence and therefore minor role, if any, in affecting the decision-making of great powers. "While in the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was practically no institutionalized interaction between states," observes Viljam Engström, he does find that international institutions did begin to crystalize in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (2012, 26). But even 19<sup>th</sup> century institutions had little impact, for example, the Concert of Europe did not sway great power behavior amidst Italy's rise. Indeed, Keohane (1989, 10) acknowledges that international regimes are more prevalent to the contemporary era and Ruggie (1994) locates the proliferation of multilateral institutions to only after WWII.

<sup>55</sup> See Fearon (1998) and Kapstein (1995) for a more thorough explanation on the distinction between systemic and domestic theories of international relations.

a certain degree of autonomy. However, the ability to actually implement strategy can sometimes be restrained by other domestic actors. According to Lobell et al., “leaders define the ‘national interests’ and conduct foreign policy based upon their assessment of relative power and other states’ intentions, but always subject to domestic constraints” (2009, 25-26). It is the culmination of domestic discourse and debate that determines a state’s interests. For example, Anderson (1995, 65) observes that early in the War of the Austrian Succession powerful domestic groups in Great Britain were adamantly against any involvement in a European conflict. George II encountered stiff domestic resistance from both government officials and the British public which did not wish to involve itself with Prussia’s actions in Silesia. A change in leadership can also have a dramatic impact on a state’s strategy. For example, Spain remained neutral throughout the Seven Years War until Charles III assumed the throne in 1759 after his brother’s death and subsequently pursued a more aggressive foreign policy that sought to balance against British power. A more spectacular case was the change in the Russian emperors in 1762 from Elizabeth to Peter III which resulted in that state’s withdrawal from the conflict and effectively precluded Prussia’s demise, thereafter referred to as the ‘Miracle of the House of Brandenburg.’

Reference to decisions taken by elites at the unit-level has a long history in the subfield of foreign policy analysis. In their seminal study, Richard Snyder, H.W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin claim that “state action is the action taken by those acting in the name of the state. Hence, the state is its decision-makers” (2002 [1962], 36-37). Chris Alden and Amnon Aran provide further elaboration by explaining that this broad research track traditionally assumes that a “state first identifies and prioritizes foreign policy goals; it

then identifies and selects from the means available to it which fulfil its aims with the least cost” (2012, 15-16). Specifically within the subfield of security studies, many scholars have underscored the importance of domestic politics in accounting for interstate behavior (Buono de Mesquita & Lalman 1992; Huth 1996; Kier 1997; Posen 1984; Snyder 1991).<sup>56</sup> It is not surprising then that Zakaria concludes that the “domestic politics of states are the key to understanding world events” (1992, 177).

But for Kenneth Waltz (1979, 37) “reductionist explanations of international politics are insufficient” to understanding international politics.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Levy and Thompson stress that “domestic-level theories, if they consist exclusively of variables internal to the state, cannot provide a theoretically complete explanation of the causes of war and peace” (2010, 84). Ralph Pettman (1975, 51) eloquently concluded that opening the black box of the state is akin to opening a messy filing cabinet – full of insightful information but lacking an intelligent filing system. More recent scholarship has acknowledged the expanding role of domestic politics in foreign policy analysis and international relations theorizing, but such decision-making factors remain undertheorized and underdeveloped (Kaarbo 2015).<sup>58</sup> Other scholars reject the role of domestic politics as an independent variable or its effect on international outcomes. In his influential study, Peter Gourevitch (1978) reversed Waltz’s second image and

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<sup>56</sup> Even Gilpin (1981, 234) has argued that “domestic politics and political leadership create the responses of states” to the challenges faced by differential growth.

<sup>57</sup> Waltz further added that “systems theories explain why different units behave similarly and, despite their variations, produce outcomes that fall within expected ranges. Conversely, theories at the unit level tell us why different units behave differently despite their similar placement in a system” (72). More critically for this dissertation, Waltz stresses that it would be a mistake to conflate a “theory of international politics for a theory of foreign policy” (121).

<sup>58</sup> Other scholars such as Zakaria (1992) have also extolled the virtues of incorporating domestic factors into international relations theorizing, but caution that many studies unduly ignore systemic pressures. Arthur Stein echoes this sentiment, suggesting that “internal characteristics may determine a single actor’s preferences but, in order to ascertain outcomes, it is also necessary to know the interests of other actors and to have a sense of the likely pattern of strategic interaction” (1993, 50).

instead highlighted the manner in which international politics affects domestic structure.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, some structural realists reject domestic factors and instead insist that anarchy and the distribution of power is what really affects state behavior.<sup>60</sup>

Singer contends that research premised on the internal characteristics of states can yield a more fruitful understanding of the “processes by which foreign policies are made” (1961, 90). Fearon (1998) has similarly argued that domestic politics are useful in explaining variation in states’ foreign policies. Kapstein (1995) also concludes that unit-level factors are helpful in accounting for state behavior.<sup>61</sup> With respect to my study, I agree, and argue that consideration of national interests as formulated by decision-making elites and domestic institutions can be useful in studying the behavior of great powers toward rising peers.

### **Threats & Opportunities**

Military strategy is the use of force and employment of military resources in order to achieve state interests and national security objectives. “War, and military strategy,” conclude Yarger and Barber, “supports the policy of the state in its pursuit of its interests” (1997). But state interests must still operate through the intervening variables of threats or opportunities. In other words, an incumbent’s decision to use military force

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<sup>59</sup> In a subsequent study, Robert Putnam (1988) articulates a ‘two-level game’ in which international and domestic politics have an interactive effect with one another. As will be elaborated below, this dissertation also considers international pressures — in particular external threats and opportunities — as intervening factors that influence a state’s foreign policy.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Mearsheimer (2001, 10-11) who is quite explicit in excluding unit level variables from his version of offensive realism. It is interesting to note, however, that Mearsheimer has also conceded that domestic factors can be useful in explaining international politics when combined with realist theories (2009, 247).

<sup>61</sup> Other scholars have suggested it is problematic to segregate structural and unit level explanations. According to Helen Milner, “the sharp distinctions between the two realms are difficult to maintain empirically. More importantly, any dichotomous treatment of domestic and international politics may have heuristic disadvantages” (1993, 160).

to fulfill state interests is contingent upon the various threats it may face to its existing territory or the opportunities for expansion.

### *Threat*

As Robert Blackwill argues, “the examination of external threats should follow an analysis and ranking of core objectives/vital and important interests” (1993, 104). He proffers several different criteria with which to evaluate threat including an immediacy in terms of time, geographic proximity, and the magnitude of the threat to national interests. Given these factors, a strong adversary poised to strike a state’s territory would necessitate a military response. For Blackwill, the application of military power is therefore based on whether vital state interests are threatened by a rival.

Stephen Walt (1987) proposes a much more sophisticated exposition with his balance of threat theory. He argues that states generally balance against perceived threats rather than simply power as described by Waltz (1979). Walt examines material capabilities, intentions, geographic proximity, and offensive capabilities as factors that states consider when assembling countervailing alliances. In contrast to balance of power theory, he argues that a state’s perception of these variables and whether an opponent poses a security threat can better account for balancing behavior.<sup>62</sup>

The preemptive paradox model incorporates these theories by proposing that territorial interests are particularly susceptible to threats and most likely to precipitate

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<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that Walt’s balance of threat theory differs from Waltz’s neorealism via an explicit reliance on rationality as a microfoundation. Moreover, balance of threat theory is dyadic by being a function of state interactions. Defensive structural realism also differs from Waltz’s neorealism in its willingness to make foreign policy predictions (c.f. Elman 1996). Such discrepancies suggest that an investigation into rising powers and the foreign policymaking of incumbent states constitutes a slightly different research question than what purely structural variants of neorealism tend to address.

military action. States respond to threats that not only endanger their national security but also jeopardize unit-level interests. Domestic elites prioritize state preferences such that territory deemed essential to an incumbent's national security or interest is the most sensitive to threats and thus trigger countervailing strategies.<sup>63</sup> An obvious existential threat is one in which a candidate power launches an offensive attack against an incumbent. For example, Maria Theresa was forced to defend the security of the Austrian empire in response to Prussia's Silesian invasion. Indeed, Anderson concludes that the invasion of Silesia threatened the very survival of the Habsburg monarchy (1995, 72, 82). Throughout the eighteenth century Britain's military policy was also driven by threats to its territorial interests, particularly by France's efforts to seize Hanover and several attempted invasions of Britain's homeland.

This dissertation therefore seeks to build upon existing theories of threat by endogenizing a state's territorial interests in order to better explain great power behavior. I argue that it is critical to understand exactly *what* is being threatened since by themselves proximity and capabilities can not account for the variation in how incumbents responded to rising peers. Similarly, the explanatory leverage of intentions is diminished if a state's malignity targets obscure territories that have no immediate bearing on an incumbent's national security or directed towards secondary concerns such as interstate trade.<sup>64</sup> Great powers maintain many different types of interests that

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<sup>63</sup> Blackwill (1993) distinguishes between vital, important, and peripheral interests. Vital interests, he argues, are the most important and demand military action given the immediate consequence such interests have for a state's national security.

<sup>64</sup> In sum, the inclusion of state interests increases the explanatory leverage of balance of threat theory and helps account for great power behavior. The various sources of threat that Walt identifies – proximity, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intentions – only explain *why* states may feel threatened. The addition of unit-level interests is therefore required to identify *what* is actually being threatened. This stands in contrast to many defensive realists who are implicit regarding the threats posed to territorial preferences. The endogenization of interests allows the model to be more explicit about the factors that influence threat perception and subsequent policy.



are not all equally affected by external threats. A state is likely to respond differently to existential threats that target its immediate homeland or territory deemed vital by domestic decision-makers, versus threats to obscure territorial holdings a state may possess in remote corners of the world or even threats to economic trade. Incorporating the additional factor of state interests offers a useful extension to the existing literature on threat perception and provides a means of making foreign policy predictions.

### *Opportunity*

Scholars have frequently demonstrated, however, that states do not engage in war solely for defensive purposes in response to threats. They often launch offensive wars as an opportunity to advance their interests and acquire additional benefits.<sup>65</sup> According to Harvey Starr (1978, 365), the willingness of states to exploit opportunities “deals with the motivations and goals of policy makers, and the decision-making processes that lead them to choose the ‘war’ alternative rather than ‘no war’.” John Tures and Paul Hensel (2000) have built upon Starr’s work by describing the willingness of states to engage in conflict as the “threat or use of military force [as] a specific policy option that is chosen by leaders on at least one side in pursuit of goals on one or more contentious issues.” In other words, states use military force as a means of securing domestic interests. Tures and Hensel add that territory is the most salient issue area over which states are willing to use military force as rivals advance competing claims.

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<sup>65</sup> Much of the existing literature distinguishes between ‘opportunity’ and ‘willingness,’ with the former relating to capabilities to engage in war and the latter referring to the readiness of policymakers to act on domestic interests. Such distinctions are important, however, within the context of this study they are unnecessary and I use the terms interchangeably.

The notion of states using offensive force to advance their interests is also a common theme found in some variants of international relations theory, particularly neoclassical realism. “Revisionist states tend to value what they covet more than what they currently possess,” argues Schweller, “and they will not hesitate to employ military force to destroy the existing arrangement among states” (1996, 100). He adds that “many large-scale wars were initiated by precisely those states that valued expansion more than their own safety” (1996, 106). In sum, wars are rarely accidental outcomes of simple misunderstandings between states and revisionists powers will sometimes use offensive military force to extend their interests through territorial expansion.<sup>66</sup>

Even scholars working in other branches of realism and international relations have proffered the notion that states use military force to secure additional gains rather than simply defend what they already possess. Most notably the offensive structural realist John Mearsheimer has declared that conquest can “improve a state’s power position” (2001, 147). Robert Gilpin (1981, 10) similarly suggests that states will seek to “transform institutions and systems in order to advance their interests” as they accrue higher levels of power. In particular, a change in the relative cost of achieving national interests will typically correspond to a change in foreign policy.

Given their prodigious power and vast global interests, great powers are especially prone to engaging in opportunistic wars to secure domestic interests. Indeed, a review of the historical record reveals the revisionist aspirations of many incumbents. During Russia’s rise to great power status in the early eighteenth century, England’s “entry into the Great Northern War was driven largely by opportunism... in order to

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<sup>66</sup> Schweller (1996, 107) correctly points out that expansionism does not necessarily mean global hegemony and may sometimes include expansion at the local or even region level.

acquire additional territory” (Gibler 2009, 48). For King George I, the goal was to connect his Hanoverian territory to the North Sea. During the War of the Austrian Succession the French statesman, Charles Louis Belle-Isle, sought not only the transfer of the Imperial crown to Charles Albert but also advocated the complete dismantlement of Austrian territory. Indeed, Frederick the Great reputedly commented that Belle-Isle acted as though Austria’s territories “were up for auction” (Asprey 1986, 214). During the war Spanish foreign policy was also opportunistic and sought to use Austria’s ongoing conflict with Prussia as an opportunity to advance their own interests in Italy. Indeed, Showalter (1996, 62) argues that “Philip V of Spain had taken advantage of the Prussia occupation of Silesia to assert an almost equally shadowy set of claims to the Habsburg possessions in Italy.”

### **Prioritizing Military Strategy**

Threats to current interests and opportunities for future expansion are equally important in understanding the formulation of a state’s military strategy. The international system includes a mixture of both revisionist and status quo states that must be considered when formulating theories of international relations (Schweller 1996, 116). But given their global presence, great powers have a large number of territorial and economic interests, and face a dizzying array of threats and opportunities. Military resources are also scarce and incumbents must therefore be selective in identifying targets of military strategy. How can we then predict instances of conflict and whether great powers will preempt the rise of a new peer?

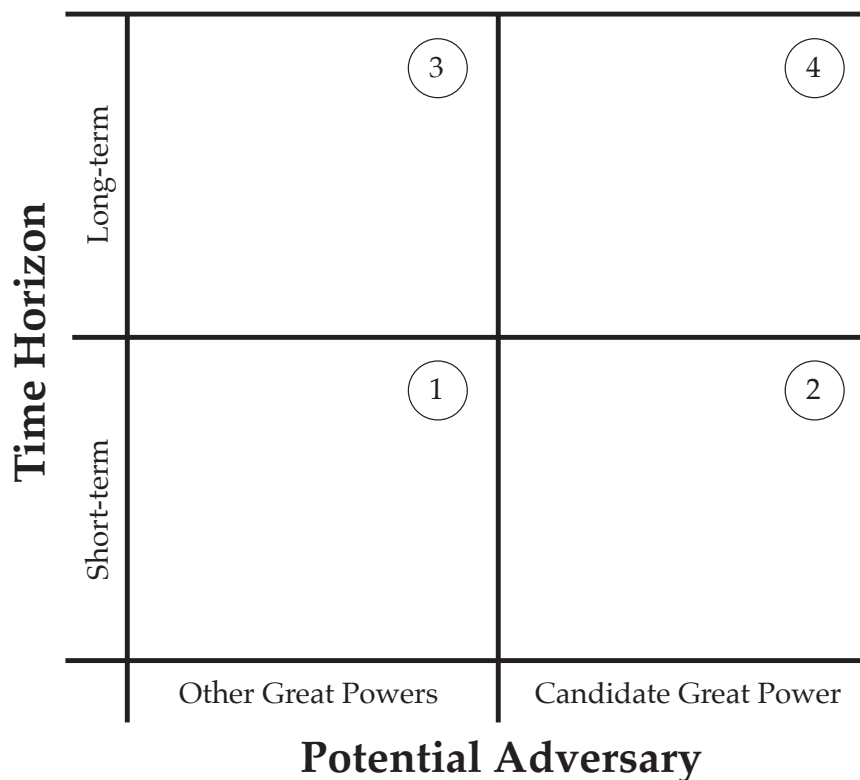


Figure 2.3: Outline of the Preemptive Paradox

This study relies on two factors to help predict a great power's military strategy. These are graphically represented in Figure 2.3 which provides a typological outline of the preemptive paradox. The typology represents the decision-making matrix from the perspective of incumbent great powers. The horizontal axis identifies the potential adversaries an incumbent may encounter which includes another great power or the rising candidate power. States face numerous prospective adversaries and must constantly monitor who poses the greatest threat to its national security or undermines its interests. Meanwhile, the vertical axis bifurcates the strategic time horizon of an incumbent into the short and long-term.<sup>67</sup> All states maintain a wide variety of objectives

<sup>67</sup> The literature is generally inconsistent about distinguishing between short and long-term time horizons. Industrial organization theorists define long-term periods of time as anywhere between 15-20 years (Neuhoff and von Hirschhausen 2005, 2). Meanwhile, Jones et al. identify the short-term as concerning immediate events or happenings, and suggest that long-term change is associated with structural change that can operate "over centuries

to enhance their strategic position and face tradeoffs between pursuing short and long-term goals.

With the property space established, we can now locate and identify the preemptive paradox as residing in the top-right quadrant. If it is presumed that, in the long-term, a rising great power will upset system stability and alter global balances of power then incumbents should have a strong incentive to thwart the rise of a candidate great power. This is particularly true if relative power differentials favor the incumbent. The empirical record, however, demonstrates that extant great powers have rarely contested the rise of a candidate great power and were scarcely concerned about the long-term implications of a new peer competitor.

Instead, incumbents are most concerned about the bottom-left quadrant of Figure 2.3. They carefully monitor the actions of other great power rivals since, by their very nature, they possess the immediate capacity to undermine the security of others. Moreover, the greatest threat to an incumbent is an invasion of its sovereign territory in the short-term which offers little time to implement precautionary defensive measures. Similarly, because of the magnitude of threat posed by rival great powers, an incumbent will constantly seek out new opportunities to bolster its relative power position. This is consistent with Mearsheimer who argues that states will “seek opportunities to weaken potential adversaries” (1990, 12). For these reasons, the bottom-left quadrant reflects

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or even millennia” (2001, 15). Their definition of short-term events is consistent with contemporary military strategists who similarly define it in terms of an immediacy of time that, if unfulfilled, “will have immediate consequence for critical national interests” (Yarger and Barber 1997). However, Jones et al. choose to rely on an untenable operationalization of long-term time horizons. George Modelski and William Thompson (1999) similarly define long-term cycles in terms of intervals of approximately 100-120 years. This dissertation will instead borrow Detlef Sprinz’s pragmatic definition of long-term policy issues as lasting for at “least a human generation of 25 years” and which contain a great deal of uncertainty (2009, 2). He also offers the useful heuristic that long-term issues are those that extend beyond the tenure of current policymakers in office.

the highest priority of incumbents to always be alert to immediate threats by other great powers. Meanwhile, the bottom-right quadrant in which an incumbent faces the candidate great power in the short-term also constitutes an immediate threat, but because of the relatively weaker power differentials it is less of a concern to an incumbent than when facing a stronger adversary.

In the long-term, incumbent great powers have more time to address a prospective adversary by seeking a diplomatic negotiated settlement of potential conflicts of interest or by pursuing traditional countervailing measures such as forging new alliances and bolstering its internal military power as a means of shoring up its defense. In this regard, the top row of Figure 2.3 in which an incumbent has more of a long-term strategic outlook is less of a concern than immediate threats to its national security as found in the bottom row. Nevertheless, other rival great powers still remain as the primary potential adversary an incumbent may face given their capacity to marshal offensive military resources and wider array of global interests which constitutes a larger number of potential sources of interstate dispute. Finally, the top-right quadrant in which an incumbent may face the candidate great power in the long-term represents the lowest level of threat extant great powers face.

Thus, the reason incumbent great powers rarely preempt the rise of aspiring powers is because of the low level of threat they pose to states. At the same time, incumbents prioritize opportunities to weaken rival great powers as a means of bolstering their relative position. As Waltz argued, “a general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers” and therefore incumbents will focus their efforts on other major powers since they have the greatest bearing on their security

and interests (1986, 61). In contrast, aspirants possess fewer offensive capabilities and a more limited global presence that mitigates their proximity to the great powers and thus reduces the likelihood for a potential conflict of interest. They must also exercise caution in terms of signaling their malign intentions towards the territorial interests of existing great powers since power differentials still favor the incumbent. Moreover, in the long-term, aspiring powers ultimately face numerous obstacles in their rise to obtaining great power status and thus are not likely to elicit a countervailing response by incumbents.

These results shed light on why incumbents placed such a low priority on the top-right quadrant of Figure 2.3 and often declined to preempt the rise of a candidate great power. Incumbents are not likely to risk preemptive war if there is a low probability that the candidate great power will become a threat in the long-term. They are also less willing to preempt the rise of a candidate great power since it would divert scarce resources away from potential conflicts with other great powers who constitute a greater threat. "Acting preemptively contributes to security only when a significant *probability* exists that the rising power will aggressively use military force when it becomes predominant in the future" (Brooks 1997, 458). Under this assumption, it is not likely that incumbents will be overly threatened by the long-term rise of candidate great powers given the numerous obstacles they face in their ascendancy and the absence of any long-term probable threat to territorial interests.<sup>68</sup> As a result, a noninterventionist policy is the most likely outcome and symbolizes the preemptive paradox.

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<sup>68</sup> Additionally, because intentions remain uncertain in an anarchical environment incumbents do not consider other powers to be inherently malign. In other words, incumbents do not assume the worst-case scenario that even their most trusted ally will some day become an adversary. Relatedly, great powers have no reason to automatically regard candidate powers as adversaries that will threaten its national security or interests. This is consistent with defensive realism which does not consider security to be scarce and maintains a more optimistic disposition. States

## Onset of Conflict

Once a rising state begins its attempted transition toward great power status we can then make predictions as to how incumbents will react and whether it chooses to contest the rise of a new peer. First off, when an incumbent and aspirant have different sets of interests that do not overlap it is less likely that conflict will erupt between the two states. This is a rather intuitive result since states that are not direct competitors will be less inclined to risk the high costs of war. Even great powers who are assumed to have broad global (or at least regional) interests are not willing to expend blood and treasure on issues that do not affect their own preferences. For example, if an incumbent's economic and territorial interests are primarily located in Europe and the aspirant's interests are in Latin America then the incumbent will have little reason to contest the state's rise to power.<sup>69</sup> In the cases under review in this study, the emergence of the United States in North America was of little concern to the existing great powers since their interests were not challenged. Similar circumstances surrounded the rise of China during the second half of the twentieth century as it chose to focus on the internal consolidation of its existing territory rather than pursue external expansion that would threaten extant great powers. Therefore, an incumbent will choose a policy of nonintervention if the candidate great power does not pose an immediate short-term threat to its territorial interests.

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are able to prioritize certain preferences over others and are able to pursue a wide range of potential foreign policy options in either the short or long-term that may not include contesting the rise of a candidate power. Indeed, according to Brooks, "it is emphasized that states often make trade-offs between different priorities" (1997, 471).

<sup>69</sup> To be fair, Mearsheimer (2001) would likely object to this assertion and argue that an aspiring regional hegemon would compel an incumbent to intervene.



When short-term territorial interests begin to overlap, however, an incumbent is more likely to contest the rise of a candidate great power.<sup>70</sup> As discussed above, territorial disputes pose a greater threat to an incumbent's national security and more likely to elicit a direct military response.<sup>71</sup> A brief survey of rising great powers reveals several instances of short-term territorial threats posed by candidate great powers, for example, in the early eighteenth century Russia challenged Sweden's dominance over the Baltic region in its quest to attain great power status. In Europe, Silesia was a contentious piece of territory between Prussia and Austria, while the Italian revolutions witnessed a revolt against Austrian rule and unified control over the Italian states. Additionally, in the early twentieth century, Russia and Japan clashed over control of Manchuria. Such instances correspond to the bottom-right corner of Figure 2.3 and represents the conditions under which a great power is most likely to preempt the rise of a candidate great power.

Contestation	Nonintervention
Russia	United States
Prussia	China
Italy	
Japan	

<sup>70</sup> The relative intensity of preferences determines the foreign policy response of states. For purposes of formulating a parsimonious theory, this dissertation subdivides state interests into territorial and economic matters. It is assumed that territory is a zero-sum condition that can impose high negative externalities on other states leading to conflict. In contrast, economic issues impose fewer negative externalities and have a greater potential for mutual gains such that the probability of conflict is significantly lower. Finally, in cases where there is little overlap between interests – regardless if it is a territorial or economic matter – then it is hypothesized that no conflict will occur with little foreign policy response by states to the preferences of others.

<sup>71</sup> This is consistent with Axelrod (1970, 5) who defines a conflict of interest as “the state of incompatibility of the goals of two or more actors.” In other words, the more a situation approximates a zero-sum interaction the more likely conflict will ensue.

Table 2.2: Territorial Conflict and Onset of War

Table 2.2 categorizes all cases of aspiring great powers according to whether their rise was contested or if other great powers simply chose not to respond. Only two states achieved great power status without being opposed: United States and China. The long-term rise of these two states and the negligible threat they posed to territorial interests meant that incumbents would abstain from preempting their ascendancy to great power status. The majority of states, however, encountered some form of resistance as their attempted rise involved a conflict of interest in the immediate term that triggered a dyadic war.

## **Implications of the Model**

Wars are costly and their outcomes often uncertain. Great power wars are of particular importance since they have the potential to alter global balances of power. “These general wars have been major turning points in international history,” observes Levy, “marking the rise and fall of hegemonic powers and serving as the primary vehicle for fundamental transformations of the international system” (1983, 3-4). Therefore, the objective of this dissertation is to formulate a model that can be a useful tool to predict whether great powers chose to contest the emergence of a new great power peer with military force.

While most strands of realism offer a pessimistic portrayal of international relations consisting of states tragically gravitating towards war, this dissertation is arguably more optimistic by establishing a particular threshold for conflict. In the

absence of short-term clashes of territorial interests states are not likely to expend scarce resources and risk the high cost of war. Moreover, given the wide number of potential great power dyads in the system at any given time the probability of multiple states satisfying this condition is low and war is not likely to spread throughout the international system. Therefore, what I expect to be the most striking finding of this dissertation is that the emergence of new great powers do not necessarily trigger systemic instability and conflict as is often theorized. Great powers are able to manage the international system and adjust to the emergence of a new peer. For contemporary policymakers, this also suggests that all states need not fear an inevitable war with new powers and they can adjust their defense expenditures in accordance with this reduction in uncertainty.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, diplomats may be able to forestall interstate hostilities by anticipating potential sources of dispute and actively negotiate the resolution of possible conflicts of interests.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, as contemporary interstate state borders become more widely institutionalized and established, this dissertation may also account for the general decline in great power conflicts over the past several centuries.<sup>74</sup>

Lastly, the behavior and manner in which a state rises to become a great power is an important predictor of conflict. Aspirants who challenge the territorial integrity of great powers are likely to find themselves involved in a war. Indeed, what is perhaps

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<sup>72</sup> This is closely related to the spiral model of international relations; see Herz 1950, Jervis 1978, and Glaser 1997.

<sup>73</sup> For example, the global community could focus on potential sources of territorial disputes such as the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea which has been a significant point of contention between Japan and China.

<sup>74</sup> This conclusion may also be paired with normative accounts of international relations, for example, as the norm against the application of military power becomes more established then states are less likely to be concerned with short-term clashes of interest and can instead begin to focus on long-term goals. This corresponds to the top row of Figure 2.3 which has a lower probability of conflict. Additionally, greater institutionalization and recognition of state sovereignty may also account for a shift in state interests such that they are permitted to focus on more long-term objectives without having to constantly fear short-term territorial attacks. In other words, the shift in emphasis from the bottom to top row of Figure 2.3.

most striking is that in all cases of war onset the initiation of conflict was launched by the candidate great power.<sup>75</sup> The historical record shows that the rising power or revisionist state is the actor who initiates conflict – not the incumbent great power or status quo state. This result has important implications for international relations theorizing and foreign policymaking. In terms of IR theory, it offers an insightful extension to the wide body of scholarship collectively known as ‘rise and fall’ realism.<sup>76</sup> While Organski (1968) argues that the rising state launches a hegemonic war, Copeland (2000) counters that it is actually the declining state that initiates conflict.<sup>77</sup> The logic and findings of this dissertation, however, seem to support the contention that it is the rising peer that triggers war. This result then has enormous implications for contemporary policymakers. In particular, the leadership of rising states would be well-advised to calculate how their actions and behavior will be received by extant great powers. The model offers a clear policy prescription that any aspirant should eschew territorial conquest if they wish to avoid assuming the high costs of war.

## Methodology

This dissertation employs a qualitative methodology to help understand how great powers select their foreign policy strategy in light of a new peer. In particular, I use

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<sup>75</sup> This accords with Schweller who argues that “it is not declining hegemons but risk-acceptant leaders of rising dissatisfied challengers... [who] have been the great makers of preventive war” (1999, 8). Sneh Mahajan (2002, 3) also contends that it should be expected that “the ascendant powers would demonstrate their might by expansion beyond their frontiers.”

<sup>76</sup> See Elman & Jensen (2014, Chap. 7) for a brief overview and discussion of rise and fall realism. This dissertation potentially extends the logic of rise and fall realism from its current restriction among the superclass of hegemonic states to the interaction between great powers and aspiring powers.

<sup>77</sup> Gilpin (1981) seems to agree with both perspectives. On the one hand, he argues that a rising power will seek to change the international system if the benefits exceed the costs; on the other hand, Gilpin acknowledges that a dominant power can arrest its decline by launching a preventive war against a rising challenger.

process-tracing which is a valuable tool for not just theory testing but also theory generation. The method is well-suited to help identify the intervening causal processes that lead to the occurrence of a given outcome.<sup>78</sup> Process-tracing “identifies a causal chain that links independent and dependent variables,” explains Jeffrey Checkel, allowing the researcher to establish a “series of theoretically predicted intermediate steps” (2009, 115). With respect to the model developed in this dissertation, process-tracing can establish the sequence of events beginning with the formation of national interests, the intervening threats or opportunities to those interests, and finally leading to the outcome of great power behavior.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, according to Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, “process-tracing is an indispensable tool for theory testing and theory development not only because it generates numerous observations within a case, but because these observations must be linked in particular ways to constitute an explanation of the case” (2005, 207).

Tracing the various pathways leading to the outcome of interest also facilitates the elimination of rival explanations. Given that a goal of this dissertation is theory generation, it is critical that other potential causes of great power behavior are considered and subsequently removed (George and Bennett 2005, 217). As explained in the introductory chapter, the main rival causes for this study will predominately originate from the realist literature. An in-depth analysis of the cases will therefore allow

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<sup>78</sup> Process-tracing can also assist in the fundamental goal of establishing the causes-of-effects (CoE). This form of causal inference is when an investigator “seeks to understand the causal relationship between an already observed outcome and an earlier intervention” (Dawid 2000, 408). Indeed, it is consistent with John Stuart Mill’s notion of induction which he asserts “is mainly a process for finding the causes of effects” (Redman 1997, 328). An appreciation of CoE is therefore helpful in identifying the relevant factors that may have influenced a great power’s foreign policy.

<sup>79</sup> Process-tracing can assist in determining the extent to which domestic factors influence the foreign policies of states which is a central task of this dissertation (c.f. Kapstein 1995, 754).

for the consideration of alternative pathways to a great power's foreign policy.<sup>80</sup> This also permits the discovery of 'equifinality' or the possibility of multiple causal pathways to the same outcome.

There are, however, salient limitations to the use of process-tracing (George and Bennett 2005, 222-223; Checkel 2009, 120-125). The first is an inability to demonstrate an uninterrupted pathway or sequence of events. This can seriously undermine a proposed hypothesis and the contention that an independent variable has a measurable impact on the outcome. As alluded to above, another potential challenge is the discovery of multiple pathways equally compatible with an outcome. This makes it difficult to determine whether the competing accounts have an additive effect or if one is spurious.<sup>81</sup>

Despite such limitations, process-tracing has proven to be a useful methodological tool and has been successfully employed by many scholars working within the security studies and diplomatic history subfields. Richard Ned Lebow (1984), for example, provides an insightful examination of the outcomes of international crises with particular attention devoted to decision-making. For his part, Levy (1990/91) examines the causal pathway leading to the outbreak of WWI by focusing on critical decision points. Finally, Nina Tannenwald (2015) has recently provided a broad

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<sup>80</sup> In particular, careful attention must be devoted to assessing the role of threat since it is contained within my preemptive paradox model as well as the realist variant of balance of threat. Process-tracing is thus a useful tool to establish the sequence events and whether the formation of national interests *precedes* the perception of threat and changes in the dependent variable.

<sup>81</sup> Olav Njølstad (1990) offers helpful guidance on how to resolve such obstacles. Bennett and Elman (2007, 183) also suggest a number of best practices in the use of process-tracing. More recently, James Mahoney (2015) has proposed general guidelines for scholars to consider in order to ensure an effective application of process-tracing to their research.

overview of the use of process-tracing in security studies and outlined how it has advanced the subfield.

In this study, the chosen cases reflect instances of both the presence and absence of short-term territorial disputes that is hypothesized to trigger dyadic conflict: Prussia is presented as an instance of territorial conflict and the United States is selected given the absence of any territorial dispute with another great power. Careful attention is made to ensure that the presence of any conflict of interest precedes the onset of war in order to avoid tautological error.

In sum, this dissertation employs process-tracing to first establish the key national interests of the great powers during the time period under examination with particular attention paid to vital economic and territorial matters. I then move to determine whether the great power confronted any threats to these key interests or faced opportunities to advance their interests. Given that incumbent great powers typically face a dizzying array of threats and opportunities, I also assess whether they occur in the short or long-term, and whether such threats and opportunities stand in relationship to other great powers or a rising candidate power. These potential relationships are then placed within the typological framework presented above in Figure 2.3. The use process-tracing in conjunction with typological theorizing is helpful in understanding complex phenomena such as great power behavior and foreign policymaking (Bennett and Elman 2007, 171).

The model hypothesizes that dyadic conflict is most likely when an incumbent and candidate great power have an immediate dispute over a territorial matter vital to their national security. Under such circumstances we should expect to see the

incumbent contest the rise of a new great power. This also allows us to obtain confirmation whether incumbents were more likely to target a rival great power rather than the candidate great power which underscores the preemptive paradox.

## **Dissertation Structure**

The remainder of this dissertation will be structured along the following chapters:

### *Chapter 3: Prussia and Frederick the Great*

The rise of Prussia to great power status was punctuated by two wars: the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War. The occurrence of these conflicts furnishes us with two distinct cases with which to evaluate the onset of war. In particular, we can confirm whether the initiation of conflict is triggered by territorial disputes and examine the threats and opportunities that may have led others to enter the war.

### *Chapter 4: United States and “The Missing War”*

Sometimes referred to as the ‘missing war,’ the rise of the United States to great power status is an anomaly from the perspective of most realist theories of international relations. Balance of power theory would suggest that increases in American power should have been checked by either the formation of countervailing coalitions or internal military buildups. Yet the empirical record reveals that incumbent powers took neither course of action and instead opted for a strategy of nonintervention. The preemptive paradox model therefore aims to shed new light on the case.



### *Chapter 5: Conclusion*

The dissertation concludes by reflecting upon the preemptive paradox and the findings of the empirical chapters. I also briefly discuss the external validity of my model to other cases in which a state achieved great power status. Moreover, the concluding chapter will discuss how the model performs in the most recent case of China and speculates as to how the model can be extended to other areas of foreign policy analysis.

### III. Prussia & Frederick the Great

The rise of Prussia to great power status in the eighteenth century was marked by several wars that rocked the European continent and had global ramifications that altered existing balances of power. Enormous resources were expended and several million soldiers and civilians lost their lives in the wars that marked Prussia's ascendancy. Its emergence on the world stage would also affect international affairs for generations to come as future leaders including Bismarck and Hitler would later harness the power of the German state with far-reaching implications. Understanding the conditions that led to the tumultuous rise of Prussia is therefore critical for contemporary policymakers to preclude a similarly violent episode and ensure global peace and stability.

Most historians are interested in the specific idiosyncratic factors that contributed to the rise of Prussia to great power status. As Dwyer (2000, 3) points out, much research is devoted to analyzing reforms of domestic institutions, relations between nobility and peasantry, Prussia's officer corps and the recruitment of soldiers, or the relative decline of its neighbors. From the perspective of international relations theorizing, however, this dissertation focuses instead on the foreign policy responses of great powers to Prussia's growth. It seeks to provide an account as to why some great powers decided to contest Prussia while others chose not to intervene.

At first glance, the rise of Prussia constitutes a 'most likely' case for balance of power theory. Given the accumulation of material power and the subsequent formation of a balancing coalition, balance of power theory should have significant explanatory

leverage over the incumbents' reaction to an ascending Prussia. Upon closer inspection, however, it will be shown that the behavior and foreign policy responses of the great powers do not entirely conform to balance of power predictions and are in fact anomalous in many respects. Instead, this dissertation will present an alternative framework with which to help explain the foreign policymaking of states in formulating their response to Prussia.

The chapter begins with a preliminary introduction of Prussia prior to its initial rise to great power status, as well as a discussion regarding the circumstances of other major European powers at the time. I then analyze the two wars that punctuated Prussia's emergence on the world stage: the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War. Each conflict is evaluated for its initial onset and subsequent diffusion to other powers. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the presence of a territorial dispute increases the probability that an incumbent will employ military force and played a key role in predicting the extent to which war engulfed not only Europe but also spread to the far corners of the globe.

## **Prussia as a Great Power**

Most observers agree that the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) served as a clear indication that Prussia was climbing the ranks of major states but had not yet achieved great power status. The Silesian invasion that sparked the War of the Austrian Succession signaled to the other powers that Prussia was becoming a "rising political force [and] was now knocking on the door of the great powers and might soon enter their ranks" (Scott 2000, 164). According to M.S. Anderson the power struggles

encompassing the War of the Austrian Succession helped elevate Prussia to at least 'potential' great power status, however, "Brandenburg-Prussia was still in 1748 not a true great power. Its population and economic resources were too small for that. But it was now beginning to have some of the characteristics of one" (1995, 211).

Prussia would not become a great power until the conclusion of the Seven Years War in 1763. H.M. Scott (2000, 164) argues that while the War of the Austrian Succession had certainly elevated Prussia's relative standing it would not achieve great power status until the Seven Years War. According to Leonard Cowie, Prussia's ability to "withstand a coalition of three great powers" during the Seven Years War meant that it "must therefore be regarded as a great power herself" (1963, 192). For his part, the historian Dennis Showalter declares that the Peace of Hubertusberg which marked the end of the Seven Years War "established Prussia as a great power beyond question" (1996, 321).<sup>1</sup>

What is perhaps most interesting is that Prussia's rise was not inevitable and at times even seemed improbable as the country flirted with disaster.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the War of the Austrian Succession, Prussia was a poor state with limited resources within its comparatively small geographic territory and without any natural barriers that exposed it to frequent raids. Cowie finds that Prussia's "territories were scattered" and "its economic resources weak" (1963, 134). Indeed, Prussian lands were colloquially referred to as the 'swamp of Brandenburg.' Moreover, industries and agriculture were both constrained due to a small population base from which it could draw labor.

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<sup>1</sup> Some may incorrectly point to Bismarck's success in establishing a unified Germany as the point at which it achieved great power status, however, Katharine Anne Lerman (2008, 23) counters this actually marks Germany's attainment of a "latent hegemony" in Europe or a 'semi-hegemonial' position."

<sup>2</sup> Contemporary historians have even suggested that Prussia's rise was somewhat of a surprise given its limited resources and exposed geographic territory (Showalter 1996, 321).

According to Philip Dwyer, “the Electorate suffered from poor soil, declining trade and a sparse population. Its territory was often at the mercy of marauding mercenaries... This was hardly the stuff out of which a great power was likely to be made” (2000, 1). When Frederick II assumed the throne in 1740, argues Dwyer, he inherited a second or even a third-rate state that did not seem poised to become one of the leading powers in Europe.

The single most powerful advantage that Prussia had over its neighbors, however, was its strong centralized government structure and powerful military.<sup>3</sup> This achievement was due in large part to the prodigious efforts of Frederick William I and ultimately harnessed by his son, Frederick II, who would inherit and subsequently exploit this robust state apparatus in order to thrust Prussia into the ranks of great powers. Indeed, given its unfavorable geographic position Prussian policymakers were incentivized to strengthen its military as a means of defending itself.<sup>4</sup> This is perhaps what led Walter Dorn to famously declare that “it was not Prussia that made the army, but the army that made modern Prussia” (1940, 90). Frederick William I inherited an army of 40,000 but by the end of his tenure this number had grown to 135,000 with the capacity to expand up to 200,000 (Cowie 1963, 135).<sup>5</sup> But while the mighty Prussian army may have been heralded as the deciding factor that allowed it to ascend the ranks of great powers, it too faced enormous obstacles that make Prussia’s rise even more

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<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Frederick the Great’s remarkable diplomatic and military strategizing, the single domestic factor that helped propel Prussia toward great power status was its military. “With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that the administrative and military foundations laid in 1740, together with the degree of social integration achieved under Frederick William I, would provide a secure basis for Prussia’s eighteenth-century emergence. Yet in the estimation of most contemporaries these advantages were insufficient to overcome Prussia’s territorial exposure and inherent poverty” (Scott 2006, 50).

<sup>4</sup> This may partially explain Prussia’s decision to pursue external acquisition as a tactic for achieving great power status.

<sup>5</sup> The expansion of military force was also achieved without relying on foreign subsidies and troops were conscripted from Prussia’s own population. For a more thorough review of Prussia’s civil-military reforms, see Büsch (1997).

surprising. Indeed, most historians note that after Prussia's invasion of Silesia and success in the subsequent War of the Austrian Succession it was still difficult for it to sustain a national army (Dorn 1940, 94; Cowie 1963, 136-137). Even after the Seven Years War in which Prussia achieved great power status it would still face enormous obstacles to sustain its lofty position: "It had neither the population nor the economic resources, let alone the geographical coherency, needed to carry out the obligations which came with its enhanced political structure" (Dwyer 2000, 2).

## **War of the Austrian Succession**

I begin my analysis with the circumstances that surrounded the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1740. This neatly corresponds with my research design to study the strategies of incumbents over the 25 years that precede the point at which most agree that Prussia attained its great power status. This also coincides with critical changes in the leadership of both Austria and Prussia. In this section I first provide a brief account of Prussia prior to the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession. I then investigate the conditions that precipitated the initiation of war following Prussia's attack upon Austrian territory, and explore how the other major powers chose to respond to the invasion. I carefully evaluate the extent of each great powers' territorial interests within the context of both short and long-term timeframes, as well as how potential adversaries threatened their interests.

## Pragmatic Sanction & Unit-Level Changes

The factor that served as the primary impetus of the War of the Austrian Succession was the circumstances surrounding the Pragmatic Sanction and subsequent changes in leadership in both Austria and Prussia. Charles VI, head of the House of Habsburg and Holy Roman Emperor, lacked a male heir to inherit the throne. In anticipation that a female might be the only viable successor, Charles VI issued the Pragmatic Sanction in 1713 that stipulated that all his territorial possessions would be inherited by his daughter.<sup>6</sup> Given the unprecedented nature of having a female assume control of one of the most powerful monarchies in Europe, Charles VI took extreme diplomatic and political measures to ensure that other great powers would recognize the succession of his daughter to the throne and respect the territorial integrity of Habsburg domains. All great powers (France, Spain, Russia, and Britain) agreed to recognize the Pragmatic Sanction and respect the transfer of Habsburg power to a female successor. Prussia was a second rate power at the time also accepted the terms of the Pragmatic Sanction.<sup>7</sup>

Although tenuous in many respects, the Pragmatic Sanction seemed poised to guarantee some measure of continuity in European affairs and global balances of power.<sup>8</sup> Charles VI died in 1740 and control of the Habsburg monarchy was

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<sup>6</sup> The Mutual Pact of Succession of 1703 had previously established that all Habsburg domains would be passed on to the daughters of Charles' brother, Joseph I. Charles VI therefore intended the Pragmatic Sanction to supersede the Mutual Pact of Succession so that his own children would inherit the throne. It should be noted that both pacts excluded control of the Holy Roman Empire which was an elective position, although by convention it had remained in the House of Habsburg.

<sup>7</sup> The only two states that refused to agree to the Pragmatic Sanction were Saxony and Bavaria whose leaders had claims to the Habsburg throne by way of their respective marriages to the daughters of Joseph I. Since neither was a great power at the time they are excluded from my analysis. It should also be noted that those states who did agree to the terms of the Pragmatic Sanction exacted rather significant concessions from Charles VI.

<sup>8</sup> Although most powers agreed to the Pragmatic Sanction in the years prior to the death of Emperor Charles, the expectation that the signatories would adhere to the terms was tenuous at best. Indeed, Frederick remarked that most states eagerly awaited the passing of the Emperor which would lead to land grabbing (Asprey 1986, 154, 156).

successfully transferred to his daughter, Maria Theresa, in a rather peaceful and uneventful manner. Coincidentally, Frederick William I of Prussia also passed away in 1740, bequeathing the entire Prussian estate to his son, Frederick II, who would later become known as Frederick the Great. Initially it appeared that peace would ensue despite the turmoil and unpredictability often associated with domestic transfers of power. However, European tranquility would soon be shattered with Prussia's sudden and surprising invasion of the Austrian province of Silesia in December 1740.

### **Invasion of Silesia**

The transition from Frederick William I to Frederick II was marked by a willingness to act upon wider geostrategic interests. Whereas Frederick William I was content to restrict Prussian policy to domestic affairs, Frederick II was more inclined to pursue wider continental interests. According to H.M. Scott (2000, 158), his "political vision was far wider than that of his predecessors, encompassing the whole European diplomatic chessboard." Showalter is more direct, arguing that "when Frederick assumed the throne on 1 June 1740, he was primed to carry out a *coup* in international affairs" (1996, 33). In Dwyer's review of Prussia's history he notes that the "character of the king and his personal preferences and attitudes helped shape Prussian policies and, therefore, the Prussian state and society" (2000, 21). Each king made crucial decisions whether to implement aggressive foreign policies which, in turn, shaped the strategic



responses of the great powers.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the expansionist policies of Frederick II resulted in a far different outcome than the pacific policies of Frederick William I.

The sudden death of Charles VI and the transfer of power to his daughter Maria Theresa represented a propitious opportunity for Frederick II to advance his territorial aspirations. On December 16, 1740, Frederick successfully invaded the Austrian province of Silesia. The far superior Prussian army quickly overwhelmed the Austrian defenders. Control of Silesia would yield valuable resources that would expand the burgeoning Prussian power. "Silesia was a highly populated province, a fertile land rich in mineral resources and strategically placed. Its acquisition would add to Prussia's security in Germany and weaken the power of her chief rival, Austria" (Shennan 1995, 42). Indeed, Silesia was one of the richest territories of the Habsburg monarchy: "With a population of 1 million, many of them still Protestant, flourishing agriculture, ore deposits and famous textile industry, it would greatly increase Prussian strength and wealth" (McKay and Scott 1983, 164). The invasion of Silesia was intended to advance the power, prestige, and security of Frederick's empire (Scott 2000, 69, 164). Christopher Clark (2006, 192-193) seems to concur, suggesting that Frederick's invasion was informed more by strategic considerations rather than economic gain.

While legal justifications were used as a pretense for the annexation of Silesia, most recognize that such claims were superficial and that Prussia's invasion was a blatant act of aggression. "Frederick II knew well that the legalistic arguments he put forward to justify his crucial invasion of Silesia in December 1740 were worthless"

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<sup>9</sup> Dwyer (2000, 21) adds that the specific motivating factors that influenced a king's policy were diverse and included religion and even personal depression. These individual-level pathologies, however, are omitted from my study in order to retain a more parsimonious account.

(Anderson 1995, 3). To be sure, Frederick II had long harbored ambitious expansionary goals that included not only Silesia, but also Polish and Swedish territories (Anderson 1995, 59-60). These territories would be seized through the use of military force. Ultimately Frederick was “anxious to cut a figure in the affairs of Europe, to show that he was a force to be reckoned with and to achieve an international reputation, most of all a military one” (Anderson 1995, 60).

Irrespective of motives or strategic planning, Frederick’s invasion of Silesia came as a shock to the existing great powers and introduced a dramatic alteration to the status quo. Not only were some states compelled to respond but the disruption also introduced a new opportunity for extant powers to further weaken long-standing rivals or to satisfy revisionist aspirations. Prussia’s invasion set off a torrent of territorial claims as other great powers (and even some lesser powers) sought to take advantage of the opportunity to acquire additional gains as the Habsburg monarchy was incapacitated. Although Maria Theresa assumed control of an empire that consisted of scattered territories that lacked any centralized administration, she remained steadfast in her determination to preserve the Habsburg monarchy. Much to his surprise Frederick encountered a new queen who was undaunted by the sudden provocation and determined to defend her inheritance.

### *Austria*

Predicting the foreign policy responses of great powers to Prussia’s initial invasion of Silesia is a rather straightforward endeavor. For the preemptive paradox, the onset of dyadic war is most likely given an immediate territorial dispute between an

aspirant and incumbent. The probability of conflict increases as a given piece of territory assumes greater importance on a great power's policy agenda. For example, remote colonial holdings with little economic or strategic value will be weighed less heavily than territories that affect the immediate homeland and actual survival of a state.

For Austria, Prussia's invasion was an unequivocal threat to the very existence of the House of Habsburg. Indeed, Anderson avers that the invasion of Silesia threatened the very survival of the Habsburg monarchy and constituted a genuine existential threat as a Franco-Bavarian force marched toward Vienna (1995, 72, 82). The historians Matt Schumann and Karl Schweizer even find that Maria Theresa regarded Prussia as a threat to not only the Habsburg monarchy but to the entire European continent as well (2008, 30). Maria Theresa thus found herself in a precarious position upon Prussia's invasion of Silesia. The invasion also signaled Austria's weakness to neighboring states who each sought additional Habsburg territory. The multitude of enemy alliances only served to exacerbate Austria's insecurity.<sup>10</sup>

The invasion in 1740 also corresponded to the most inopportune movement for Austria as it was still grappling with the transition in leadership from Charles VI to Maria Theresa. Although the Habsburg monarchy was one of the largest powers in Europe with its empire stretching over vast territories, internally it was a weakened state with limited sources of financial income, disjointed administrative structure, and a decentralized military often composed of private mercenaries.<sup>11</sup> "Her eighteenth-century position as a great power," observes Scott, "was always to be fragile" (2006, 24). In the

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<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Anderson finds that Great Britain was proving to be a questionable ally which represented an additional threat to its survival (1995, 77).

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Austria's military force, see Scott (2006, 20-24).

aggregate, Austria was a formidable power but its disjointed and decentralized administrative structure limited its ability to defend itself and successfully manage domestic and international affairs.<sup>12</sup>

Given the fragile state of the Habsburg monarchy, Prussia sought to alter Austria's strategic calculations with the invasion of Silesia which was intended to place Frederick in a position of strength when negotiating a resolution with Maria Theresa. He declared that in exchange for conceding Silesia as a *fait accompli*, Prussia would offer an indemnity to compensate for the loss of territory and even recognize Austrian rights to other German territories. But the Austrians were unmoved by Prussian overtures and committed to contesting any loss of territory. To concede any part of Silesia would signal Austria's weakness and only increase the likelihood of further Prussian demands for additional territory. Moreover, the division or even complete loss of Silesia would undermine the Pragmatic Sanction which was founded upon the indivisibility of Habsburg territory. Thus, the Habsburg strategy in response to Prussia's invasion was one of contestation.

To be fair, there was some discussion among Austria's statesmen as to the most prudent response to Prussian aggression. As anti-Austrian forces moved toward Vienna, members of a ministerial conference debated potential policy options that would guarantee the Habsburg monarchy's security while simultaneously limiting the amount of territorial concessions. The majority of members at the conference voted in favor of conceding parts of Silesia to Frederick II, while those in the minority opted for some sort

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Dorn even goes so far as to argue that the "Hapsburg monarchy of 1740 was an unfinished, ramshackle structure, which could not be called a state in the modern sense" (1940, 132). The lack of a male heir to succeed Charles VI only compounded the existing problems which Austria faced.

of diplomatic arrangement with France. However, both options failed to materialize into any meaningful policy (Anderson 1995, 84). Moreover, Maria Theresa was the ultimate decision-maker of Austrian policy and refused Frederick's offer of financial compensation for Silesia. Although maintaining a level of dignity and pride appears to have been her primary motivation, she also feared that accepting any compensation would only serve to embolden her enemies.<sup>13</sup>

### *England*

The initial onset of dyadic war triggered by Prussia's invasion of Silesia was of little concern to England. Anderson observes that in "the early stages of the war saw little British comment, either in Parliament or in the press, on the morality of Frederick's action in invading Silesia" (1995, 107).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, powerful domestic groups were adamantly against any involvement in a European conflict. As a result, Britain was "initially unwilling to commit resources to central Europe in the face of domestic indifference and hostility" (Showalter 1996, 55). This outcome is consistent with the preemptive paradox hypothesis that in the absence of any immediate territorial threat a state will choose a strategy of nonintervention.

As the war progressed, however, England's strategy shifted to balancing against a rival great power as various elites sought to advance competing state interests. The initial policy of nonintervention associated with Robert Walpole was eventually replaced as other domestic factions elevated territorial concerns that corresponded with a change

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<sup>13</sup> Maria Theresa also assumed that other European powers would not tolerate such blatant territorial aggrandizement and would soon intervene.

<sup>14</sup> Franz Szabo also argues that "British policies at the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession initially remained ambivalent" (2008, 7).

in strategy. The principle concern of most British policymakers was countering its main rival France. "From London's perspective France was Europe's real enemy" (Showalter 1996, 87).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, French expansionism was of greater importance than Prussian expansionism and therefore "Austria must be supported, but only as an essential safeguard against the growth of French power" (Anderson 1995, 79). To be clear, British statesmen had little interest in helping the Habsburg monarchy reclaim its territory lost to the Prussians and regarded its alignment with Austria only as a means of advancing its own interests. According to Showalter, "During the War of the Austrian Succession it had become plain that neither public nor political opinion in Britain regarded the Austrian connection as valuable except insofar as it was directed against France" (1996, 118).<sup>16</sup> The French threat to Britain's territorial sovereignty was challenged in 1744 as France made preparations to cross the channel and invade England. Historians have also identified other potential territorial disputes that help explain Britain's strategy of contestation. For example, Szabo (2008, 12) discovers that during the War of the Austrian Succession Britain had two vital territorial interests on the continent: Austrian Netherlands and Hanover. The former was a crucial linkage that facilitated British commerce with the continent and the latter was Britain's strategic foothold on the continent.<sup>17</sup> In sum, France's successful military campaigns in the Austrian Netherlands, their potential invasion of Britain's homeland, and support for the

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<sup>15</sup> Showalter adds that "French policies and behaviour seemed far more threatening to British interests than Frederick's ambitions in central Europe" (Showalter 1996, 61).

<sup>16</sup> According to Anderson, "By the 1730s the assumption that Austria and Britain were natural allies against French ambitions was deeply rooted in the minds of British statesmen" (1995, 11). He also adds that "there was complete agreement among politicians on the need to maintain a powerful Austria as an essential counterbalance to France" (1995, 107-108).

<sup>17</sup> King George also served as the elector of Hanover and thus its protector.

Jacobite rebellions all served to highlight the French threat to Britain's national security and territorial integrity.

Faced with an increasing threat from France, the policymakers who replaced Walpole were quick to implement a more pro-active foreign policy. For example, the Secretary of State John Carteret wanted to supply Austria with troops and finances as a means of checking French power. In 1742 the new interventionist government in England agreed to deploy 16,000 troops to support a coalition force that became known as the Pragmatic Army.<sup>18</sup> In fact, George II would personally command his troops at the Battle of Dettingen in 1743 which would be the last time a British monarch directly participated in combat operations. Despite a major success in the Battle of Dettingen the Pragmatic Army achieved little due to internal disputes regarding military operations amongst allied commanders.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Showalter contends that it "continued to constitute a significant independent threat to France's eastern frontier" (1996, 63).

British fleets primarily utilized to defend its territory from French attack were also sent to disrupt French trade and engaged in a few skirmishes in the Mediterranean (McKay and Scott 1983, 171). Although the number of Anglo-French naval battles increased toward the end of the war it was still regarded by both combatants as being of only marginal importance relative to the land battles in the European theater (Scott 2006, 66). The naval war during the Austrian Succession, however, signaled a shift in state interests such that by the time the Seven Years War erupted the great powers –

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<sup>18</sup> There appears to be some discrepancy among historians as to the composition of the Pragmatic Army. The general consensus seems to be that the Pragmatic Army was an amalgamation of British, Austrian, and Hanoverian troops. McKay & Scott, however, seem to suggest that Britain merely funded the Pragmatic Army which consisted of only German mercenaries and thus no Englishmen were actually deployed (1983, 167, 169). Dorn (1940, 152) offers a similar account, finding that the Pragmatic Army consisted of 16,000 Hanoverians and 6,000 Hessians.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson therefore argues that the battle had no significant impact on the overall war (1995, 117).

specifically France and England – would engage in an all-out campaign for control of their imperial possessions.

The fall of Walpole also cleared the way for financial subsidies to be delivered to Austria. In particular, £500,000 were allocated to Maria Theresa in January of 1742 which allowed her to continue her anti-Prussia campaign (Asprey 1986, 241). Indeed, the bulk of British involvement consisted of financial support to its Austrian ally who desperately needed the funds to keep its army operational. McKay & Scott argue that “desperation for subsidies had reduced the Empress to a dependent of Britain” (1983, 175). By 1746 Great Britain had so heavily subsidized the Austrian war effort that the Habsburg monarchy “increasingly felt they were becoming British mercenaries in an Anglo-French war” (McKay and Scott 1983, 172). For their part, some British statesmen grew weary of the subsidy policy and were starting to regard Austria as merely a financial burden. According to McKay & Scott (1983, 172-173), the War of the Austrian Succession “cost Britain £43 million, of which £30 million was added to the National Debt. With the land tax at 4s in the pound, alarmist in the government raised the cry of national bankruptcy.”<sup>20</sup>

British financial subsidies were not limited to its Austrian ally but were also used to protect other territorial interests as well. For example, during the last years of the War of the Austrian Succession, England increased its financial subsidies to assist the Dutch in defending their territory against French incursions and funded the partial mobilization of Russian troops.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the full financial responsibility of mobilizing Russia’s military

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<sup>20</sup> Others began criticizing the subsidy policy as merely defending Hanover and Austria rather than advancing other British interests (Scott 2006, 59).

<sup>21</sup> Russia did in fact mobilize some troops per their agreement with England, but much to the dissatisfaction of the British the deployment of these Russian troops was excruciatingly slow and never engaged in combat operations.



fell upon Great Britain that wished to see Russian troops used to not only help protect Hanover from Prussia, but to also aid the Dutch who were under attack by France (McKay and Scott 1983, 172, 177).

In sum, the shift in British strategy to balancing against a rival great power can be attributed to changes in threat perception of territorial interests. In his survey of 18th century British foreign policy, Jeremy Black finds that “the supposedly pacific and isolationist policy of the late 1730’s has been associated with the ministry of Sir Robert Walpole, while the more aggressive and pugilistic policy of 1742-44 has been associated with Lord Carteret. As a result it is easy to suggest that the change in British policy corresponded with and was the consequence of the change in the ministry” (1986, 315).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Walpole faced strong domestic opposition to his policy of maintaining England’s neutrality once war in Europe broke out. “It was clear to the other ministers and to George II that Austria’s existence was at stake and that her destruction would raise the power of France and her German allies to a level which would threaten Hanover and ultimately Britain herself” (McKay and Scott 1983, 166).

### *Russia*

Despite their alignment with the Habsburg monarchy, Russia largely adhered to a strategy of nonintervention throughout most of the War of the Austrian Succession.<sup>23</sup> First and foremost, Russia simply did not have any vested interest in the Silesian invasion and had little overall territorial interest in the War of the Austrian Succession.

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<sup>22</sup> To be fair, Black does suggest that such conclusions may be an oversimplification and that internal policymaking and agenda setting were somewhat more complex.

<sup>23</sup> Signed in 1726, Russia maintained an enduring alliance with Austria in order to advance their shared interests of preserving their respective spheres of influence in Poland and balancing against the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, they had been allies in the Russo-Turkish War of 1735-1739.

Instead, Russia had prioritized its interests in the eastern Baltic region and was already consumed by war with Sweden that sought to reclaim territory lost in the Great Northern War.<sup>24</sup> A British envoy reported that Russia was “entirely taken up with the Swedes, and have more at heart to secure the assistance of others for themselves, than to furnish any to the house of Austria” (Anderson 1995, 80).<sup>25</sup>

Internal domestic divisions also compelled Russia to opt for a noninterventionist strategy. The death of Tsarina Anna in 1740 resulted in fractional infighting among domestic leaders that precluded the state’s ability to translate preferences into policy (Clark 2006, 190). The uncertainty of Russia’s political leadership attenuated the application of its military and ability to effectively project its power west over long distances (Scott 2000, 172). As a result, throughout most of the War of the Austrian Succession Russia was relegated to the sidelines. McKay & Scott (1983, 176) conclude that domestic turmoil over who would ultimately lead the country contributed to its neutralization and it was not until Elizabeth assumed the helm in 1742 that Russian policy took a more decidedly anti-Prussian bent and began to transition to a strategy of contestation.

When Russia’s conflict in the Baltic concluded it shifted its gaze westward and once again prioritized national interests in central Europe. Russia was apprehensive about Prussia’s rise in power which it viewed as a formidable bulwark to its own

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<sup>24</sup> The Russo-Swedish War (1741-43) was largely instigated by Charles Louis Auguste Fouquet, duc de Belle-Isle, a French general and statesman who Anderson characterizes as being the “most important single influence on French policy in the crucial year 1741” (1995, 25). Belle-Isle actively encouraged an interventionist strategy with the twin goals of supporting the election of Charles Albert to Holy Roman Emperor through military support and fomenting anti-Russian sentiment in Sweden in hopes it would culminate in a war that would hinder Russia’s ability to support its Austrian ally. Indeed, Showalter (1996, 55) finds that Belle-Isle was outspoken in his desire to capitalize on the Prussian invasion of Silesia and “spoke eloquently of the need to seize the moment and mobilize Germany and Europe against an Austria that was uniquely vulnerable.”

<sup>25</sup> Anderson concludes that the “Russo-Swedish war therefore had a very important indirect influence on events in the German world” (1995, 80).

attempts at westward expansionism (McKay and Scott 1983, 176; Scott 2000, 167). As Prussia continued to augment its power, Russia became increasingly concerned that it was now “confronted by a militarily strong, internally stable kingdom” that could potentially join anti-Russian alliances (Showalter 1996, 65). Even the Russian Chancellor, A.P. Bestuzhev, reputedly spoke of the dangers of Prussian expansionism, declaring that “the more the power of the King of Prussia grows the greater the danger for us becomes” (Showalter 1996, 65). Once Elizabeth assumed the throne she was able to translate state preferences into a coherent military strategy that viewed Prussia as a threat to its territorial ambitions, and “was now determined to deprive Prussia of its conquests” (Anderson 1995, 149). By 1745, Russian policymakers had become increasingly irritated with Frederick’s actions and implemented a military strategy of contestation with the mobilization forces in preparation for a potential intervention in what would eventually become known as the Rhine Campaign of 1748 (Anderson 1995, 148-149).<sup>26</sup>

### *France*

France was yet another incumbent that was not threatened by material increases in Prussian power and instead prioritized the immediate threat emanating from its rival great power Austria. The French were traditionally hostile to Habsburg power such that the “full dismemberment of the Habsburg Monarchy” was the primary military objective

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<sup>26</sup> The Treaty of Dresden (1745), however, formally ended the Second Silesian War and would preclude any need for Russian involvement. The treaty was undoubtedly a providential event for Frederick who greatly feared a Russian intervention.

of France in the War of the Austrian Succession (Szabo 2008, 6).<sup>27</sup> Indeed, since the mid-seventeenth century French policymakers remained steadfast in their desire to see the Habsburg monarchy fall and precipitate the ascendancy of France in Europe.<sup>28</sup> With the outbreak of dyadic war triggered by Frederick's invasion of Silesia the French nobility were eager for an opportunity to drive the final nail into Austria's coffin. Charles Louis Belle-Isle, an advisor to the French king, was at the forefront of those policymakers and nobles clamoring for war. "France, he said, must now see that a friend was chosen emperor, and that the dangerous power of Austria was forever destroyed; this was the golden opportunity, success was certain, and the ruin of the House of Hapsburg inevitable" (Perkins 1897a, 185).

Revisionist aspirations achieved through territorial expansion became the primary objective of French policymakers. Indeed, Frederick reputedly commented that Belle-Isle acted as though Austria's territories "were up for auction" (Asprey 1986, 214). Scott (2006, 54) even finds that policymakers who opposed expansionist aims were eventually replaced. André-Hercule de Fleury, chief minister of Louis XV, "had to accept French policy returning to the seventeenth-century tradition of territorial expansion at Habsburg expense. In fact no better opportunity to destroy Austria completely had ever presented itself." At the tactical level, French foreign policy centered upon bolstering the efforts of German states – particularly Bavaria and Saxony – to seize Habsburg territory. By supporting these smaller German states France would also be able to

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<sup>27</sup> But Szabo notes that over the course of the war French objectives shifted from weakening Austria to targeting Britain. France also wished to reduce Britain's presence on the continent, with some historians even suggesting that "the real enemy of France was not Austria but England" (Dorn 1940, 160).

<sup>28</sup> Perkins argues, however, that such preferences had become outdated by the eighteenth century. Austria no longer constituted the threat it did in the seventeenth century and France had "nothing to gain by further weakening the House of Austria, and still less was it worth while to go to war in order to transfer the shadowy authority of the empire to some other family" (1897a, 179).

increase its level of influence in the region.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, France believed the division of Austrian territories in Italy would further weaken its great power rival and “saw it as an obvious field for attacking Austria” (Cowie 1963, 208).

In addition to their intensely held preference of countering Austrian power by dismantling its territory, French elites also wished to unseat the Habsburgs from retaining the lineage of Holy Roman Emperor. Partially motivated by personal animosities, Louis XV was humiliated by the prospect of Maria Theresa’s husband, Francis Stephen, assuming the title given his inferior rank and social status among European monarchs. If he were elected to the throne he would suddenly outrank the king of France – an intolerable outcome from the perspective of Louis XV (Perkins 1897a, 303). The French foreign minister, d’Argenson, shared the king’s interest that no member of the Habsburg monarchy should again control the Holy Roman Empire: “We must spend our last crown and lose our last soldier,” wrote d’Argenson, “rather than allow the grand duke to become emperor” (Perkins 1897a, 307).

Ultimately the enduring state preference of France was to weaken the Habsburg monarchy, which policymakers then translated into two interrelated objectives: dismember the territorial integrity of Austria and support the candidacy of the Elector of Bavaria to Holy Roman Emperor. The French policy “had been based upon the Prussian alliance; it was with the help of the Prussian army that they hoped to extend the dominions of the House of Bavaria, and to destroy the predominance of the House of Austria” (Perkins 1897a, 223-224). According to Gibler, “Frederick II was a valuable ally for France’s efforts to undermine Austria” (2009, 87). For his part, Frederick II

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<sup>29</sup> At the same time, however, France feared that a failure to support the smaller German states would somehow result in a domino effect whereby they would each be overrun and succumb to French adversaries.

actively sought French support and expressed his willingness to serve as their proxy against Austria, declaring that “I shall be her most faithful, most zealous and most grateful ally in the world” (Anderson 1995, 63). Another strategic advantage of supporting Prussia was that its presence effectively created an ‘eastern barrier’ to any additional Russian expansion in European affairs. In sum, the anti-Austrian coalition was forged on the basis of each individual member’s territorial ambitions (Dorn 1940, 145).

From the perspective of the preemptive paradox, it was then the combination of revisionist territorial interests and the opportunity to target a rival great power that determined France’s military strategy. Some historians even seem to indicate that France eagerly awaited a Prussian invasion of Silesia: “Once the invasion of Silesia had begun, powerful forces in Paris would certainly press for advantage to be taken of this opportunity to weaken the old enemy” (Anderson 1995, 63).<sup>30</sup> In essence, France waited for the outbreak of dyadic war before entering the conflict and striking its Austrian adversary.<sup>31</sup> Over the course of the war, French involvement expanded to not only include participation in the battles over German territories, but also military operations in the Netherlands, Italy, and even the planning of an invasion of Britain itself.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The War of the Austrian Succession was a propitious opportunity for France to break up the Habsburg empire (McKay and Scott 1983, 165). It also regarded the outbreak of war as an opportunity to strike at its British rival as well.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it wasn’t until January 1741 when Fleury made the initial overtures to establish an alliance with Prussia which was consummated in June. In exchange for signing a formal alliance, Frederick insisted that France take an active military role in combating both Austria and, if need be, Russia (Asprey 1986, 213).

<sup>32</sup> Cowie (1963, 210) contends that the main theater of fighting for France was in the Netherlands. That said, French strategy was not limited to revisionist aspirations and necessitated defense of its own territories. During the War of the Austrian Succession, France’s territory was invaded several times by Austria. In 1744, for example, an Austrian force seized Alsace and was poised to advance on Lorraine and even Paris (Anderson 1995, 132). Although both incursions were brief, it never the less highlights the threat France faced in terms of its territorial security.

## *Spain*

Spain is a clear case in which a great power exploited an opportunity to advance its revisionist aspirations. Upon the death of Charles VI, the Queen of Spain, Elizabeth Farnese, proclaimed that “the time has come when France and Spain must unite more closely than ever for each to profit from so great an event; the Spaniards should enter Italy without delay and the French take possession of the Low Countries” (Anderson 1995, 77).<sup>33</sup> Spain was motivated by its territorial interests and would choose to target its rival great power Austria rather than preempt the rise of Prussia.

Spain was strictly focused on reclaiming territory lost in the War of the Spanish Succession. Spanish policymakers were particularly resentful of the Peace of Utrecht (1713) that resulted in Austria appropriating Spain’s Italian territories. Indeed, on several different occasions during the interregnum between the wars of the Spanish and Austrian succession, Spain undertook several unsuccessful military operations to reclaim its coveted Italian territories.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the primary foreign policy objective of Elizabeth Farnese, wife of Philip V, was to appoint her sons, Don Carlos and Don Philip, as rulers of Italian territories. Since Don Carlos was awarded the leadership of Naples and Sicily (and crowned Charles III) as part of the negotiated settlement of the War of the Polish Succession, the appointment of Don Philip was therefore the “supreme, indeed the only real, objective of the queen’s life” (Anderson 1995, 11). John Lynch (1989, 131) offers a similar assessment of Spanish interests, finding that “the ultimate

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<sup>33</sup> Spain was certainly attracted to France as an alliance partner given their shared ancestral relationship via the Bourbon monarchy, but John Lynch points out that other factors were arguably more influential in bringing the two powers together, in particular the fact that France was a formidable land power in Europe and could help restore the balance against England (1989, 131).

<sup>34</sup> However, Spain would later be able to obtain Naples and Sicily for Don Carlos in the War of the Polish Succession.

objective was to restore a dismembered monarchy and to recover possessions lost at Utrecht, above all those in Italy.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately Spain's desire to recover its Italian territory was a "dynamic factor European statesmen had to take into account" (Szabo 2008, 3).

The initial dyadic war between Prussia and Austria thus expanded to include Spain's participation. According to Showalter, "Philip V of Spain had taken advantage of the Prussian occupation of Silesia to assert an almost equally shadowy set of claims to the Habsburg possessions in Italy" (1996, 62). In November 1741, Spain invaded Tuscany and was reinforced by additional Spanish troops arriving in January 1742. Charles III supported the invading Spanish army by deploying his own Neapolitan troops to assist in the assault.<sup>36</sup> When the Second Silesian War ended with the signing of the Treaty of Dresden in 1745 Italy became the main theater of fighting among the remaining contending powers.<sup>37</sup> Spain's incursion into Italy was therefore an attempt to reverse the threat to its own great power status emanating from its Austrian rival. Indeed, Showalter (1996, 74) finds that at the beginning of the Second Silesian War Austria's military operations "focused not on Silesia's recovery, but on offensives in Italy" and served to redirect the brunt of the Habsburg military away from Prussia.

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<sup>35</sup> Historians have noted, however, that Spain's emphasis on reclaiming Italian territory occurred at the expense of other critical areas of foreign policy that were vital to the longevity of the state (Lynch 1989, 131). The dynastic and personal ambitions of the Spanish elite, in particular those of Elizabeth Farnese, obfuscated other agenda priorities that included the defense of a global empire other than those in Italy. Spain's efforts in Italy were ultimately "a misuse of finite resources" (Lynch 1989, 140).

<sup>36</sup> In August 1742, however, a British naval squadron arrived in Naples's harbor and threatened to bombard the city unless the Neapolitan army stopped supporting the Spanish invasion. The consequence of Naples' capitulation greatly weakened the Spanish force and further aggravated Elizabeth who continued to be frustrated by France's obstinacy to support Spain's efforts on the peninsula.

<sup>37</sup> While France regarded the Italian theater simply as an opportunity to further weaken Austria, Spain considered the conquest of Italy to be a critical step in reclaiming its rightful place of privilege among the great powers. Although many within Louis XV's cabinet disagreed with his policy, a French minister reported that "the King's sole object and interest in the war in Italy is to help obtain the Duchies which the Queen of Spain wants for Don Philip" (Anderson 1995, 139).



## Seven Years War

The War of the Austrian Succession officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748. Despite the staggering loss of blood and treasure, the treaty essentially settled the dispute by allowing Prussia to retain control of Silesia.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the most notable drawback of the treaty was its inability to provide the conditions necessary for an enduring peace as the lingering animosities and territorial disputes which triggered the initial onset of war were left unsettled. “This pacification,” wrote Frederick the Great, “resembled rather a truce, in which all the parties profited by a moment of repose to seek new alliances, in order to be in better condition again to take up arms” (Perkins 1897a, 377). Dramatic alterations to domestic interests and interstate alignments would subsequently lead to a new round of fighting that punctuated Prussia’s rise to great power status.

The interregnum period leading to the Seven Years War witnessed a dramatic reversal of interstate alignments between the great powers which became known as the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756.<sup>39</sup> A series of overlapping and interrelated events all played a role in compelling the states to switch allies. One of the many dynamics that contributed to the Diplomatic Revolution was that the goals of existing alliances were not always in sync. For example, Great Britain and Austria each maintained their own individual foreign policy objectives which did not necessarily complement one another. In particular, the main focus of Austria was to counter Prussian expansionism while

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<sup>38</sup> To be fair there were other conditions such as Prussia’s withdrawal from Saxony (although Frederick refused to provide any compensation for the ruin he left in his wake) and recognition of Maria Theresa’s son, Archduke Joseph, to the position of Holy Roman Emperor. France also ceded territory it conquered during the war (most notably the Netherlands), but ultimately most observers agree that the war constituted a needless loss of life.

<sup>39</sup> See McKay & Scott (1983, 181-192) for a brief overview of the Diplomatic Revolution. For a more thorough analysis of the Diplomatic Revolution see Robert Middleton (1968).

Great Britain was more concerned with balancing against France. According to Anderson (1995, 79), “the two powers were irremediably at cross-purpose: from this they were never to escape.” Walter Dorn seems to agree by observing that there was a “clear divergence of the vital interests” between Austria and Britain (1940, 295).

In addition to divergent goals, some allies began to either view one another with disdain or simply realized that other partners would be more conducive to their long term interests. For example, France not only felt betrayed by the unilateral abandonment of its Prussian ally on three separate occasions during the War of the Austrian Succession, but it also began to feel threatened by Prussia’s growth in power.<sup>40</sup> For his part, Frederick started to see Britain as being better situated for a protracted war on the continent than France. At the same time, the British continued to be frustrated with Austrian policies and began to regard Frederick as a useful partner despite his treacherous behavior with which he treated his allies. They needed a continental ally who would help protect British interests should war break out in North America with France.<sup>41</sup>

Ultimately, France and Prussia are reported to have played a minimal role in the events that led to the Diplomatic Revolution. While French foreign policymaking was in disarray, Prussia was concerned with internal reform. Instead, the change in interstate

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<sup>40</sup> The cohesion of the anti-Austrian coalition was generally fragile with a great deal of mistrust among members. Frederick II would make a number of secret agreements that only reveal the extent of his duplicity. For example, despite assurances to the French that he would not do so, Frederick II approved a secret arrangement with Austria known as the Klein-Schnellendorf agreement which entailed Austria’s surrender of Neisse, while Prussia pledge to cease military operations. Yet even this agreement was violated about a month after it had been signed by Prussia who conspired with others to further carve up Habsburg territory (Anderson 1995, 90). Frederick would sign other unilateral peace agreements without consulting his allies, including the peace treaty at Breslau in June 1742 that marked the official end of the First Silesian War. The Treaty of Dresden (1745) is also seen as example of Prussia reneging on alliance its obligations with France (Anderson 1995, 149). All of which further enhanced Frederick’s reputation for being a duplicitous and unreliable ally.

<sup>41</sup> There is some indication that Prussia and Britain both considered a possible alliance with one another for quite some time before the actual signing of the Treaty of Westminster in 1756. Anderson (1995, 155) suggests that considerations were made by both parties even during the War of the Austrian Succession.

alignments was primarily the work of Austria, Russia, and England (McKay and Scott 1983, 182). As the colonial competition with France escalated, Britain was desperate to establish a continental alliance that would help protect the Netherlands and Hanover. Meanwhile, during the interwar period Russia's antagonism toward Prussia had grown stronger and it also resented France for excluding it from peace talks at Aix-la-Chapelle. Russian statesmen also harbored a personal disdain for Frederick and viewed Prussia as a formidable hurdle to further westward expansionism (McKay and Scott 1983, 186-187). Given such circumstances, conditions were ripe for a newfound partnership between Britain and Russia.<sup>42</sup>

In 1755 Britain and Russia reached an agreement. Russia would mobilize its troops along its western borders to help protect Hanover from a French invasion (or possibly even Prussia acting on behalf of France) in exchange for financial subsidies.<sup>43</sup> Frederick believed, however, that the Anglo-Russian convention would leave Prussia vulnerable to attack from Russia and Austria while Britain and France were at war with one another in the Americas.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Frederick had been receiving an increasing number of intelligence reports that both Austria and Russia were bolstering their military capabilities (Asprey 1986, 413). Fearing an invasion, Frederick became increasingly receptive to exploring potential relations with Britain. Some historians seem to suggest that Frederick considered close relations with England as an opportunity to implement a

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<sup>42</sup> The reversal of alliances was facilitated in part by Russia's increasing involvement in European affairs and the rise of Prussia as a candidate great power. The emergence of these two actors offered existing incumbent powers with new opportunities to form alliances.

<sup>43</sup> Scott (2006, 88-89) provides greater detail on the actual amounts of the subsidy and terms of the agreement. He also points out that while Britain viewed the agreement as merely a defensive arrangement, the Russians interpreted it to be used for offensive purposes. Dorn (1940, 295) offers a similar observation, finding that England believed its alliance with Russia would actually *prevent* a continental war from breaking out.

<sup>44</sup> "Even if Austria and Russia did not attack him," McKay & Scott argue, "there was the danger France would drag him into her war with Britain and then into a wider conflict with Britain's Austro-Russian friends" (1983, 188).

'wedge strategy' that would divide the anti-Prussian alliance. Frederick even acknowledged that "this is how the Romans divided their enemies, and in fighting them one by one, conquered all of them" (Asprey 1986, 415).

In response, the British Prime Minister, Thomas Pelham-Holles the Duke of Newcastle, offered Frederick a means of alleviating his fear of diplomatic isolation by signing the Treaty of Westminster in January of 1756 that constituted a defensive pact where neither side would attack one another and stipulated that no foreign troops would enter Germany.<sup>45</sup> In signing the treaty, however, Frederick was erroneous in not only believing that Britain's influence in Russia would wean it from Austria and effectively neutralize both parties, but also that France would not harbor any objections to the treaty.<sup>46</sup> In reality, both Austria and Russia remained determined to thwart Prussia's rise to great power status, and French statesmen took offense that its Prussian ally had once again abandoned them. The Austrian chancellor, Count Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, even declared that the Anglo-Prussian convention "was the decisive event in the salvation of Austria" (McKay and Scott 1983, 189). Meanwhile, British expectations were also misguided by assuming that the partnerships with Russia and Prussia would be perceived by all states as being defensive in nature and would therefore not inflame tensions – a classic instance of the security dilemma in action. In fact, the Russians

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<sup>45</sup> Scott (2006, 90-91) seems to suggest that the actual provisions of the agreement fell short of what is required to constitute a formal alliance. This is perhaps why most scholars and quantitative databases omit the Treaty of Westminster and don't code it as an alliance, for example, Gibler (2009) does not include it in his own extensive study.

<sup>46</sup> British statesmen also seem to have incorrectly believed that they retained a significant amount of influence over the Russians. Indeed, Lord Holderness assured Frederick that "the Petersburg court would always remain attached to English interests, and of that there was not the least doubt" (Asprey 1986, 416). In general, Britain assumed that it could simultaneously bankroll both Russia and Prussia and therefore influence their behavior (Showalter 1996, 125-126).

were offended that England would ally with its Prussian enemy and therefore considered all previous agreements with Great Britain effectively nullified.<sup>47</sup>

With Prussia now aligned with Britain, France suddenly found itself isolated and became receptive to Austrian overtures to establish an alliance.<sup>48</sup> Thus, in May of 1756 Austria and France agreed to a defensive pact in the First Treaty of Versailles.<sup>49</sup> Each signatory pledged to deploy troops in the event that the other party was attacked. Their relationship, however, was fundamentally flawed as France viewed the alliance as a means of maintaining peace on the continent so that it could more effectively wage war in the colonies, while Austria regarded the alliance as an opportunity to bolster the anti-Prussian coalition in preparation for war. As a result, Dorn (1940, 308) points out that the treaty effectively placed France at the mercy of Austrian foreign policy. If Austria could somehow provoke Prussia to attack – as policymakers at the time seemed to be conspiring to do – then France would suddenly find itself drawn into a continental war.

The twin treaties of Westminster and Versailles constitute what has become known as the Diplomatic Revolution which shattered the previous alliance system that had existed for centuries. Austria, England, and Russia versus Prussia, France, and Spain now became Austria, Russia, France, and Spain versus Prussia and England. But what is perhaps most ironic about the diplomatic reversal is the belief among all parties that the treaties would usher in a period of peace on the European continent and that no one would dare take offensive actions that would invoke a counter-response.

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<sup>47</sup> For their part, the Russians were also astonished by what seemed to be glaring contradictions in British foreign policy. On the one hand, the Russians interpreted their subsidy treaty with Britain as supporting the deployment of troops for an eventual attack on Prussia. On the other hand, Russia regarded Britain's new treaty with Prussia as prohibiting the use of any Russian troops in Germany.

<sup>48</sup> Over the course of the preceding years, Kaunitz had quietly signaled to France a desire to forge relations but nothing would materialize until the Treaty of Westminster suddenly left France isolated.

<sup>49</sup> The treaty intentionally omitted the then looming Anglo-French War.

“Frederick would surely not dare attack Austria and risk war with France,” argue McKay and Scott (1983, 190).

The Diplomatic Revolution may have introduced dramatic alterations to the strategic calculations of states but their foreign policies remained largely the same as those implemented during the War of the Austrian Succession. Indeed, as explained in the previous chapter alliances are an unreliable predictor of great power behavior and the occurrence of conflict. Historians also stress that it would be erroneous to conclude that the Diplomatic Revolution was the single causal mechanism of the Seven Years War: “The Austro-French alliance may have made the continental war more likely and it certainly provided the basis for the anti-Prussian coalition after 1756. It did not, however, make the Seven Years War inevitable” (Scott 2006, 93). We must still examine whether states faced a territorial threat in the short-term or had an opportunity to exploit the ongoing war in order to advance their territorial interests.

## **Invasion of Saxony**

The lead up to the Seven Years War was a confused period of time with sometimes contradictory intelligence reports being received by all sides. It was unclear which states were mobilizing their forces, the level of commitment among allies, and whether states would even attack. In fact, Frederick asked Maria Theresa for official clarification as to “whether we are at war or at peace” (Asprey 1986, 423). What is clear, however, is that both Austria and Russia were eager to contest the rise of Prussia and the threat it posed to their respective interests. Empress Elizabeth of Russia was anxious to launch an offensive campaign and even prepared to deploy eighty thousand

troops in support of the effort (Dorn 1940, 310). Austria, however, urged restraint since the anti-Prussian alliance lacked the necessary military strength for a successful attack and still required French support for offensive operations.

Frederick recognized the danger he now faced as he was surrounded by three dangerous adversaries: Austria, France, and Russia. Anticipating an imminent attack, he decided to seize the initiative and launched a preemptive invasion of Saxony in August 1756, thereby setting into motion the Seven Years War.<sup>50</sup> Frederick regarded Saxony as a potential bridgehead for Austrian and Russian troops from which they would be able to strike Berlin. Saxony was also targeted to not only remove the threat it posed to Prussia's security, but to use the captured resources and territory to facilitate its eventual march toward Vienna and knock down its Habsburg enemy once and for all. Moreover, Frederick believed the timing was in his favor since the anti-Prussian alliance would not be able to respond until after the winter thaw which would also serve to dissuade France since Frederick hoped his success would by then be regarded as a *fait accompli*. In a matter of a few short months Frederick successfully occupied Saxony.

### *Austria*

Once again explaining the initial onset of war is a rather straightforward endeavor since Austria had a stark clash of territorial interests with Prussia that threatened its security. Following the War of the Austrian Succession it became clear to Austria's

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<sup>50</sup> Scott (2000, 168) describes Frederick's invasion as being a case of both brazen aggression and miscalculation to the extent that the Austro-French defensive alliance would not be triggered unless Prussia attacked. Additionally, a long-standing unresolved debate among historians is whether Frederick's invasion of Saxony can be characterized as an offensive operation to seize new lands or a defensive war of preemption (Dorn 1940, 292). Other historians point out that Frederick was never able to marshal concrete evidence that Saxony was complicit in an offensive alliance against Prussia (Szabo 2008, 37-38).

policymakers that Prussia had become their greatest existential threat – not France. The Habsburg monarchy was never content with the outcome of the war and made immediate preparations to once again confront its Prussian adversary. “The recovery of Silesia was seen as the principal Austrian objective, and important administrative and military reforms were already under way, in preparation for a future war” (Scott 2000, 167). Austrian policymakers, especially the Austrian chancellor Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, believed the recovery of Silesia was critical to ensuring Austria’s position as a great power (Cowie 1963, 217).

Even before Prussia’s invasion of Saxony, Austria had already established a war cabinet responsible for preparing its military for potential hostilities. Under the direction of Kaunitz, the goal was to mobilize 90,000 troops by the end of the year (Szabo 1994). Although the Austrian military was not fully mobilized by the time Prussia invaded Saxony, a force of 30,000 troops under the command of Maximilian Ulysses Browne successfully halted the opening advances of Frederick’s army in the Battle of Lobositz.<sup>51</sup>

Frederick’s invasion not only constituted an existential threat as the Prussian army attempted to march on Vienna, but it also provided Austria with a pretext to use military force in order to reclaim its Silesian territory. Thus, as predicted by the preemptive paradox model, a territorial dispute with the candidate great power that threatened an incumbent’s national security led to a strategy of contestation.

### *France*

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<sup>51</sup> See Christopher Duffy (1964) for a more thorough biography of Browne. Interestingly, contemporaries and historians have trouble deciding who was the ultimate victor of the battle.



Prussia's invasion of Saxony and subsequent war with Austria triggered France's entrance into the conflict. Indeed, Frederick's preemptive invasion only served to precipitate French involvement. According to McKay & Scott (1983, 191),

"His action was to push Louis XV solidly behind Maria Theresa, particularly as the French King's son was married to a Saxon princess. France would probably not have made this decisive break with her past but for Frederick's invasion of Saxony. Together with the other continental states the French court was outraged by this latest piece of Prussian aggression."

What was initially a defensive pact between Austria and France now quickly became an offensive alliance with the Second Treaty of Versailles in May 1757 that stipulated France would assist Austria in recapturing its Silesian province in exchange for transferring control of the Netherlands.<sup>52</sup> To be sure, French interest in obtaining the Netherlands remained an important goal for France throughout the war.

The principle strategy of France, however, was not to help Austria preempt the rise of Prussia. Indeed, during the entire war France would engage in only one direct battle against Frederick's forces at Rossbach in 1757 (Marston 2001, 41). Instead, their primary objective was to continue balancing against its main great power rival Great Britain – especially since they were already engaged in an armed conflict against one another in North America. But rather than confront Britain in North America, French policymakers believed a more prudent strategy was to strike at Britain's territorial interests in Europe. In particular, it was believed that the conquest of Hanover would provide France with a significant bargaining leverage that would negate any colonial losses it may have endured elsewhere (Dorn 1940, 318). While the French were

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<sup>52</sup> In accordance with the treaty, France would help subsidize the deployment of allied forces as well as send over one hundred thousand of its own troops (Cowie 1963, 221; Dorn 1940, 312). Thus, "the invasion enlarged the coalition against Prussia by ensuring France would participate" (McKay and Scott 1983, 192).

committed to curbing further westward expansion of British colonists by building a series of fortifications (most notably Fort Duquesne), France placed a greater priority on its European interests than it did on its colonial possessions in North America. According to Dorn, “France, while not completely indifferent, was not sufficiently convinced of the importance of Canada to put forth a commensurate effort to save it” (1940, 358). France ultimately regarded Europe rather than North America as the primary theater of combat in order to defeat Britain and many policymakers believed that France “ought to conquer America in Germany” (Szabo 2008, 74).<sup>53</sup> Thus, while Britain saw victory in Europe as being secured in North America, France pursued the antithetical strategy of winning the war not in the colonies but in Europe.

France ultimately entered the Seven Years War as a means of targeting its great power rival which corresponds to the bottom-left quadrant of the preemptive paradox typology. It believed that threats to its territorial interests in North America could be counterbalanced by taking advantage of the ongoing European war and seizing Hanover as a bargaining chip. France also used the war as an opportunity to secure additional territory by transferring its troops to occupy the Netherlands.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, just as it had attempted to do so in the War of the Austrian Succession, France would try to

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<sup>53</sup> Historians demonstrate that key decision-makers sometimes had different opinions as to whether North America or Europe should be prioritized and for many of these individuals both theaters were valued equally (Szabo 2008, 74-75). Other historians are critical of France’s decision to prioritize Europe. Anderson is particularly outspoken and seems to imply that France miscalculated and squandered an opportunity to concentrate on the more vital issue of protecting its colonial possessions against Britain and instead succumbed to the “largely meaningless tradition of hostility to Austria” (1968, 28). He makes a similar argument with respect to the Seven Years War, contending that France “committed herself to expensive intervention in a war in which her real interests were hardly involved and from which she could hope to gain little” (1968, 35). In other words, French policymakers miscalculated state interests by elevating continental matters over those in North America. Meanwhile, Dorn observes that “it was patent enough that France had no compelling interest in disturbing the new balance in Germany resulting from the rise of Prussia,” and therefore had no reason to intervene in the conflict between Austria and Prussia (1940, 325). On the other hand, the French belief that operational success could only be achieved in Europe may not have been entirely unreasonable since the British navy in the colonial war was far superior to France.

<sup>54</sup> In exchange, the French also provided its Austrian ally with financial subsidies to support their war effort against Prussia (Showalter 1996, 235).

undertake yet another invasion of Great Britain during the Seven Years War. In 1759 the French foreign minister, Étienne François the Duke of Choiseul, spearheaded the invasion plan which called for the speedy delivery of a large mass of French troops across the channel, however, were routed in the Battle of Lagos and later the Battle of Quiberon Bay which ultimately compelled Choiseul to abandon the invasion plans.

### *Russia*

Russia viewed Prussia as a threat to its national security given its consanguineous relations with Sweden which the Russians feared could some day evolve into an offensive alliance. Moreover, Prussia stood in the way of future Russian efforts to expand its western borders.<sup>55</sup> By March of 1756, Russia had fully mobilized its armed forces in preparation for an all-out offensive against Prussia, however, Austria urged restraint and convinced Russia to delay any attack until the following year since the two powers lacked the financial means of conducting a sustained operation and the belief that French commitment to the attack was necessary for success.<sup>56</sup>

Once Frederick invaded Saxony the anti-Prussian coalition was set into motion and Russia was now free to act upon its territorial interests. In the lead up to the Seven Years War, Russia was motivated by expansionist aspirations to become a European power or even a hegemonic power in eastern Europe. In this respect, Prussia was regarded as an obstacle to reaching this goal and Russia's subsequent foreign policy in 1757 was more opportunistic and less a response to any immediate threat that Prussia

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<sup>55</sup> Given the sparse landscape that separated Russia from Western Europe, Prussia was viewed as a potential base from which Russia would be able to conduct operations and more immediately influence European politics.

<sup>56</sup> At this time, France had only signed a defensive treaty with Austria via the Treaty of Versailles which did not include any provisions for offensive operations. It is debatable, however, whether an Austro-Russian invasion would have still transpired without French help.

posed to Russia's territorial security.<sup>57</sup> It maintained an intensely held preference to conquer and partition the Prussian state (Clark 2006, 197; McKay and Scott 1983, 186-187). Not only did Russia have aspirations to retain control of East Prussia, but as the Seven Years War progressed it increasingly desired long-term possession of Poland (Showalter 1996, 284-285).

The Seven Years War subsequently expanded to include Russia that pursued a strategy of contestation. After a long and sluggish mobilization process, Russia finally deployed its initial onslaught of 55,000 troops under the command of Stepan Fedorovich Apraksin in August 1757.<sup>58</sup> They marched toward East Prussia and scored an early yet costly victory in the Battle of Gross-Jägersdorf. The Russian army secured several more impressive victories including the devastating defeat of Frederick's forces at the Battle of Kunersdorf in 1759. Russia's military success in the Seven Years War was demonstrated not only by its occupation of East Prussia but also by its brief seizure of Berlin during the war.

As predicted by the preemptive paradox model, however, a change in national interests will correspond to a change in military strategy. This was particularly evident in the case of Russia during the Seven Years War. With the sudden death of Elizabeth in 1762 her successor Peter III immediately moved to align with Prussia and renounced any territorial claims within Prussia. Peter never considered Prussia as a threat and

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<sup>57</sup> In other words, Russia's foreign policy more closely corresponded to that of a revisionist state rather than a status quo power balancing against an adversary's accumulation of power.

<sup>58</sup> Russia faced enormous logistical and administrative obstacles in mobilizing its massive military force. Corruption, administrative infighting, supply shortages, and illness all affected the pace at which Russia was able to harness its military power. "Despite initial problems of mobilization and concentration, by the end of May 1757 almost 100,000 men were marching towards East Prussia" (Showalter 1996, 178).

instead regarded Denmark as the primary focus of Russia's foreign policy.<sup>59</sup> During Peter's brief tenure, Russia and Prussia quickly formed a warmhearted relationship. Czar Peter immediately relinquished all territorial conquests Russia had acquired during the war and both states released captured prisoners of war. Peter's amiable disposition toward Frederick was conspicuous, even referring to Frederick as "the king, my master" (Asprey 1986, 552). The changes in Russia's perception of territorial threats and opportunistic aspirations resulted in a reversal of strategy from contestation to nonintervention as Peter ordered a cessation of all Russian military operations and recalled his troops home.<sup>60</sup>

Peter's pro-Prussian foreign policies, however, angered domestic elites who later overthrew the leader in an internal coup orchestrated by his wife who then succeeded him as Catherine II.<sup>61</sup> Despite renouncing the alliance with Prussia, Catherine chose to maintain a noninterventionist strategy in favor of pursuing domestic reforms. "It became increasingly evident," observes Szabo, "that Catherine had a whole new set of foreign policy priorities and that her alliance calculations were based on what would serve these objectives best" (2008, 398). She would continue to honor the peace treaty so long as Prussia did not violate any of its terms and would adhere to a strategy of nonintervention for the duration of the war.<sup>62</sup> In other words, so long as it did not threaten Russia's territorial interests Catherine would abstain from preempting Prussia.

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<sup>59</sup> In terms of the provisions of their alliance, Russia and Prussia pledged to protect each other's territory in case of attack (Szabo 2008, 384).

<sup>60</sup> Peter did provide Frederick with a small auxiliary force of 20,000 troops under the leadership of Zakhar Chernyshyov but never participated in actual combat and essentially served as an observation force in the Battle of Burkensdorf in 1762.

<sup>61</sup> Peter also ridiculed powerful domestic institutions such as the Orthodox church, and infuriated military leaders with controversial reforms of the army and his proposal to wage a new war against Denmark.

<sup>62</sup> Scott (2006, 106-107) concludes that "only the Empress Elizabeth's death at the very beginning of 1762 may have saved Prussia from defeat and the threat of destruction."

## *Spain*

The death of Philip V in 1746 and the ascension of Ferdinand VI to the throne corresponded with a change in state interests and subsequently Spain's strategy. Ferdinand had little interest in foreign affairs or advancing territorial claims, and his ministers were more concerned with domestic reforms. In the lead up to the Seven Years War, it became clear that "Spain was preoccupied with an extensive domestic reform programme, and had no intention whatever of being drawn into another costly war with England" (Showalter 1996, 127). Other historians have also confirmed that Ferdinand VI pursued a policy that emphasized domestic interests over expansionist objectives (Kuethe and Andrien 2014, 160).

The new queen was also indifferent to territorial claims in Italy which had dominated the previous regime during the War of the Austrian Succession. Indeed, the death of Philip V meant that "Elizabeth Farnese no longer controlled Spanish foreign policy, which ceased to aim at gaining Italian territories" (Cowie 1963, 176). According to Cowie (1963, 210), "she was a Portuguese princess, favourable to Britain and little interested in Italy." As a result, Lynch (1989, 157) suggests that Spanish foreign policy under Ferdinand VI became more balanced and reflected an appreciation that its primary interests were not necessarily in continental Europe.

King Ferdinand VI therefore insisted on a neutral policy of nonintervention during the Seven Years War.<sup>63</sup> Despite being associated with the anti-Prussian coalition it did

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<sup>63</sup> Some domestic policymakers, however, did object to Spain's strategy of nonintervention. The new minister of war, Sebastián de Eslava, was a strong supporter of France in their colonial war with England and urged Spain to intervene in the conflict. But England's influential ambassador to Spain, Sir Benjamin Keene, was able to moderate such bellicose demands and convince the Spanish monarchy to adhere to a policy of neutrality during the Seven Years War (Lynch 1989, 190-193). The last few years of Ferdinand's reign were also largely dysfunctional and

not have any territorial interests at stake.<sup>64</sup> “Until the closing stages of the Seven Years War,” observes Scott, “Madrid remained neutral” (2006, 111). Although Spain harbored several points of disagreement with the other powers over matters of ship seizures, access to North American fisheries, and continued indignation of losing Gibraltar, such issues did not constitute an immediate territorial threat. Moreover, British diplomats undertook extreme efforts to placate Spanish grievances in exchange for its neutrality.

But once again a change in leadership led to a revision of national interests that altered the outcome of a great power’s strategy. When Ferdinand died in 1759 his successor, Charles III, assumed a far more proactive foreign policy.<sup>65</sup> Charles was alarmed by mounting British victories which altered the colonial balance of power and, to a lesser extent, motivated by personal indignation of having been overpowered by Britain when he was in Italy during the War of the Austrian Succession. Charles III was also interested in fulfilling the long-standing objective of Queen Elizabeth to secure territory for his younger brother Don Philip. The revived national interest in preserving Spain’s colonial territories therefore resulted in a change from nonintervention to balancing. Spanish participation in the later stages of the Seven Years War, however, was largely limited to an unsuccessful invasion of British-backed Portugal in 1762. Nevertheless, Spain’s commitment to targeting rival great powers instead of preempting the rise of a candidate great power corresponds to the bottom-left quadrant of the preemptive paradox typology.

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marked by an absence of any coherent policymaking. In 1758 the king went into a severe bout of depression following the death of his queen, Maria Bárbara of Portugal, during which time Spain’s government lagged without any semblance of leadership. When the king died a year later and Charles III assumed the throne Spain’s foreign policymaking was reinvigorated with a renewed sense of direction and leadership.

<sup>64</sup> This result serves to reinforce the contention that alliances are not a significant predictor of state behavior.

<sup>65</sup> This corresponded to the Third Family Compact with France which was an offensive alliance that targeted Britain.

It should be noted that by the end of the Seven Years War Spain ceased to be considered a great power. Ironically, the rise of Prussia coincided with the decline of Spain from the ranks of great powers. McKay & Scott (1983, 177) even argue that by the end of the War of the Austrian Succession Spain had ceased to be a great power and its foreign policy retrenched. Levy offers a similar assessment by pointing out that Spain's power began to decline by the end of the 17th century and "played a minimal role in the Seven Years' War" (1983, 34).

### *England*

After the War of the Austrian Succession, Britain continued to balance against France due to the territorial threat it posed to the Netherlands and Hanover.<sup>66</sup> Its newfound alignment with Prussia was seen by policymakers as a means of weakening France's position on the European continent and simultaneously "served the vital purpose of protecting Hanover" (Scott 2006, 112). According to Scott (2000, 174), "Britain saw Frederick as her continental ally against France, not against Austria or Russia (who were not formally London's enemies during the Seven Years' War)." London's only desire was to protect its Hanoverian possession and force France to redirect some of its military forces to the European continent.<sup>67</sup> England also sought to

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<sup>66</sup> A subtle shift in state interests occurred during the interwar period where protection of Hanover became less of a concern than potential French territorial gains in Europe and North America. The shift can also be partially attributed to the nature of the colonies themselves. Given the sparseness of initial settlements there was little interaction or opportunities for friction, however, by the mid-eighteenth century the growth in colonial settlements increased the likelihood that an imperial struggle would ensue (Scott 2006, 76-77).

<sup>67</sup> McKay & Scott (1983, 196) describe Britain's alignment as being opportunistic.



safeguard its colonial holdings in the Caribbean, North America, as well as India (McKay and Scott 1983, 178).<sup>68</sup>

The protection of England's territorial interests therefore had a strong effect in determining its military strategy. Through an agreement reached in April 1758, Britain would provide Prussia an annual subsidy of £670,000 and finance an 'Army of Observation' that would be stationed in western Germany to protect its flank (McKay and Scott 1983, 196).<sup>69</sup> Britain's strategy during the war was intended to have France become embroiled in the continental conflict which would then diminish the amount of resources it had available to conduct operations in the colonies. It also ensured that Hanover would not be conquered by France which it could then hold as hostage and use as leverage in any future negotiations. In 1757 the British even attempted an amphibious assault on France at the southwestern port of Rochefort.<sup>70</sup>

Over the course of the war, however, unit-level changes to national interests reduced the degree of importance British policymakers placed on Europe relative to the North American theater. Following the death of George II in 1760, his grandson George III was much less sympathetic to the Prussian cause and sought to reduce Britain's

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<sup>68</sup> In particular, the British feared that France would soon achieve military supremacy in North America that would block future westward migration. In 1756 domestic groups pressed for a more bellicose foreign policy against France that soon escalated to open warfare in the colonies. Before the official declaration of war, the colonists and merchants had already fought one another in a series of low-scale battles.

<sup>69</sup> See also Showalter (1996, 207-208). Scott (2000, 173) finds that while the army consisted primarily of German mercenaries it did include some British troops. Much of this foreign policy was driven by the British statesman William Pitt and designed explicitly to support Prussia's war efforts. In 1754 the death of Henry Pelham would signal an end to England's pacific foreign policies as new statesmen such as Pitt and the Secretary of War, Henry Fox, now spearheaded a more bellicose agenda. By the following year, Fox would deploy 10,000 regular troops to North America which was intended to signal Britain's resolve to use military force in order to protect its colonial interests (Scott 2006, 80). These individuals were critical in shaping domestic preferences and, in turn, England's strategy.

<sup>70</sup> Although some initial success was achieved in capturing a small island off the coast of France, British commanders dithered in finalizing their invasion plans which allowed French defenders to shore up their fortifications and prevent any opportunity for invasion. The British fleet was forced to return home, costing £1 million and "brought nothing but humiliation" (Szabo 2008, 81).

commitment to its ally.<sup>71</sup> Whereas George II was associated to Hanover by birth, George III lacked any immediate ties and was not as devoted to his Hanoverian heritage (Asprey 1986, 545). The new king even went so far as to refer to Hanover as “that horrid electorate” (Dorn 1940, 372). By 1762, Pitt’s successor, John Stuart, the Earl of Bute, informed Frederick that Prussia would no longer receive financial subsidies to continue its military operations unless Prussia sought to end the war and negotiate a peace settlement. A renewed war with Spain and the diminished importance of Germany to British interests further served to decrease its level of commitment to its expendable ally. Ultimately North America was a greater priority to England than continental interests, and this policy was intensified once George III assumed the throne (Dorn 1940, 372).<sup>72</sup> Throughout the war, England remained committed to targeting its rival great power and never considered preempting the rise of Prussia.

## Summary of Strategies

We can now summarize the strategy each great power selected in response to the rise of Prussia during the mid-seventeenth century. Its ascendancy toward great power status is generally marked by the ascension of Frederick the Great to the throne

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<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, in 1760 Pitt was able to ensure another tranche of British subsidies to its Prussian ally. It was clear to all combatants that Britain’s commitment to the continental war depended on Pitt remaining in office, and most expected that if England were to conclude a separate peace that its subsidies to Prussia would also end. William Pitt the Elder thus became a primary driver of British foreign policy during the Seven Years War. “Pitt’s single-minded aim was to destroy French power” (McKay and Scott 1983, 197). When a renewed alliance between France and Spain (Third Family Compact of 1761) was discovered, however, Pitt was compelled to resign from his position after his proposal for a preemptive attack against Spain was blocked by political opponents. Pitt’s successor, John Stuart, the Earl of Bute, chose not to continue financially supporting Prussia and sought an end to England’s involvement in the continental war. As a result, Frederick found himself in a precarious strategic position without the support of his primary ally, but his fortunes would change dramatically in his favor with the death of Russia’s Czarina Elizabeth.

<sup>72</sup> The alignment between Britain and Prussia would therefore end in an unpleasant manner. For a more in-depth historical analysis of the fallout between Frederick and Bute, see Dorn (1929).

and his subsequent invasion of Silesia in 1740. It is not surprising that Austria chose a strategy of contestation given the existence of an immediate territorial dispute with Prussia. Maria Theresa was determined to preserve both her hereditary title and the territorial integrity of her empire. She refused to acquiesce to Frederick's invasion of Silesia, fearing any sign of capitulation would embolden other adversaries. Austria would adhere to its military strategy of contestation as Prussia continued to pose an immediate territorial threat after a brief truce and the return to conflict with the Seven Years War.

During the early stages of the War of the Austrian Succession, Russia initially adhered to a policy of nonintervention given that its national interests were directed toward the Baltic region where it was already consumed by war with Sweden.<sup>73</sup> But once this conflict with Sweden concluded Russia was free to redirect its interests toward Europe and became increasingly concerned by Prussia which it regarded as a bulwark to future attempts at westward expansionism. By 1746 Elizabeth was determined to seize Prussia's territories and mobilized troops to contest Prussia's ascendancy. Russia targeted Prussia during the Seven Years War and even occupied Berlin for a brief period of time. But Russia's policy of contestation changed with the sudden death of Elizabeth in 1762. When Peter III assumed the throne he renounced territorial claims in Prussia and redirected Russia's national interests toward Denmark. The military strategies of Austria and Russia correspond to the bottom-right corner of Figure 3.1. No

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<sup>73</sup> As noted above, Russia's noninterventionist strategy was also the result of domestic turmoil that precluded the articulation of state interests. Once Elizabeth seized power the Russian state began to regard Prussia as a short-term threat to its territorial interests in Europe.

other incumbent power chose to preempt Prussia either due to an absence of any short-term threat or because state preferences were directed elsewhere.

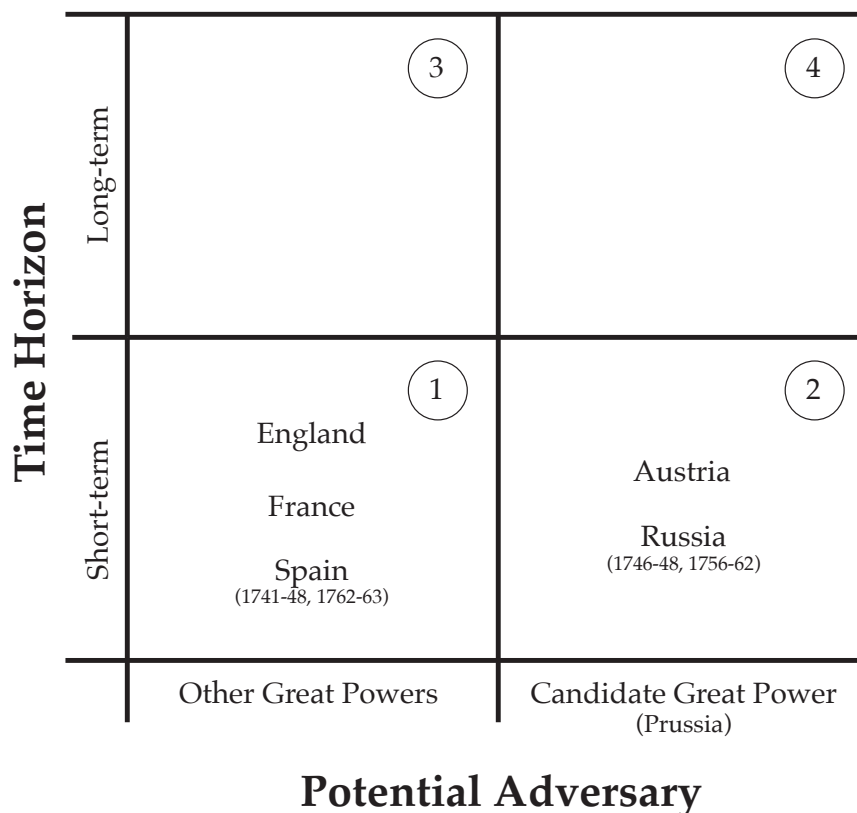


Figure 3.1: Prussia (1740-1763)

In contrast, Prussia's emergence as a European power did not pose a short-term threat to the other great powers, nor was it regarded as an obstacle to advancing their national interests.<sup>74</sup> England had little concern for Prussia and its attempted rise to great power status, and in fact historians point out that there was minimal discussion about Prussia's aggressive behavior in either parliament or the press. Instead, the principle

<sup>74</sup> There is some evidence that Frederick carefully calculated the risks associated with an invasion of Silesia and considered the interests of other states (Dorn 1940, 139). His estimations seem to have been accurate given that Silesia played an insignificant role in the policymaking of other great powers. Such considerations are in addition to the fact that the Silesian province itself was also poorly defended given Austria's ailing military structure and therefore a ripe target for attack. On the other hand, H.M. Scott points out that Frederick's invasion was less a result of "mature political calculation and much evidence of youthful bravado and rapid improvisation" (2000, 161). Similarly for Dorn, "it was rather a sudden improvisation upon which he decided when he heard the news of the death of the emperor" (1940, 138).

concern of Britain was targeting its main great power rival France who threatened its continental territories and even attempted to invade the British Isles on several occasions. During the Seven Years War England's main objective was to counter French colonialism in North America. For their part, France used the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession as an opportunity to target its great power rival Austria, and later during the Seven Years War directed its military force toward Britain in both North America and Europe. Meanwhile, Spain targeted Austria as it was motivated by the opportunity to reclaim its Italian territory lost during the War of the Spanish Succession. This strategy was briefly suspended when Ferdinand was king, but resumed in 1762 when Charles III assumed the throne.<sup>75</sup> All three military strategies of England, France, and Spain correspond to the bottom-left quadrant in Figure 3.1, representing their decision to target a rival great power rather than contest the rise of Prussia.

The preemptive paradox model is helpful in understanding how incumbent great powers responded to the rise of Prussia and, in particular, why so few chose to contest or preempt Prussia. Most incumbent powers simply did not have an immediate territorial dispute with Prussia and were instead focused on targeting other great powers. Rather than looking to systemic variables as the primary factors that influence a great power's behavior toward rising peers the model emphasizes national interests and the intervening threats and opportunities to these interests. In the case of an ascendant Prussia, only Austrian and Russian interests were affected and thus compelled to contest its rise. In contrast, Prussia had no bearing on the national interests of the

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<sup>75</sup> Under the leadership of Charles III, Spain would also invade Portugal which was considered a nominal ally of Great Britain during the Seven Years War.

remaining incumbents who all chose to prioritize rival powers. As elaborated below, this helps fill the lacuna in neorealist theory by providing an explanation as to why the mere shift in material power did not correlate with a change in the dependent variable of great power behavior.

## **Realist Theory**

My account of how incumbent powers selected their strategies in response to the rise of a new peer seems to perform rather well. However, in evaluating the performance of a theory it is important to not only test it against the empirical evidence but to also assess how well it performs relative to other competing theories. This competitive test between two theories and the evidence is often referred to as a “three cornered fight” (Elman and Elman 2002; Lakatos and Musgrave 1970; Van Evera 1997). In this section, I pit my preemptive paradox model against balance of power theory. On the surface, balance of power seems to offer far greater explanatory leverage but it will be demonstrated that it actually has difficulty explaining various instances of state behavior and, in fact, is anomalous with the evidence in many cases.

On the one hand, the period in which the world witnessed the rise of Prussia to great power status is consistent with the fundamental assumptions of balance of power. “Power politics,” Walter Dorn declares, “dominated the scene” (1940, 1). Dorn goes on to describe the international system of the eighteenth century as being anarchic and that states were always apprehensive about potential adversaries. Leonard Cowie (1963, 125-126) also contends that the notion of a balance of power among European states was a dominant theme in eighteenth century diplomacy, arguing that “for the

greater part of this period European statesmen regarded the preservation of a balance of power as the best policy for their own countries.”

To be sure, many incumbents adhered to a balance of power logic. For example, one of Britain’s goals during the War of the Austrian Succession was to prevent France from dominating the continent and possibly even achieving regional hegemony.<sup>76</sup> It operated in accordance to principles of relative gains such that advantages accrued to one side meant a loss to the other side (Grieco 1988; Waltz 1979). Indeed, Jones (2002, 134, 137) argues that the great powers all subscribed to a common goal of maintaining a balance of power among states, asserting that “the achievement of a balance of power in Europe was still the highest priority of European statesmen.”

While the realist account of a balance of power does serve an important role in eighteenth century global affairs, it still faces several interrelated deficiencies. First off, some variants of balance of power theory postulate that weaker states will combine their forces to balance against the stronger power, however, it is unclear whether any European power was on the cusp of attaining any sort of hegemony. Indeed, with the possible exception of Britain most great powers at the time possessed no material advantage over its peers. This was especially true for Prussia which was far weaker relative to the other powers. Second, balance of power theory can not account for the variation in foreign policies between the great powers, in particular, why some powers chose to preempt the rise of the candidate power while others opted not to intervene whatsoever.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it becomes evident that the alteration in the European balance of

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<sup>76</sup> Dorn (1940, 150), for example, cites Walpole’s early promise of financial and military support to Austria as an effort to preclude French hegemony than any treaty obligation.

<sup>77</sup> To be fair, however, Waltz is clear that structural realism does not offer a theory of foreign policy. See Waltz 1979 and Waltz 1996. For a rejoinder, see Elman 1996.

power did not affect incumbent behavior. For example, at no point did France chose to balance against Prussia and the perturbation it caused to European power politics.

Alternative explanations are therefore required to study the outcome of interest. Balance of power theory offers an important yet incomplete account of how incumbents selected their military strategies, leaving critical questions unanswered. While it provides an insightful explanation of eighteenth century diplomacy it only offers a partial account of the motivation of a few select great powers and is unable to explain behavior across all cases. For example, balance of power may not have influenced France's policy toward Prussia but it did affect its behavior toward England. Balance of power is also unable to explain why only certain states viewed Prussian expansionism as a threat. Moreover, it can not be used to predict a great power's strategy specifically toward a candidate great power and does not offer any insight as to the level of commitment a great power may have to its chosen strategy. Thus, Walter Dorn admits that while principles of balance of power did play a significant role in eighteenth century international affairs amidst an anarchic structure he acknowledges that interstate balancing applied only to some of the great powers and did not extend to their relations with weaker states (1940, 2-3). Indeed, Britain and France were more concerned about checking the activities of one another and not necessarily concerned with balancing against the growth in Prussian power. James Perkins seems to agree, concluding that it would be far too simplistic to believe that the singular purpose of great powers at the time was to ensure a continental balance of power (1897b, 1).



## The Aftermath

The rise of Prussia corresponded with two bloody wars that spanned the globe. Prussia's ascendancy to the ranks of great powers also had lasting repercussions that extended all the way into the twentieth century with two world wars, and the German state continues to play a significant role in international affairs today. Given the volatility associated with the emergence of a new power it is assumed that other states would be incentivized to thwart the emergence of a new peer competitor. Paradoxically we see that not only did some incumbents choose not to take any action but actually accommodated and supported the rise of the aspirant.

This chapter therefore attempted to shed light on the puzzle and provide an account as to how some great powers selected their military strategy in response to the rise of a new peer. The model begins with the assumption that state interests are a better predictor of great power behavior. In particular, incumbent powers are most likely to use military force to counter threats to existing territorial interests or when opportunities exist to expand vital territory. Incumbents will then prioritize threats and opportunities emanating from rival great powers since, by their very nature, they possess the wherewithal and capacity to undermine the interests of other states.

An evaluation of eighteenth century great powers reveals that only two incumbents chose to preempt the rise of Prussia: Austria chose to counter Prussia given the threat it posed to its national security, while Russia eventually confronted Prussia once it deemed its presence to be a threat to its opportunistic goal of territorial expansion into Central Europe. The remaining great powers, however, abstained from preempting Prussia as it did not pose an immediate threat to their territorial interests

and instead focused on countering threats emanating from rival incumbents. The preemptive paradox model also stresses that disputes over zero-sum interests such as territory are more likely to lead to conflict than variable-sum issues such as economic matters.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the French foreign minister, d'Argenson, seems to have recognized the tradeoff between territorial and economic interests, opining that France had become "too well-placed for trade to prefer territorial acquisitions" (Jones 2002, 137). Even Frederick the Great in his famous *Anti-Machiavel*, published a few months prior to his Silesian invasion, acknowledged the phenomenon of a 'war of interests' (Clark 2006, 186).

Ultimately it is important to reiterate that achieving great power status is not an inevitable affair. To be sure, the fortunes of Prussia stand in sharp contrast to those of Bavaria and Saxony who also sought territorial aggrandizement and arguably great power status (Clark 2006, 196). Prussia's attainment of great power status came at a very high cost in terms of both casualties and financial resources. Its behavior and the foreign policy responses of other great powers serve as an important lesson for contemporary policymakers who wish to preclude a similarly bloody affair.

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<sup>78</sup> Jones's (2002, 135) description of great power strategies is consistent with my own account, namely that territorial disputes engender conflict while economic disputes are less likely to lead to war.

## IV. United States & the Missing War

In the late nineteenth century the United States became not only a great power but arguably a regional hegemon with its success in the Spanish-American War of 1898. According to Jeffrey Meiser, the outcome of the war was a “major turning point” during which the “United States joined the great power club through its military defeat of Spain and acquisition of colonies in the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific regions” (2015, 29). European diplomats now assented to the Monroe Doctrine and agreed to recognize America’s preeminence in North America, reinforcing the proposition that the United States had achieved “the mark of a first-division nation” in the eyes of its peers (Kennedy 1987, 194; Herring 2008, 308).<sup>1</sup>

The empirical question, asks David Fromkin (1980, 950), is why none of the great powers even attempted to stop the United States from becoming a North American hegemon? Despite being constrained by institutional and normative factors, scholars have argued that the United States exhibited the highest level of territorial expansion during the last few years of the nineteenth century (Meiser 2015). The puzzle that this dissertation seeks to resolve is why extant great powers chose not to curb this remarkable feat of American expansionism that help propelled it to join the ranks of great powers?<sup>2</sup> Most variants of realism would predict that the alteration in global balances of power and aggressive intentions should have triggered a counterbalancing coalition, but instead the major powers chose not to intervene nor curb America’s rise to

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<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the belief that the United States had achieved a lofty position among global powers was self-embraced by Americans as evidenced by the grandiose Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Stated differently, if the United States was a latent great power in the 1870s given its prodigious economic base, increase in military capabilities, and clear demonstration to act upon broad regional interests, then the fundamental question is why other great powers chose not to thwart the rise of the United States during the roughly 25 year interval?

great power status. This is anomaly is colloquially referred to as the 'missing war' and is the central focus of this chapter.

I begin by establishing the timeframe and manner in which the United States attained its status as a great power. I then proceed to outline the various national interests of incumbents and their subsequent foreign policy decisions not contest the United States. Consistent with the preemptive paradox model, my findings demonstrate that existing great powers prioritized vital interests outside of the North American region and were therefore not perturbed by an ascendant United States.

## **United States as a Great Power**

The United States is widely believed to have achieved great power status during that late nineteenth century. David Hendrickson (2009, 262), for example, contends the United States' meteoric rise to great power status occurred primarily during the 1890s as it not only asserted itself in the Western Hemisphere, but also used its growing power to acquire additional territories in the Pacific. Most historians, however, pinpoint America's great power status with its victory in the Spanish-American War of 1898. George Herring (2008, 309) declares that the war heralded the "United States as a world power." The implication of the war, argues Robert Schulzinger, "was catapulting the US into the first rank of world powers" (2002, 15). The political scientist Randall Schweller agrees with the consensus that the United States emerged as a "world power after the Spanish-American War" (1999, 4) and is echoed by Frank Ninkovich who finds that historians generally describe the United States as transitioning from a post-Civil War isolationism to a "sudden break through to world power in the Spanish-American

War of 1898” (2014,40).<sup>3</sup> Kennedy concludes that by the end of the nineteenth century the “United States had definitely become a Great Power” (1987, 248).<sup>4</sup>

By the late nineteenth century the United States not only accumulated sufficient material power but had also identified and acted upon wider geostrategic interests. “US economic dominance spanned all measures of industrial might,” observes Jeffrey Meiser,

“In the 1870s the United States surpassed Great Britain as the largest economy in the world. By 1900 the United States was the dominant industrial power, producing twice as much iron and steel and consuming almost twice the energy of its nearest competitor. The United States also had the largest share of world manufacturing output and the largest industrial potential of any great power, an advantage that only continued to grow up through World War II” (2015, xiiin1).<sup>5</sup>

Economic growth was accompanied by a rapid expansion of military power, especially in terms of naval expenditures.<sup>6</sup> The influential strategist and lecturer at the Naval War College, Alfred Thayer Mahan, was a passionate advocate for a strong navy that would protect sea lanes, trade, and secure new colonies that would yield raw materials (Weigley 1977, 78). In terms of broader geostrategic interests and behavior, Meiser finds that by 1896 “the Republican platform set forth a full-fledged expansionist agenda: European withdrawal from the hemisphere; a voluntary union of English-speaking peoples in North America, meaning Canada; construction of a US controlled isthmian

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<sup>3</sup> Other historians go so far as to contend that the United States was not only a hegemon in North America, but its territorial “acquisitions in the Pacific [also] made it a major player, if not the dominate power, in that region” as well (Herring 2008, 335).

<sup>4</sup> Meiser (2015, xviii) offers the most generous assessment, contending that the United States may even be considered a potential hegemon after the 1870s as it sought to lead the international system. He argues that by 1898 “the United States of America stood on the cusp of world empire” (Meiser 2015, xiii). Meiser even goes so far as to argue that the United States became a great power around 1853 simply by virtue of its economic power (2015, xxix). He also makes the additional argument that any territorial expansion prior to the United States attaining its status as a great power is irrelevant, thereby dismissing the pre-1853 period as inconsequential.

<sup>5</sup> See also Paul Kennedy (1987, 242-249); George Herring (2008, 270, 285-286); Michael Hunt (2007, 23-33).

<sup>6</sup> Naval expenditures increased approximately 175 percent between 1890 to the outbreak of the First World War (Kennedy 1987, 247).

canal; acquisition of the Virgin Islands; annexation of Hawaii; and independence for Cuba” (2015, 6).

Regional conquest was a clear demonstration of the United States’ behavior as a great power.<sup>7</sup> According to Mearsheimer (2001, 238), “the United States was bent on establishing regional hegemony, and it was an expansionist power of the first order in the Americas.”<sup>8</sup> The Philippines, in particular, were the “most important colonial possession of the United States” (Meiser 2015, 39). A naval base in the Philippines served as a defensive bastion for the United States in case of attack on its Pacific coast and facilitated its ability to act upon its interests in the Far East. Annexation of Hawaii was motivated by similar factors and seen not only as being vital to defending the west coast of the United States, but expedited access to Chinese markets. Of course, it should be recognized that annexation was a contested issue and fiercely debated among legislators.<sup>9</sup> The opposition was marginalized, however, with the onset of the Spanish-American War which highlighted the need for Pacific bases in order to transport troops to the Philippines and thus seen as a strategic necessity. The annexation of Guam was similarly justified by the need to transport military personnel and supplies to the Philippines.

Meanwhile, US interest in Cuba was primarily motivated by economic considerations given the high volume of trade between the two nations.<sup>10</sup> Once the

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, President Roosevelt and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge both wished for the United States to be recognized as a great power (Ninkovich 2014, 73).

<sup>8</sup> Mearsheimer (2001, 77) identifies the United States as a great power by 1898 based on similar criteria used in this dissertation, i.e. power, interests, and behavior.

<sup>9</sup> The annexation of Hawaii was opposed for a variety of reasons, ranging from political, philosophic, and moralistic arguments to explicitly racist and self-interested arguments” (Meiser 2015, 36).

<sup>10</sup> Ninkovich takes a unique approach to reinterpreting America’s rise to great power status by arguing that its proactive role in international affairs was not the consequence of some romanticized notion of Manifest Destiny nor motivated by economic interests, but instead a function of globalization and growing interconnectivity. Indeed,

revolutionary insurgency began, popular support for US intervention was further motivated by a number of factors including repulsion over the harsh treatment with which Spain treated both rebels and civilians alike, and sympathy for the “Cuba Libre” movement that conjured parallels to America’s own revolutionary struggle against Britain nearly a century earlier. Anti-Spanish propaganda and “yellow journalism” disseminated by Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst also contributed to calls for US military involvement, especially after the sinking of the *USS Maine* in Havana Harbor. As a result of the Spanish-American War the United States acquired the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and established an enduring degree of influence over Cuban affairs despite its nominal independence.”

Secretary of State James Blaine was one of the primary architects of America’s transition from an isolationist and relatively passive posture to a more aggressive and expansionary foreign policy agenda. “He developed a vision of empire that included U.S. prominence in the hemisphere, commercial domination of the Pacific, an American-owned canal, and even the acquisition of Hawaii, Cuba, and Puerto Rico” (Herring 2008, 278-279). US policymakers remained vigilant to any encroachment upon what they perceived to be their sphere of influence in North America. Indeed, foreign policy was guided by the Monroe Doctrine which regarded any intrusion by European powers in North America as an act of aggression. Policymakers were particularly mindful of Germany which had recently enacted an expansionary agenda of their own

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specifically with respect to Cuba, he argues that “there is little evidence that investors favored war for protection of American interests in Cuba, much less for empire” (2014, 70).

<sup>11</sup> But as the US inched closer towards war, Congress passed the Teller Amendment that stipulated any military intervention would be limited only to the establishment of an independent government on the island and that the US would not annex Cuba as part of its own territory. The Platt Amendment of 1901, however, would impose a number of restrictions on Cuba’s sovereignty including its ability to implement an independent foreign policy.

that was accompanied by an aggressive naval building program (c.f. Hunt 2007, 56-57). That said, the United States was not worried about the colonial ambitions of most other great powers (Gatzke 1980, 40-41). Indeed, President Roosevelt went so far as to suggest that the region was not important enough for the European powers to expend their resources (Ninkovich 2014, 83).

To be fair, there were some territorial disputes with the other great powers but these were marginal and did not affect their national security. For example, the United States contended with both Britain and Germany over Samoa during its civil war, but the matter was resolved diplomatically with the Tripartite Convention of 1899 that partitioned the archipelago amongst the powers.<sup>12</sup> Although the European great powers did have disputes with the United States and its imperialist agenda as enshrined by the Monroe Doctrine, they had no intention of challenging America's preeminence in the region. Indeed, the crisis surrounding Venezuela in 1895 was only of peripheral importance to Britain as evidenced by the response of Prime Minister Salisbury who was shocked by the United States' aggressive behavior over a "subject so comparatively small" (Herring 2008, 307). As Mitchell discovers, most of the overtures made by England and Germany toward Venezuela were not regarded as being threatening so long as they "did not contemplate any territorial acquisition" (1996, 192). Even US expansionary activities in the Pacific triggered no immediate conflict of interests (Carroll 1966, 411).

Despite the massive increase in power and expansionist foreign policy, the puzzle remains why the incumbent powers did not balance against the sudden rise of

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<sup>12</sup> As the crisis surrounding Samoan Islands escalated, Bismarck quickly backed down as he did "not want war with the United States over a faraway Pacific island" (Herring 2008, 295).



the United States as it ascended to the rank of great power. The absence of any counterbalancing becomes even more perplexing if we accept the contention that the United States became not just a great power but a regional hegemon in the late nineteenth century. “The European great powers,” observe Jack Levy and William Thompson, “gave little weight to the United States in their strategic calculations” up until 1945 (2005, 5n12). Imanuel Geiss similarly finds that the United States was “beyond the horizon of European diplomacy in the nineteenth century” that dominated the affairs of existing great powers at the time (1976, 20).

The remainder of this chapter will evaluate the great powers’ foreign policies toward the United States during the late nineteenth century. Consistent with the hypothesis of the preemptive paradox, it will be demonstrated that the great powers were primarily interested in managing the fluid and constantly evolving nature of European affairs and were less concerned with addressing the rise of another rival halfway around the world. It will also be shown that while balance of power theory may explain relations strictly among incumbents, it fails to provide a satisfactory account of how incumbent powers responded to a rising peer.

## **Great Power Strategies**

Scholars seem to be in unanimous agreement that the prevailing great powers during the late nineteenth century were England, France, Russia, Germany, Austria, and Italy.<sup>13</sup> Turkey and Spain during this period were no longer great powers and, in fact,

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<sup>13</sup> Imanuel Geiss (1976, 17) lists the prevailing powers in Europe at the time of Germany’s unification as being Germany, France, Britain, Austria, and Italy. Sneha Mahajan (2002, 8) identifies Britain, Russia, France, Germany,

were now objects of imperial conquest by the existing great powers (Geiss 1976, 20). Through a careful examination of each state's vital interests, it will be revealed that none had significant territorial interests in North America and were more concerned about long-term threats emanating from rival European great powers.

### *England*

England's most vital national interest during this time period was its colonial possession of India. It not only constituted a significant portion of Britain's global empire and great power status, but it also facilitated important commercial linkages to other parts of the globe. It was believed that without India, Britain would cease to be a great power and thus assumed top priority on the state's policymaking agenda (Mahajan 2002, 31-32). As such, England remained alert to any potential threat that may challenge its presence on the subcontinent. Indeed, Britain has a long track record of quickly squashing any rival encroachment into its Indian possession dating back to Napoleon's incursions in the late eighteenth century. Even the faintest appearance of a threat was met with fierce diplomatic and military resistance.

Russia posed the most immediate challenge to England's authority over India. Russia was a major concern to English policymakers who feared that Russian expansion in the region threatened its prized colonial possession and potentially undermined its access to Chinese markets (Brandenburg 1927, 1-2). "The alarmists in Britain," observes Barbara Jelavich, "saw in the Russian actions a carefully conceived

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Austria, and Italy as the incumbent great powers during the period of America's ascendancy. It is important to stress that the identification of these states is consistent with Levy and Waltz whose listing of great powers forms the basis of case studies employed in this dissertation.

plan designed to take India” (1964, 198). Whether such expansionism was a consequence of rogue Russian military commanders in the field made no difference to British policymakers in London. Any sort of encroachment on India was regarded as a threat to national interests. As a result, British policymakers made a conscious decision to prioritize the protection of India over its interests in other parts of the world including the Middle East. The long-standing British policy of checking Russian power was even perpetuated across party lines and administrations.<sup>14</sup>

Since Britain possessed a clear naval superiority over its great power rivals, the land-based northern route to India through Central Asia was regarded as its ‘Achilles heel.’ Most British policymakers were perturbed by the potential expansion of Russian influence into Central Asia which could serve as a beachhead from which to penetrate India. This dynamic is often referred to as the “Great Game” in which Britain’s policymakers sought to protect their Indian territory throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> According to Bourne (1970, 145), the Russians emerged as “England’s principal enemy and it was necessary to keep carefully on guard in the buffer states of Central Asia.” British fear was certainly justified given that the Russian general in command of Far East affairs contemplated invading India, an aspiration that reputedly enticed the Tsar (Patrikeeff and Shukman 2007, 24). In this regard, Afghanistan was seen as a critical bulwark to Russia’s continued encroachment in the region by assuming the role of a

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<sup>14</sup> When Henry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice, the 5th Marquess of Lansdowne, became Secretary of State he believed that British military power should concentrate exclusively on checking Russia and sought the cooperation of other great powers in achieving this objective (Bourne 1970, 169). Even Gladstone who had earlier chastised the previous government for their willingness to devote scarce resources to stopping Russian advances in Central Asia found himself entangled in diplomatic crises in the region such as the Panjdeh incident of 1885 (Bourne 1970, 143-144).

<sup>15</sup> See Fromkin (1980) for a brief overview of the dynamic between Britain and Russia that constituted the Great Game.

buffer state. When the Marquess of Salisbury, Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, succeeded Derby in 1878 as foreign secretary he brought with him a keen interest in balancing against Russia given his previous service as Secretary of State for India.<sup>16</sup> Relatedly, another long-standing English policy had also been to minimize Russia's influence in the Ottoman Empire. In 1895, Salisbury declared that "keeping of Constantinople out of Russian hands has now for near half a century, if not more, been made a vital article of our political creed" (Bourne 1970, 158-159). In 1896 the Director of Naval Intelligence submitted a memorandum that concluded the "advance of Russia to the sea and her establishment as a first-class naval Power both in the Mediterranean and Far East appears to be certain" (Marder 1940, 578-580). It was advised that Britain focus on protecting their Egyptian foothold and safeguard the Suez Canal which influenced their ability to defend India. Nevertheless, observers stress that the Russian threat in the east and protection of India remained the primary foreign policy concern of Britain (Bourne 1970, 163; Gillard 1987, 129).

Germany also gradually emerged to become another great power rival to Britain's interests. "Economic change and the alteration in the relative weight of Germany and Britain within the international system, coupled with commercial, colonial and ideological rivalry, all contributed to the sharp deterioration in the Anglo-German relations after 1890" (Seligmann and McLean 2000, 139). British policymakers were threatened by Germany's *Weltpolitik* that challenged their colonial and naval superiority.<sup>17</sup> Societal attitudes amongst Germans were also deeply hostile to Britain

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<sup>16</sup> The level of prioritization that Salisbury and other policymakers placed on countering Russia is partly evidenced by their participation in the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880).

<sup>17</sup> But while Eyre Crowe feared the potentially destabilizing force that Germany posed to Europe, he does seem to accept some degree of German expansionism so long as it did not conflict with the interests of other great powers:

which only exasperated London's concerns. By the turn of the twentieth century, Britain undertook policies explicitly designed to contain German power and maintain a European balance of power (Seligmann and McLean 2000, 135-136). Much of the policy formation at the time was directed by the Foreign Secretary Edward Grey who harbored deep levels of personal mistrust of German intentions and assumed that their actions were malevolent.<sup>18</sup> This culture of mistrust of German intentions was carefully cultivated and promoted throughout the Foreign Office and evident in official internal documents which described Germany's foreign policy as "consciously aiming at the establishment of a German hegemony, at first in Europe, and eventually in the world" (Dunn 2013, 244).

In addition to Russia and Germany, France also remained a potential foe. It had been an adversary of England for centuries and it was assumed that it would remain a rival for the foreseeable future. Despite being weakened by the Franco-Prussian War, British policymakers continued to be apprehensive of a French attack on London which was even discussed in high-level cabinet meetings (Mahajan 2002, 11). French activity in Egypt as well as South-East Asia concerned Britain and threatened its colonial interests. But while some scholars contend that Britain regarded her African colonies as "vital national interest" (Seligmann and McLean 2000, 121), it appears, however, that England was willing to compromise when it came to its African possessions and did not

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"The mere existence and healthy activity of a powerful Germany is an undoubted blessing to this world... So long as Germany's action does not overstep the line of legitimate protection of existing rights" (Gooch and Temperley 1928, 406, 417; c.f. Dunn 2013, 52-53). Indeed, Stephen Walt argues that Britain would "oppose Germany only if Germany is aggressive and seeks to expand through conquest" (1987, 26). The Crowe memorandum, concludes Geiss, "amounted to accepting German expansion in the world, as long as it was essentially peaceful and in accordance with the interest of the other imperialist Powers" (1976, 106). Thus, as predicted by this dissertation, great power behavior is partially driven by the interests of states and the extent to which they conflict with one another.

<sup>18</sup> Throughout Grey's career he adhered to neorealist principles and sought to balance against other competing great power rivals. Even as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Grey was suspicious of French colonial policies in Africa and viewed their activities as being hostile to England's interests in the region.

prioritize them as much as other territories or security issues. The truth perhaps lies somewhere in the middle – it would be reasonable to conclude that while England was willing to make trade-offs with respect to many of its African colonies, the single piece of territory on which it was not willing to compromise was South Africa.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, during his tenure as Foreign Secretary, John Wodehouse, the 1st Earl of Kimberley, reputedly warned Germany that South Africa was “perhaps the most vital interest of Great Britain because by the possession of it communication with India was assured” (Mahajan 2002, 26). These territories were not intrinsically valuable per se, rather they were vital communication and transportation linkages to India. Thus, Britain prioritized territories insofar as they related to India.

Finally, with respect to the rising United States, British policymakers had little vital interest in North America. Throughout the late nineteenth century, British policymakers continually reaffirmed that their interests resided in continental Europe – not North America.<sup>20</sup> According to Bourne, “Britain’s diplomatic and military retreat in America was not taken in isolation from European affairs. Far from it; it was yet another instance of the priority which European affairs assumed in British foreign policy” (1970, 96). Paul Kennedy (1984, 28) also argues that Britain had no imperialistic ambitions in North America and did not have any desire to annex territory. Although somewhat perturbed by United States’ aggressive expansionary efforts in Central America, British policymakers and the general public had little interest in the region and therefore opted not to intervene (Bourne 1970, 87). Other matters were of far greater priority on

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<sup>19</sup> It should be recognized that this era of British imperialism in West Africa is highly disputed among historians. See, for example, Ajayi and Austen 1972; Hopkins 1968; Hopkins 1972.

<sup>20</sup> This corresponds with Elman (2004, 567) who argues that as an insular great power England should “give precedence to local power considerations.”

England's agenda, and America's aggressive diplomacy in Central America had little bearing on the national security and stability of Europe. In fact, proposals to contest America's rise were not only rejected but many even believed the United States should be supported. An op-ed article published in the mid-nineteenth century reaffirmed the absence of any vital British interest in the region: "We wish ourselves for no extension of territory on that continent. We are half inclined to regret that we hold any possession at all there south of the Union. Desiring no territory, we desire only prosperous, industrious, civilized and wealthy customers... Central America peopled and exploited by Anglo-Saxons would be worth to us tenfold its present value" (Bourne 1970, 88).

During the Spanish-American War, British policymakers may have sympathized with Spain but had little interest in the outcome. Not only was England careful in projecting a neutral policy but, in a show of good will, allowed the American navy to continue using Mirs Bay in Hong Kong during the war. Lord Salisbury was a strict proponent of 'splendid isolationism' and had no desire to intervene in the partition of Spanish territory in the aftermath of their defeat to the United States in 1898. Moreover, Erich Brandenburg (1927, 124) finds that "it was a fixed principle of English policy on no account to antagonize the United States." By the turn of the century England effectively signaled their acceptance of US superiority in North America via the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty that permitted the American government to build and control the Panama Canal. The subsequent withdrawal of naval forces from North America allowed Britain to concentrate its efforts on more pressing matters in Europe. Since the United States was not a threat to British interests and even considered a tacit ally, policymakers concluded

there was no need to continue deploying scarce military resources across the Atlantic and assumed a policy of nonintervention.

### *France*

French foreign policy during the rise of the United States to great power status was largely disjointed and unorganized. Historians reach different conclusions as to the priorities of France during this period. Following the Franco-Prussian War, the French statesman Léon Gambetta proposed a three-prong policy agenda that focused on cordial relations with Germany, avoiding excessive entanglements in international disputes, and the internal development of the French state (Périgord 1939, 79). In contrast, R.D. Anderson counters that French foreign policy was far more singular and was “dominated by the problem of Germany” (1977, 141). Jelavich similarly finds that by the late nineteenth century “France gave a clear first priority to its continental position and to the German frontier” (1964, 251).<sup>21</sup> The foreign policy of the Third Republic was ultimately divided between the dual objectives of mitigating the threat emanating from a powerful Germany and a scramble for colonial expansion. Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Reberieux find that “up to the end of the nineteenth century France had hesitated between a policy of colonial expansion which brought her into competition with England and a continental policy aimed essentially against Germany” (1984, 291).

France pursued its European interests in a number of different ways including a series of alliances with other great powers culminating in the Entente Cordiale of 1904.

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<sup>21</sup> Guy Chapman (1962, 344) echoes such interpretations and contends that the ministry of foreign affairs was primarily concerned about Germany and jealous of Great Britain. Eber Carroll also seems to concur, arguing that “the French nation of necessity and choice was mostly concerned with problems at home” (1931, 85).



“The immediate task, and the one which should determine France’s foreign policy, was the resumption of the broken contacts with the Powers and of a moderate activity abroad” (Carroll 1931, 70). This was seen as the only avenue to not only restoring France’s status as a great power but ensuring its national security. Upon assuming his post at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Delcassé made clear that his most important foreign policy objective was the establishment of cordial relations with Great Britain. “I do not wish to leave here, I do not wish to leave this armchair,” asserted Delcassé, “until I have reestablished a friendly understanding with England” (Stuart 1921, 12).<sup>22</sup> But beyond the forging of alliances, Anderson finds that “France’s role in continental affairs remained essentially passive” (1977, 141). Indeed, even the formation of alliances was impeded as long as Bismarck remained in office and kept Russia within Germany’s orbit. Even French aspirations of reclaiming lost territory was impeded by their relative military weakness and isolation. Paul Périgord contends that the sole objective of the renowned diplomat and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Théophile Delcassé, “was the recovery of the lost provinces” of Alsace-Lorraine (1939, 79). This ambition also reflected the popular sentiment of the French people, however, French policymakers were never able to formulate concrete plans to retake the lost provinces (Anderson 1977, 143). “Any ideas of revenge, or even adequate preparation for self-defense, were impossible,” argues Leslie Derfler, “until France could break out of the diplomatic isolation imposed by Bismarck” (1966, 58). To be sure, Léon Gambetta recognized that France was not likely to win any revanchist war with Germany. In 1876 he declared that

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the eventual establishment of the Triple Entente was the ‘keystone’ of his foreign policy agenda. He was determined to forge an alliance that would encircle Germany and at times embraced the need to take military action in order to reclaim Alsace-Lorraine. Carroll does add, however, that Delcassé’s policy stance at times wavered (1931, 171).

“I am for negotiating. I am against war, against violence” (Carroll 1931, 74). France was forced to bide its time and patiently await until more favorable circumstances allowed it to reclaim Alsace-Lorraine.

The only arena in which France flexed its military muscle was in the realm of colonial expansion. France’s expansionist era is generally associated with the enterprising efforts of Jules Ferry who helped extend French influence into several African territories and Indochina. Consistent with the hypothesis of this dissertation, however, France’s success in colonial expansion was due in large part to the absence of any conflict of interest with the other great powers. Indeed, Anderson (1977, 144) observes that “much of this expansion was in territory not coveted by other Powers.” While there were a few crises that were cause for alarm, Anderson argues that serious conflict was avoided since France’s global ambitions were largely compatible with the other great powers.<sup>23</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that France’s colonial endeavors were without complications. To be sure, France struggle to quell insurrectionary activities in their colonies which generated a great deal of skepticism and doubt regarding the utility of colonial expansion. An unexpected French military retreat in Tonkin in 1885 quickly erupted into a political crisis that not only precipitated the end of the Sino-French War but also the downfall of France’s prime minister Jules Ferry. According to Leslie Derfler, France’s retreat engendered a great deal of concern

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<sup>23</sup> Graham Stuart does offer an opposing viewpoint that French interests did conflict with Britain and they “found themselves at odds in every part of the globe where their colonial interests were neighboring” (1921, 13). The most notable incident being the Fashoda Crisis with Britain which has already been extensively debated among scholars and not necessary to repeat here. See, for example, Christopher Layne (1994), James Lee Ray (1995), and Kenneth Schultz (2001). Another major incident revolved around a dispute over Siam. Nevertheless, while several incidents did occur between France and its great power rivals, most notably a brief tariff war with Italy and the Fashoda Crisis with Britain, for the most part France was able to restore its preeminent position on the global stage without arousing much hostility from its great power competitors.

amongst the public and elite who now “worried about France’s reduced ability to defend herself in Europe” (1966, 34).

Nevertheless, France’s colonial expansion continued largely unabated and was a global force by the turn of the twentieth century. According to Hugh Seton-Watson, by the late nineteenth century France’s focus on its African territories allowed it to successfully transform itself into a world colonial power during this period (1967, 577). But despite the prodigious success France achieved in the realm of colonial expansion it was only a marginal component of a foreign policy that continued to focus on European affairs. “France neither invested nor received much from her Empire,” observes Derfler who also finds that “colonial investments represented only 10 per cent of the nation’s total foreign commitments. Considerably more money was sent to Russia to establish and strengthen an alliance” (1966, 58). Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Reberieux obtain a similar finding that French expansionism was not profitable and that the “colonies bought more abroad than from the mother country. Their place in French life remained a slender one” (1984, 173). Moreover, Mayeur and Reberieux point out that while colonial adventurism may have been tolerated by the French public, there was little enthusiasm and most policy initiatives were spearheaded by lobbyists.

Colonial ambitions, domestic affairs and the healing of internal divisions remained a central focus of decision-making elite. Indeed, in 1901 a historian commented at the time that other than its colonies France lacked any interest in foreign affairs and the topic was never given much attention during electoral campaigns (Chapman 1962, 344). Even severe political crises such as the tumultuous Dreyfus Affair had little impact on France’s foreign policy (Carroll 1931, 191). During this time

the government of France seemed to be a revolving door of statesmen and it was not surprising that concrete foreign policymaking was absent. For example, from the fall of Jules Ferry in 1885 until 1898, France had over ten different Secretaries of State and went through nearly seventeen prime ministers. Given the dizzying turnover of key government posts, it is no wonder that France lacked any interest in concerning itself with the rise of a new power in a remote continent that had little bearing on its immediate global standing. Indeed, by the nineteenth century France had already relinquished its most significant North American holding with the Louisiana Purchase.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately France's focus on rival European powers, its adventurism in Africa, and the absence of any territorial interest in North America meant that it opted for a policy of nonintervention amidst America's rise to great power status. The preemption of the United States was never countenanced by French policymakers.

### *Russia*

Beginning our analysis with the last quarter of the nineteenth century it is apparent that the Near East and Europe was the priority of Russian policymakers (Jelavich 1964, 171-172, 214). The acclaimed Russian journalist, Mikhail Katkov, remarked at the time that "Our future lies in Europe, not in Asia" (Rogger 1983, 165). Defense of its western border was regarded as the most critical in terms of national security and most Russians had an ideological affinity toward Europe which further propelled its focus west.<sup>25</sup> Russia also desired Western access to the Mediterranean

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<sup>24</sup> According to Mitchell (1996, 185), "France did not have a navy capable of projecting power" into the North American region. See also Elman (2004, 563).

<sup>25</sup> While this does lend some credence to the causal explanations common to social theories of international relations, it still does not provide a comprehensive account of great power behavior which is the fundamental question posed by this study.

which would provide an ice-free route to deploy its military resources and engage in greater levels of economic exchange. As such, it welcomed the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire which controlled the territory coveted by Russian elites.

Given such unit-level interests it is not surprising that Barbara Jelavich concludes that the territorial priority of Russia at this time was Europe, particularly the areas occupied by Germany and Poland. "It was from here," observes Jelavich, "that Europe could effectively launch an invasion of Russia that could endanger the existence of the state. Thus in comparison to Europe, the Near, Middle, and Far East always remained sideshows" (1964, 220). The belief that Russia's western front was vulnerable to attack was echoed by many Russian strategists. In 1900 the Minister of War, Aleksey Kuropatkin, noted in a report that Russia's western flank had become so vulnerable that "the attention of the Ministry of War in the first years of the present century should be confined to strengthening our position on that side, and not be diverted to aggressive enterprises elsewhere" (Rogger 1983, 169). Russia also viewed Germany's economic activities in Turkey and the Near East with a great deal of suspicion and would use diplomatic measures to ensure its influence in Constantinople in fear that the other great powers were attempting to undermine its presence in the Ottoman Empire (Carroll 1966, 435-439). Meanwhile, the Russian diplomat Aleksandr Nelidov was particularly concerned that Britain would deploy a naval fleet to the Black Sea and even submitted plans for a military counter-operation to seize the Bosphorus (Seton-Watson 1967, 574-575).

Russia's geostrategic concerns in Europe were intensified by Pan-Slavic calls for a more proactive foreign policy. "The goal of all the Panslavs," Jelavich contends, "was

the assumption by Russia of the leadership of the Slavic peoples; their liberation from foreign, that is Habsburg and Turkish, control; and their organization into political units closely allied to St. Petersburg” (1964, 174). Such domestic interests combined with the emerging Balkan crisis led to the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). Unfortunately Russia’s military operations during the war lacked any effective coordination and the subsequent twin treaties of San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin constricted any significant territorial gains.<sup>26</sup> Although there was a great deal of popular frustration directed toward domestic decision-makers, most of the blame was ascribed to Bismarck who failed to champion the Russian cause as expected. As a result of the humiliating terms of the Congress of Berlin, Russia would remain distrustful of Bismarck and Germany’s commitment as an ally despite renewing the League of the Three Emperors.<sup>27</sup>

Following the Russo-Turkish War there appears to have been a subtle transition in Russia’s global interests. The conflict not only exposed serious flaws in its military command structure but uncovered a degree of diplomatic weakness as rival great powers meddled in the final resolution of the conflict at the Congress of Berlin that rolled back Russia’s territorial gains acquired during the war. At the same time, Russian statesmen had long worked to uphold a European balance of power and did not wish to

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<sup>26</sup> Jelavich (1964, 184) points out that the peace settlement did not satisfy any of the parties involved which only led to further conflicts.

<sup>27</sup> A major consequence of the Russo-Turkish War was the realization that Russia was no longer a dominant European power and was now overshadowed by a unified Germany. The war also exposed weaknesses in Russia’s military and domestic structure. Jelavich concludes that such a realization among Russia’s policymakers compelled them to focus on internal reform rather than aggressive expansionism for which they were ill-prepared: “Adventurous actions, such as the Russo-Turkish War had been, were, in the future, to be avoided” (1964, 187). Upon inheriting the throne in 1881, Alexander III would continue enacting pacific foreign policies in favor of domestic reforms despite his nationalist sentiments. Indeed, he would renew the League of the Three Emperors and even signed the Reinsurance Treaty when the League collapsed.

challenge the system that had functioned so well.<sup>28</sup> “Perhaps precisely because in Europe Russia was checked and contained in the nineteenth century by powerful neighbors,” observes Hans Rogger, “energies turned towards Asia” (1983, 164). A turn toward Asia also represented an opportunity for Russia to challenge rival great powers outside of the European continent, most notably England in India.

Russian strategists had long desired to exploit any opportunity to weaken Britain’s stronghold in India. Indeed, after witnessing the Indian Rebellion of 1857 the Russian diplomat Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatyev advocated for a more expansionist policy into Central Asia and led several exploratory missions into the region.<sup>29</sup> Although an invasion of India was also contemplated, such an operation was not feasible until the Orenburg-Tashkent Railway was completed (Seton-Watson 1967, 578). Not surprisingly, Britain was alarmed by Russia’s renewed westward advances during the Russo-Turkish War but was able to restrict significant advances with the Treaty of Berlin. British policymakers also remained sensitive to Russian encroachment into Central Asia that undermined the defense of India, but they were temporarily assuaged by the success of the Afghan Boundary Commission that was established to settle territorial disputes concerning the border of Afghanistan. Although Russia did obtain a degree of success in its expansionary efforts in Central Asia, these newly acquired territories never attained a high degree of importance. Not only were they difficult to defend, but in order to reap any economic benefit they would have required a great deal of financial investment which the Russian government was unable to do at the time. It is

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<sup>28</sup> Although Russian foreign policy may have been cautious and sometimes contradictory, Hans Rogger stresses that it was not isolationist and maintenance of Russia’s great power status was paramount (1983, 164).

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the justification Russia used was based on the reputed civilization of primitive peoples that was reminiscent of the United States’ own rationale for its westward push across the North American continent.

no surprise that Jelavich concludes that “the colonial areas thus had a relatively minor place in the formulation of general policy” (1964, 171). Nevertheless, Russia continued to exploit British sensitivities in India and threatened to invade as a means of gaining concessions elsewhere.

Toward the latter half of the nineteenth century Russian interests were primarily directed toward the Far East, particularly in Manchuria and Korea.<sup>30</sup> To be fair, “Russia long equated security with expansion, protecting earlier territorial acquisitions by adding new ones” (Jukes 2002, 7). Dating back to the 1850s, Russian expansion was focused toward the east since western alternatives were blocked by the looming presence of European powers. The last half of the nineteenth century saw Russia establishing a number of Asian settlements, territorial acquisitions, and expansion of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Russia’s turn toward the east was an effort to carve out its own sphere of influence, procure new markets and natural resources, and secure warm water ports for its naval forces (Rogger 1983, 175). Other favorable conditions also facilitated Russia’s objectives in the east, for example, its newfound alliance with France provided a modicum of security along its western border.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, increasing interest among the other great powers in China necessitated that Russia now consolidate its Asian territories in light of new regional competition.

Russia had little territorial interest in North America. Its only major possession, Alaska, was of little strategic importance and its economic value diminished with the

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<sup>30</sup> For a brief review of Russia’s foreign policies in the Far East, see Anatolii Ignat’ev (1993).

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, Berlin encouraged Russia to pursue its interests in Asia in order to redirect its focus away from Europe and preclude potential hostilities with Germany. Germany also believed that redirecting Russia’s focus away from the Balkans would reduce the likelihood it would engage in conflict with its Austrian ally (Seton-Watson 1967, 586). Moreover, German policymakers hoped that it could gain leverage as a mediator should any disputes arise between Russia and Britain.



decline of the fur trade in the mid-nineteenth century (Seton-Watson 1967, 444).<sup>32</sup>

Negotiations for its sale to the United States proceeded rather quickly following the American Civil War, as Russia was eager to sell and the Americans eager to buy.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the growing financial burden Alaska posed to Russian business interests, Nikolai Nikolaevich Bolkhovitinov notes that policymakers were keen to concentrate Russia's foreign policy in the Far East and deliberately wished to preclude any potential conflict of territorial interests with the United States.

According to Jelavich (1964, 167), at no time did Russia ever express any interest in the North American hemisphere. It had little economic value and was difficult to defend from a strategic perspective. Even when American interests started to penetrate Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, Russian diplomats were never distressed since the United States did not threaten their vital territorial interests. Because of the absence of any conflict of territorial interests, it is not surprising that Russia opted for a policy of nonintervention and chose not to expend military resources in preempting the rise of the United States. "When we look back at Russian-American diplomatic relations in the nineteenth century," observes Henry Roberts, "they do seem to be, for the most part, marginal to the interests of each nation" (1962, 582).

### *Germany*

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<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Jukes also argues that while it is true that Russia sold Alaska to the United States in 1867, the decision was not a renunciation of an expansionary policy but instead a consequence of a decline in the primary resources of sea-otter and seal pelts (2002, 7).

<sup>33</sup> For a more thorough review of the sale of Alaska, see Bolkhovitinov (1993).

The primary and indeed sole interest of German policymakers was the fulfillment of a unified state. “All their interest, all their efforts and all their aspirations,” contend Seligmann and McLean, “were bound up in this one cause” (2000, 45).<sup>34</sup> Imanuel Geiss concurs, observing that the “overriding aim of German foreign policy was consolidating and maintaining the enormous increase of power accumulated within the new German Empire” (1976, 18). This goal translated into a foreign policy of maintaining continental peace through a complex web of interstate alliances that would ensure its national security. “Bismarck was acutely aware of Germany’s geopolitical and strategic vulnerability, exposed on virtually all sides by the lack of natural borders and with only limited access to the North Sea and the Baltic Sea” (Lerman 2008, 25-26). As such, Bismarck’s foreign policy concentrated on securing the hard-fought gains of unification by forging a series of alliances between the other powers so that it would not be the sole target of any potential balancing coalition. “Bismarck’s great strength,” argues Lerman, “was to understand the multidimensional nature of European international relations and how Germany’s bilateral diplomacy might have an impact on third parties” (2008, 28).<sup>35</sup> Thus, “the supreme object of Germany’s policy, which was controlled by Bismarck until 1890 in spite of various *contretemps*, was the maintenance of European peace” (Brandenburg 1927, 2).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Even after the historic events that lead to unification, many policymakers at the time wished to focus on domestic reforms that would solidify their newfound success.

<sup>35</sup> Lerman does caution, however, that it would be misguided to wholeheartedly embrace Bismarck’s diplomatic acumen. While he may have been successful during his tenure in managing European balances of power, many of the treaties he devised only instilled mistrust among the great powers and were often riddled with contradictions. “By the end of Bismarck’s tenure in office the strains on his diplomacy were already in evidence, and it was becoming increasingly unlikely that his system of improvised checks and balances could endure” (2008, 30).

<sup>36</sup> Another salient foreign policy goal was to ensure the integrity of the Austrian empire which would likely fall under Russia’s orbit should it collapse. At the same time, however, Germany also did not want to see Russia collapse (Brandenburg 1927, 15).

Bismarck's objective was actualized with the Kissingen Dictation in which he established a goal of achieving "an overall political situation in which all the great powers except France have need of us and are as far as possible kept from forming coalitions against us by their relations with one another" (Lerman 2008, 27). Despite their victory in the Franco-Prussian War, Germany remained sensitive to French power and the threat it posed to German national security. The chief of staff of the German army, Field Marshal Moltke, even urged for a preventive war against France although Bismarck resisted such bellicose demands (Seligmann and McLean 2000, 42). Nevertheless, a "major German objective," observes Edgar Feuchtwanger, "was to keep France isolated" (2001, 80). This was primarily achieved by keeping France diplomatically marginalized and weak such that it would be unable to launch any offensive operations to reclaim Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>37</sup>

Although Germany's primary foreign policy focus during this period was on the European continent, German policymakers did have a strong interest in becoming not just a regional but a global power. With the exception of a brief period of imperial acquisitions between 1884 and 1885, however, Bismarck expressed little interest in colonial conquests and viewed Europe as the primary focus for German policy.<sup>38</sup> Geiss argues that Germany's era of imperialism only occurred with the announcement of *Weltpolitik* following Bismarck's tenure (1976, 23). To be sure, he generally ignored

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<sup>37</sup> That said, Bismarck followed a rather prudent policy toward France that avoided antagonizing militant irredentism and even went to far as to support France on matters where their interests did not conflict. Bismarck argued that if "France finds Germany opposing her on all her paths [it] would very considerably strengthen the party in France that stands for revenge and national hatred, and would even hasten the outbreak of a new French War; and I fail to discern what benefit would accrue to us from eventual victory. Even if we were victorious such a war would be a great calamity" (Brandenburg 1927, 10).

<sup>38</sup> The rationale for Bismarck's sudden and brief interest in colonial affairs is a much debated topic among historians. For a brief overview see Seligmann & McLean (2000, 47-51).

opportunities for new conquests and viewed existing holdings as a burden rather than benefit.<sup>39</sup> Those few instances in which Bismarck did seek colonial acquisitions, however, were “largely determined by domestic considerations and was part of a broader strategy to bolster his personal position at a time when the Kaiser’s health was failing and the succession of the liberal crown prince seemed imminent” (Lerman 2008, 29). Geiss concurs by noting that domestic and socio-economic factors “give the most satisfactory answer to the question of German motivation for colonial policy” during Bismarck’s tenure (1976, 44-45).<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, Bismarck pursued colonial expansion only where existing German enterprises were already established as an initial foothold and where no other great power had any overlapping territorial claims that could trigger a potential conflict of interest (Feuchtwanger 2001, 90). Moreover, Bismarck “never allowed considerations of colonial expansion to decide Germany’s national policy, or to influence her alliances and enmities” (Brandenburg 1927, 18).

In 1888 Wilhelm II became the last German emperor and dramatically altered the direction of both domestic and foreign policies previously instituted by Bismarck.<sup>41</sup> The individual largely responsible for foreign policy after Bismarck’s resignation was Leo von Caprivi who assumed the chancellorship. Although he possessed impressive credentials and practical knowledge of domestic policymaking he lacked experience

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<sup>39</sup> The colonies were not only seen as a financial burden but diverted vital military resources away from defending the German homeland.

<sup>40</sup> The historian Edgar Feuchtwanger agrees, however, he does seem to downplay the degree to which domestic pressures influenced Bismarck’s foreign policymaking by contending such factors were only a “subordinate consideration” (2001, 90).

<sup>41</sup> Seligmann & McLean summarize the difference between Bismarck and Wilhelm in terms of their foreign outlooks: “Bismarck had been content to accept a latent German hegemony in Europe, whereas Kaiser Wilhelm II and his entourage wished to turn it into an actual position of territorial and economic dominance” (2000, 143). James Retallack (2008) cautions, however, that it would be somewhat overstated to claim that there was a sharp break between the reigns of the two leaders and that a great deal of continuity existed between them. Additionally, it should be pointed out that most scholars make clear that Bismarck’s resignation was not the consequence of differences of opinion with William II over foreign policy matters (Brandenburg 1927, 20).

with international affairs. “Compounding this ignorance of overseas policy,” argue Seligmann and McLean, “was the even more serious problem that in place of the hard lessons of experience, [he] brought instead a number of preconceptions about the management of diplomatic affairs that were to prove less than successful when put into practice” (2000, 109). Other historians contend that Caprivi along with other policymakers responsible for foreign affairs failed to understand or even appreciate the importance of the alliance network that Bismarck had worked so carefully to craft (Brandenburg 1927, 31). That said, Caprivi did share Bismarck’s perspective that colonial holdings only served to divert resources away from their main geostrategic interest of Europe.<sup>42</sup> Upon transferring Germany’s colonial assets to Britain in the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty of 1890, Caprivi remarked that “the less Africa [that Germany has], so much the better for us” (Seligmann and McLean 2000, 111).<sup>43</sup> By 1894, however, Caprivi was forced to resign from his position as chancellor as he faced mounting criticism over his handling of Germany’s foreign affairs.<sup>44</sup> Ultra-nationalists were angered by his decision to relinquish Germany’s colonial holdings in Africa and was roundly condemned for allowing Russia to forge an alliance with France that exposed German territory on two sides. Even Caprivi’s economic bilateral trade agreements which successfully reduced tariffs only angered powerful agricultural interest groups.

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<sup>42</sup> Geiss (1976, 61) similarly suggests that Caprivi’s foreign policy during his brief tenure can be encapsulated by an attempt to concentrate Germany’s power in Europe and reduce its overseas commitments. Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein, who served as Secretary of State of the Foreign Office under Caprivi, also stressed that Germany had no interest in the affairs of other great powers in the periphery (Brandenburg 1927, 38).

<sup>43</sup> Another reputed advantage Caprivi hoped to gain with the *rapprochement* with Britain was a future prospect of forging an official alliance between the two powers, however, Caprivi neglected the fact that British policymakers wished to remain divorced of European affairs and adhered to a policy of ‘splendid isolation.’

<sup>44</sup> Brandenburg (1927, 47) offers a slightly different perspective by contending that Caprivi’s foreign policies were not necessarily the source of his ouster.

Caprivi was forced from office and replaced by Chlodwig Carl Viktor, Prince of Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, who chose to make a sharp break from his predecessors' Eurocentric stance and instead embraced an expansionist agenda.<sup>45</sup> The focus of his foreign policy was directed toward southern Africa, specifically the Transvaal Republic, with the goal of bolstering Germany's economic and demographic base. Since this area was already regarded as being an integral component of Britain's South African empire, Germany's new colonial policy therefore marked the beginning of a new era of strained Anglo-German relations.<sup>46</sup> Yet Germany was acutely aware of the existing imbalance of military power as Britain could easily marshal a far superior force to counter any German deployment to the region and was regarded as a glaring weakness in Germany's relative standing among the great powers which policymakers wished to remedy. Ultimately the "period between Bismarck's downfall and the inauguration of German 'Weltpolitik' in 1897-8 is one of transition and full of discrepancies... Bismarck's policy of concentrating on Europe was carried on by Caprivi, even if with different methods, but was abandoned under Hohenlohe. The result was a policy of open imperialism, known as 'Weltpolitik'" (Geiss 1976, 60-64).

Germany's power and its transitional foreign policy to imperialism was a serious concern of American policymakers who were always quite fearful of potential foreign intrusion into the Western Hemisphere, but in actuality the Germans harbored no serious ambitions in the region (Mitchell 1996, 207). Carroll observes the "relatively insignificant role of the United States in Bismarck's diplomatic calculations" (1966, 410).

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<sup>45</sup> To a certain extent this was not a surprise given Hohenlohe's own cousin, Hermann Ernst Franz Bernhard, Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, was a former president of the German Colonial Society. Even Adolf Freiherr Marschall von Bieberstein, who served as Hohenlohe's Secretary of State, was also a member of the Colonial Society.

<sup>46</sup> The diplomatic crisis that soon erupted over the Kruger telegram that congratulated the Transvaal's president on successfully repelling the Jameson Raid in 1896 was a pivotal event.

Indeed, “contrary to the popular image of him, the kaiser expressed no interest in seizing the opportunity to grab a base or coaling station” in the region (Mitchell 1996, 203). Ultimately the historian Eber Malcom Carroll finds that “no serious conflict of national interests” existed between Germany and the United States (1966,409).<sup>47</sup> By and large, the only source of conflict between the two states concerned economic affairs: Germany’s agricultural sector faced increasing competition from American producers which was only exasperated by the McKinley Tariff of 1890 that raised duties on imports.<sup>48</sup> But as predicted by this dissertation, there is a low probability that economic disputes will trigger military conflicts. In fact, “when all was said and done,” observes Gatzke, “trade between the two nations increased rather than decreased in value, and Germany in particular was heavily dependent on imports of American oil, cotton, and food-stuffs” (1980, 43). The absence of any territorial dispute with the United States in the late nineteenth century corresponded with Germany’s policy decision not contest its emergence as a great power. German elites were far too focused on securing their newfound unification in Europe and, to a lesser extent, obtaining colonial conquests in its bid to become a global power.

### *Austria*

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<sup>47</sup> To be fair, immediately *after* the United States attained its great power status Germany did have a number of disputes with its new peer. For example, during the Venezuela Crisis of 1902 Germany joined several other great powers and imposed a naval blockade on the South American country in order to collect outstanding foreign debts. Initially the United States conveyed a sense of indifference to the blockade so long as the other great powers did not intend to conquer any territory in contravention of the Monroe Doctrine. Secretary of State John Hay even responded to the blockade by issuing assurances that the United States would not object provided that the other powers “did not contemplate any territorial acquisition” (Mitchell 1999, 80). The crisis ended, argues Mitchell, because the costs of intervention were much greater than the anticipated gains that would be achieved through a negotiated settlement. German policymakers were also eager to maintain cordial relations with England and wished to avoid stirring anti-German sentiment. Mitchell stresses that the blockade did not end as a result of Roosevelt’s reputed threat of deploying a U.S. naval fleet to force arbitration and in fact such assertions contradict historical evidence.

<sup>48</sup> See Gatzke (1980, 40) for a brief discussion of economic and trade disputes between the United States and Germany.

Austria was primarily concerned with domestic affairs during the period of the United States' rise to great power status. Although its economy had improved by the 1880s, Austria was still reeling from the financial crash of the Vienna Stock Exchange and a series of banking failures that ultimately led to the Panic of 1873. Politically the empire struggled to transition from an absolutist monarchy to a federalist democracy as evidenced by the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. "The crucial weakness of the Habsburg monarchy," observes Zbynek Zeman, "was always the tension between Vienna and Budapest, between attempts to centralize emanating from the capital and the will of the Hungarians to resist those attempts. Whatever common institutions might be set up, or compromises made, nothing could alter this basic fact" (1971, 25). Moreover, the empire proved unable to cope with the advent of mass politics and virulent nationalism that divided the state.

"By 1890 the power structure of the Habsburg Monarchy, already intricate, had become almost unmanageably complex" (Beller 1996, 140). The monarchy was torn between its two halves, rife with nationalist demands, constitutional struggles, and economic disparities. Benjamin Curtis (2013, 235-236) observes that during most of the Habsburg's last few years of rule it was struggling with modernization efforts and rapid socioeconomic changes. Internationally the monarchy's prestige was in shambles and the empire struggled to defend itself until its eventual demise with the conclusion of World War I. Curtis even goes so far to argue that the "decline in the Habsburgs' geopolitical standing continued such that by 1900 the monarchy was clearly no longer in the first rank of powers" (2013, 244). "As the century drew to a close," echoes Beller,



“the Monarchy represented not so much a ‘gorgeous mosaic’ as a patchwork quilt with more than one seam coming undone” (1996, 140).<sup>49</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Imperial Council struggled to reach any consensus on what constituted the national interest. The only significant foreign ventures that Austria pursued, especially following the Bosnian Crisis, were primarily located in the Balkans. In fact, according to Alan Sked, the only place in the world in which Austria-Hungary could exercise its power was in the Balkans (2001, 248).<sup>50</sup> For example, what began as a railway convention between Austria and Serbia quickly expanded to forge strong commercial ties and eventually a formal alliance in 1881. As a result of the Austro-Serbian alliance nearly all of Serbia’s imports and exports were tied to Austria, thereby forging a virtual customs union. Relations were so strong between the two states that Serbia’s Milan Obrenović proposed that Austria simply annex the principality. The Austrian diplomat, Gustav Kálnoky, declined the offer, responding that “Austria would have more profit from a peaceful and flourishing independent Serbia, in friendly relations with us, than from a rebellious province” (Macartney 1969, 597-598).<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, Austria was granted de facto administrative rule of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a result of the Congress of Berlin of 1878 despite it formally remaining under the Ottoman Empire.<sup>52</sup> Curtis (2013, 255-256) suggests that the acquisition was a move to

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<sup>49</sup> By the turn of the century, many of Austria-Hungary’s rivals doubted whether it could even still be considered a great power. It had become such a margin player in global affairs and plagued with internal strife that the German chancellor, Count Bülow, characterized Austria as a ‘neutral Switzerland’ (Beller 1996, 164-165). For their part, the British regarded Austria as “little more than a tool or satellite of the more powerful German empire” (Jelavich 1975, 139). Levy stresses, however, that periods of temporary weakness should not disqualify a state from retaining its position as a great power (1983, 24-26).

<sup>50</sup> Sked (2001, 270) adds that “there was no other outlet for its dynamic ambitions.”

<sup>51</sup> Relations remained strong during Obrenović’s tenure, however, would deteriorate following his resignation and the subsequent succession of Serbian leadership.

<sup>52</sup> The Congress of Berlin modified the preliminary Treaty of San Stefano that concluded the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano had contravened informal agreements made between Russian and Austrian officials prior to the war. According to Jelavich, “Britain was concerned chiefly with the Asiatic settlement, Austria-Hungary with the status of Bosnia and Hercegovina. Both opposed the creation of a large

not only offset losses elsewhere (i.e. Italy) but a means for Franz Joseph to demonstrate the continued relevancy of the empire in international affairs. Bosnia-Herzegovina, however, was of little utility to Austria and would only be a source of strife – especially following its formal annexation in 1908 which only deepened Serbian animosities.

Austria's foreign policy in the Balkans placed it squarely at odds with Russia that also sought to exert its influence in the region. Although Austria was able to reach a number of tenuous compromises with Russia, most notably the League of the Three Emperors, relations always remained tense and unstable. Indeed, Austrian policymakers operated under the assumption that war with Russia was inevitable (Beller 1996, 131-133). But while Andrassy concurred with his Magyar kinsman that Russia was the greatest threat to Austria-Hungary, he did not believe that the empire was "capable in this period of carrying on an active and aggressive foreign policy" (Jelavich 1975, 110). Instead, he favored the maintenance of the status quo and opposed the acquisition of additional territory. This policy was continued by his successors including Haymerle and Kálnoky.<sup>53</sup> Even when Agenor Goluchowski assumed the role of foreign minister in 1895 he too objected to further territorial expansion into the Balkans and simply regarded Austria's administrative role over Bosnia and Herzegovina as a means of precluding the further spread of Russian or Slavic influence.

In part due to internal divisions, it had no other significant territorial interests, let alone the autonomy or capacity to act upon other global strategic interests. Jelavich

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Bulgarian state" (1975, 121). Great power pressure – especially threat of war with Austria – compelled Russia to accede to the Congress.

<sup>53</sup> There appears, however, to be some disagreement among historians on this point. In particular, Taylor (1941, 196) seems disagree with Jelavich by contending that Austria actually began to pursue a more imperialistic foreign policy after Andrassy.

(1975, 137) concurs by adding that domestic divisions had hindered Austria's ability to exert any influence in European affairs while its lack of naval strength had prevented it from participating in international affairs outside of the continent, especially in North America.

### *Italy*

Italy is perhaps the most unusual incumbent great power at the time of the rise of the United States, not only because of its recent accession into the ranks of great powers but also due to its military weakness relative to its peers. The actual consummation of Italy's great power status is often dated to the *Risorgimento* or Italian unification that resulted in the unified Kingdom of Italy in the mid-nineteenth century (Bosworth 1996, 18). Other scholars identify the Congress of Berlin (1878) as the point which "marked Italy's first appearance as a great power in the concert of Europe" (Hearder and Waley 1963, 174). Although Italy was considered a great power during the period of America's ascendancy its role as a major actor was never taken seriously. Italy was considered to be such an unreliable participant in global affairs that an observer mocked that "it is scarcely worth the trouble to speak of her as a member of the Triple Alliance" (Carroll 1966, 438). Most of the powers simply assumed that Italy would never fulfill its obligations as an alliance member.<sup>54</sup> Bismarck even "dismissed Italy as of 'no account' in international affairs and as 'the fifth wheel of the wagon' of the European powers" (Gilmour 2011, 266). Nevertheless, Italy still satisfied the requirements of great power status and possessed the military wherewithal to act upon

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<sup>54</sup> It does seem, however, that Italy was later able to bolster its standing upon the renewal of the Triple Alliance in which it was able to extend its influence in the Balkan region at the expense of Austria-Hungary (Jelavich 1975, 135).

broad regional interests. “Although still weak by European standards,” observes Herring, “a newly unified Italy posed a regional danger to declining powers such as France and Austria-Hungary” (Herring 2008, 267).<sup>55</sup>

But given Italy’s domestic instability it is perhaps not surprising that it was unable to identify and articulate its global interests. Depending on who was in power at the time, Italian interests wavered between colonialism in Africa and engaging in power politics in Europe (Clark 1996, 47). Italy’s foreign policy in the Balkan region was also characterized as being “inconsistent” (Bosworth 1996, 22). But even its focus on African imperialism was hotly debated amongst statesmen and the subsequent implementation of colonial policy vacillated based on who was in office at the time. Opponents believed that the scarce resources spent in Africa would be better used in redeveloping the nation at home, while others countered that investment in Africa would yield little utility reminiscent of Germany’s own colonial difficulties. Not only was Italy unable to articulate its vital national interests, but it also struggled to identify which rival posed the greatest threat. Northerners were ardent patriots who regarded Austria as their eternal enemy, while a new generation of Southerners saw France as Italy’s most prominent rival given the economic competition it posed and France’s territorial claims in Africa (Bosworth 1979, 9-10, 24).

Irrespective of its relative weakness and struggle to articulate its national interests, the primary focus of Italy’s foreign and military policy was its colonial ambitions in Africa (Gilmour 2011, 267). Martin Clark argues that Italy’s initial colonial

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<sup>55</sup> Gilmour (2011, 264) also contends that Italy’s large army was disproportionate to its security requirements and characterizes it as being “excessive for a poor, unthreatened country without colonies.” He does add, however, that the military was less for purposes of national security than it was to indoctrinate and unify citizens as Italians.

programs were not only used to bolster its position relative to that of France, but also served as a means of relieving domestic dissent. "Colonies were a potential 'safety-valve' for Southern peasants: they would find a secure plot of land and a modest prosperity, and social unrest at home would be defused" (1996, 47). Clark does suggest, however, that Italy's colonial program in Africa was more accidental given the absence of any coherent global interests (1996, 99). Indeed, the Red Sea port of Massawa was of little utility to Italy given the absence of indigenous trade that operated through it.

When Francesco Crispi assumed the premiership he inherited a rather inchoate colonial program still reeling from the massacre of Italian troops at the Battle of Dogali (1887) in Eritrea. He vowed to avenge Italy's defeat at Dogali and was an ardent proponent of aggressive colonial expansion in Africa. His jingoistic foreign policy was intended to counter French influence in Africa and achieve his aspiration of securing a colonial empire for Italy (Hearder and Waley 1963, 180). Indeed, he dramatically increased military spending based on the unfounded assertion that France was preparing to invade Italy (Duggan 2014, 167-168). Although Italy already occupied the Red Sea port of Massawa, his attempts to expand further inland proved futile and particularly embarrassing as a mistranslated treaty meant that Italy did not actually possess a protectorate over Ethiopia. Crispi's aggressive foreign policies culminated in the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1895-1896) but Italy's climatic defeat at the Battle of Adwa led to his ouster as prime minister.

Antonio di Rudiní assumed the premiership after Crispi and reversed Italy's expansionary policies. Although Italy still retained Eritrea and Somalia, it would not

resume its opportunistic African policy until the early twentieth century during Giovanni Giolitti's tenure.<sup>56</sup> Benedetto Croce contends that Italy was ill-prepared for its foray into colonial adventurism and that it chose Africa as its prey simply because it was the last remaining foreign vestige not already claimed by other great powers, adding that many of the mistakes Italy made in Africa were due to a "lack of political and military experience" (1929, 122-125). Given Italy's quagmire in Africa and focus on countering France, it is therefore not surprising that Italy opted for a noninterventionist stance toward an ascendant United States. Indeed, Bosworth (1996, 24) goes so far as to argue that Italy's foreign policy outright ignored the Western Hemisphere during this period.

## **Summary of Strategies**

We can now summarize the strategy each great power selected in response to the rise of the United States during the late nineteenth century. The United States grew in terms of all three defining characteristics of great powers: power, interests, and behavior. By once again focusing on the incumbents' national interests, as well as the threats and opportunities to these interests, the model provides insight as to how incumbent great powers chose to respond to an ascendant United States.

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<sup>56</sup> Although outside the timeframe of this dissertation, for a brief summary of Italy's nationalistic revival in the early twentieth century see Hearder and Waley (1963, 187-194). Gilmour (2011, 268-269) also notes that Italy's colonial ambitions would not be renewed until 1911 with the Italo-Turkish War. For a more detailed review of Italy's excursion into Libya, see Bosworth (1979).

<b>Time Horizon</b>	Long-term	England (3) France Austria Russia Italy Germany	(4)
	Short-term	(1)	(2)
		Other Great Powers	Candidate Great Power (United States)

**Potential Adversary**

Figure 4.1: United States (1878-1898)

Figure 4.1 reveals that no existing great power preempted the rise of the United States given the absence of any significant territorial interest in the North American region. The entire right-hand column is empty, signifying that none of the incumbents chose to contest the United States in either the short or long-term. Instead, all major powers focused on either protecting existing interests from rival great powers or exploited opportunities to advance their territorial interests elsewhere. Britain was most concerned about safeguarding India from Russia, as well as its colonial holdings in Africa from French infiltration. For their part, Russia was interested in weakening Britain's position in Central Asia and concerned about the protection of its western flank from German attack. At the same time, Austria's primary foreign policy focus was directed toward the Balkans which placed it squarely at odds with Russia who also

sought to exert its influence in the region. Meanwhile, despite ongoing domestic issues, the remaining great powers all competed against one another for the acquisition of colonies: France, Germany, and Italy all pursued an imperialist foreign policy that exploited opportunities to acquire African territory. Above all, none of the existing great powers had any territorial interest in North America and even regarded the region as being of minor importance relative to ongoing disputes elsewhere in the world. As a result, in Figure 4.1 all incumbents powers are located in the top-left quadrant given that their foreign policies prioritized other great powers in the long-term.

These findings comport with Colin Elman's assessment that the United States was able to achieve great power status in the late nineteenth century because the "anarchic international system provided only weak cues for European great powers to block its bid" and thus there was no incentive for European powers to intervene (2004, 563).<sup>57</sup> Both insular and continental powers were compelled to assign precedence to their own regions and therefore had no incentive to balance against the United States. This helps account for what is colloquially referred to as the 'missing war' as most variants of realism would predict that incumbent powers should have balanced against the United States. The preemptive paradox model helps account for this discrepancy.

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<sup>57</sup> Elman's study differs from this dissertation, however, by defining 'incentives' in structural terms rather than unit-level interests. Moreover, Elman also explicitly includes the key offensive realist assumption that states obtain security through power maximization. Many other neorealist scholars including Schweller (1999) also discuss the rise of new powers explicitly in terms of system structure.



## Realist Theory

Once again I evaluate the performance of my preemptive paradox model by comparing it with realist theories such as balance of power theory. To be clear, this dissertation does not suggest that balance of power theory lacks any explanatory power over the cases of interest. Balance of power can still be useful in explaining interstate relationships, however, it is limited to dynamics strictly among the great powers themselves. For example, many incumbents were concerned about the long-term growth in Germany's power and were certainly attuned to the distribution of power between alliances. Britain's foreign secretary, Edward Grey, was inclined to view international relations strictly in terms of balances of power which then influenced his policy recommendations vis-à-vis Germany (Bourne 1970, 184-186). At the same time, Bismarck remained sensitive to the possibility that England may align with either France or Russia that would end their period of 'splendid isolationism' and alter the European balance of power (Carroll 1966, 353). Indeed, the distribution of power among allies was an important factor that influenced behavior between great powers. According to the historian Hugh Seton-Watson (1967, 578), one of the purposes of the Franco-Russian Alliance was to ensure peace and a balance of power on the European continent. Lastly, the resolution of conflicts and the concomitant alteration to balances of power motivated great power policies. For example, the great powers viewed Russia's success in the Russo-Turkish War and the subsequent Treaty of San Stefano as disrupting existing balances of power in Europe. Under enormous pressure, Russia acquiesced to other great powers who insisted on renegotiating the outcome of the war at the Congress of Berlin (Jelavich 1987, 73-74). At the same time, Bismarck concluded that

Germany needed to support Austria-Hungary in order to maintain its position as a bulwark to potential Russia expansionism which would only undermine the existing distribution of power.

Unfortunately balance of power offers only an incomplete explanation and does not extend to the relationships between incumbent great powers and rising candidate powers. The empirical record demonstrates that most existing powers were not concerned about the mere increase in material power among weaker states who sought great power status. It is thus not surprising that while Wilson (1987, 16-17) finds that the term 'balance of power' was frequently invoked by policymakers at the time, he argues that it was essentially a meaningless phrase: "The balance of power was an expression... rather than an objective that was actively pursued."<sup>58</sup> This may help account for the absence of any countervailing coalition that should have formed in response to the rise of the United States. Ensuring the material balance of international power was not a priority for policymakers who instead devoted their efforts and resources to advancing their domestic interests. Indeed, many policymakers and elites in the cases under investigation in this dissertation explicitly denounced the suggestion that power politics should influence foreign policy. British Prime Minister Gladstone, for example, even admitted that he did not believe in power politics as the basis of

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<sup>58</sup> Other scholars and historians share the sentiment that balance of power played only a marginal role in determining great power strategy. In 1939 the English diplomat, Harold Nicolson, argued that the great powers each had competing notions of what defined a 'balance of power' and added that Italy's behavior was not based on 'power-policy' but was instead more opportunistic (Bosworth 1996, 15-16). Mahajan (2002, 7-8) also seems to confirm the rather inconsequential meaning of 'balance of power' to British policymakers who conceded that they did not possess the military wherewithal to restore any European imbalances should they materialize.

international relations and instead advocated a liberal foreign policy that promoted rule of law (Ramm 1987, 86).<sup>59</sup>

Realist theories generally assume that incumbents will react to the emergence of new states that alter balances of power and global polarity, but the historical record reveals that this was not necessarily the case and great powers did not respond to the growth in American power. Indeed, Herring insists that the “War of 1898 did not produce a realignment in the global balance of power” (2008, 336).<sup>60</sup> Kennedy seems to agree, noting that although the United States had clearly become a great power by the turn of the twentieth century the European powers were not concerned by its rise in North America and tended to see it as “less a factor in the international power balances” (1987, 248). As argued in the previous chapter, it appears that while balance of power theory may account for relations among existing great powers it offers little utility in explaining their behavior toward a rising peer.

The preemptive paradox model instead proposes that national interests, and the threats and opportunities to those interests, are the primary factors that determine a great power’s military strategy toward rising peers. In the case of the United States, the incumbent great powers did not maintain any vital interests in North America such that most defaulted to nonintervention in face of a rising peer. As Zakaria (1998, 169) explains, both England and Germany assured Washington that they “had no territorial ambitions whatsoever.”<sup>61</sup> Layne (1993, 43) similarly argues that Britain was willing to

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<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, Gillard (1987, 130) seems to contend that Salisbury took a more balanced approach to foreign policy by recognizing that both relative power and interests play a critical role in a state’s behavior.

<sup>60</sup> To be fair, however, he does acknowledge that the war did “mark the onset of a new era in world politics” (2008, 336).

<sup>61</sup> Although writing about the Venezuela blockade which occurred immediately after the United States’ rise to power, Nancy Mitchell (1996, 186) describes Germany’s behavior toward North America as being “exceedingly cautious” and even “timid.” Indeed, the German Navy secretary, Alfred Tirpitz, characterized the region as being a “marginal

accommodate America's rise since it did not constitute any meaningful threat to its national interests.

This emphasis on the causal role of national interests is reflected by other scholars and stands in contrast to neorealist theories of international relations which maintains that states predominantly respond to structural incentives. Edgar

Feuchtwanger (2001, 79), for example, contends that domestic preferences and the personalities of elite policymakers matter in determining the behavior of states.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, in his study of the rise of the United States, Meiser (2015) correctly argues that scholars should pay greater attention to the causal role of domestic forces in shaping a state's foreign policy and grand strategy.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately the incumbent great powers gave little thought to the United States prior to the Spanish-American War as the US simply did not figure into their strategic calculations (Brandenburg 1927, 138).

This outcome can largely be attributed to the absence of any vital territorial holdings in North America and the priority placed on national interests elsewhere. Indeed,

Ninkovich contends that the other great powers "took little notice of America" because it simply did not affect their "vital interests" (2014, 94).

## The Aftermath

The emergence of the United States as a great power during the late nineteenth century had enormous implications for international relations throughout the twentieth

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theater" (Mitchell 1996, 188). Meanwhile, although England was still a strong regional power broker, Mitchell finds that English foreign policy was generally 'retreating' from the Caribbean at this time.

<sup>62</sup> He adds that foreign policy is sometimes used by elites as an instrument to influence domestic politics as well.

<sup>63</sup> Meiser's study differs from this dissertation by examining the foreign policy of the United States and not the policies of other great powers.

century. It would go on to replace Britain as the dominant force in global affairs and would shape the post-WWII economic order. Indeed, the United States effectively became the leading proponent of a neoliberal economic and political system of global governance. Above all, it would become the world's leading superpower largely based on the preponderance of military power amassed during the twentieth century.

Yet the rise of the United States is an anomaly from the perspective of many variants of realist theory. The relative change in the distribution of global power did not trigger the formation of a counterbalancing coalition, nor did existing great powers attempt to thwart the rise of a regional hegemon.<sup>64</sup> This dissertation attempted to provide an explanation for the absence of preemption by demonstrating that a great power's foreign policy toward rising states is premised on national interests. In particular, incumbents formulate their military strategy according to the various threats and opportunities to their interests. The reason existing great powers chose not to preempt the rise of the United States is therefore attributed to the absence of any vital interest in North America.

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<sup>64</sup> Schweller concludes that "America's rise to great power status did not provoke a counter-coalition" (1999, 19).

## V. Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the foreign policies of existing great powers when faced with the emergence of a new peer. It presented an explanation based on domestic interests and the various threats and opportunities for states to advance such interests. The hypothesis was then evaluated using two cases – Prussia and the United States – which exhibited a great deal of variation in terms of both the independent variable and the outcome of interest. Of course, a critical task remains to determine how well the model can be generalized to other instances of rising powers. In this concluding chapter I examine the external validity of the preemptive paradox and then close with a brief discussion of the significance of the model and its relationship to other scholarship on national security policy.

### Evaluating External Validity

While the initial results of the preemptive paradox model seem to perform well in the cases of Prussia and the United States, the next task is to investigate how well the results can be generalized and the findings extended to other instances of rising great powers.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation of external validity, however, still occurs within the restrictive scope conditions of only encompassing states that rise to great power status. In other words, in this section I seek to evaluate whether the model can be generalized to the broader subclass of rising powers and whether the causal relationship still holds.

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<sup>1</sup> Shadish et al. define external validity as the extent to which the “causal relationship holds over variations in persons, settings, treatments, and outcomes” (Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002, 83).

## *Russia*

Russia's emergence as a great power began with Peter the Great's ambition to extend Russian territory to the Black and Caspian seas, as well as to secure a Baltic port. By 1700, Russia had focused its sights on Sweden and launched an offensive war of conquest but was quickly routed during the initial Battle of Narva by a Swedish relief force. The setback served as a catalyst for significant military reforms of the Russian army that would go on to defeat Sweden in the Battle of Poltava (1709). Poltava is generally regarded as marking the decline of the Swedish Empire and the concomitant rise of Russia.<sup>2</sup> "The destruction of Sweden's Baltic empire and the eclipse of Poland-Lithuania," argues Robert Frost, "secured Russia's position as a great power and transformed the European states system" (2000, 13).

The preemptive paradox model offers a reasonable account as to how other incumbent powers responded to Russia's ascendancy. In particular, it explains why most existing great powers chose not to preempt and contest Russia, despite increases in its material power and aggressive intentions. First and foremost, besides Sweden no other great power possessed vital territorial interests in the Baltic region. Second, the primary concern of existing great powers was in securing a favorable outcome in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1715).<sup>3</sup> In other words, these incumbent powers were focused on addressing short-term threats posed by a rival great power, thereby corresponding with the bottom-left quadrant of the preemptive paradox typology

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<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive treatment of the battle see Englund (2003). For an overview of military tactics and weaponry of the Great Northern War see Frost (2000).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Giblet (2009, 32) and Roider (1982, 23).

introduced in Chapter 2. While incumbents were certainly attuned to Russia's rise they instead prioritized other national interests or were encumbered by rival powers.

### *Italy*

The Italian Unification or *Risorgimento* marked the rise of Italy to great power status in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, Harry Hearder and Daniel Waley identify the Congress of Berlin as the point which "marked Italy's first appearance as a great power in the concert of Europe" (1963, 174). Although Italy is generally considered a tangential actor and the 'least of the great powers,' a brief discussion of its ascendancy is still useful in evaluating the foreign policy responses of incumbents (Bosworth 1979).

The unification process was led by pro-nationalists, particularly intellectuals in exile, who revolted against Austrian rule in an effort to establish a representative government over the Italian provinces. The period was marked by three separate wars of independence and culminated with the capture of Rome in 1870. Upon review, the strategies of existing great powers at the time and their involvement in the Italian Unification appear consistent with the hypotheses presented in this dissertation. Indeed, the independence movement constituted a clear threat to Austria's territorial interests, especially the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia. From the perspective of France, the Italian Unification was an opportunity to weaken its primary great power rival Austria and acquire the additional territories of Nice and Savoy. The other incumbents did not have any vital territorial interests in the Italian peninsula and, as predicted by the model, adhered to a noninterventionist policy.



## *Japan*

Japan attained the rank of a great power with its defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) which was also the first modern war in which a European power was defeated by an Asian state.<sup>4</sup> “For Japan,” argues Jacob Frank, “it marked the moment when the nation was accepted as a great power” (2015). Sydney Giffard concurs, finding that Japan’s victory in the war “amounted to certification of Great Power status” (1994, xvii).

Japan’s ascendancy corresponds neatly with the preemptive paradox model given the significance of territorial interests and the effect it had on state behavior. “Russia long equated security with expansion, protecting earlier territorial acquisitions by adding new ones” observes Geoffrey Jukes (2002, 7). Dating back to the 1850s, Russian expansion was focused toward the east since western alternatives were blocked by the looming presence of European powers. The last half of the nineteenth century saw Russia establishing a number of Asian settlements, territorial acquisitions, and expansion of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Advocates of a more aggressive eastern policy believed Russia should be proactive in solidifying territorial gains in Manchuria and further regarded Korea as an integral component to success. “Korea was essential for the security of Manchuria,” finds J.N. Westwood, “if Japan took Korea, sooner or later she would have Manchuria too” (1986, 14). From the perspective of the preemptive paradox it is therefore not surprising that Russia chose to contest Japan’s growth. Compromise was not possible, says Hans Rogger, as each side clearly delimited their own “exclusive spheres of influence in Korea and Manchuria respectively” (1983, 178).

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<sup>4</sup> Singer & Small (1966, 10n8) identify Japan as a great power as early as 1895.

The other incumbent power did not have strong territorial interests in the region and were instead more concerned at the time with balancing against the growth in Germany's power. Indeed, all other incumbents remained neutral observers in the Russo-Japanese War.

### *China*

China is the most recent instance of a successful rise of a great power but most contemporary research has instead focused on its prospective challenge to global hegemony and neglected the course of events that led to its initial ascendancy. While it is certainly important to understand China's potential transition to a regional or even global hegemon, policymakers must remain attuned to the antecedent conditions that propel a state to become a great power in the first place and the associated probabilities for conflict.

In the aftermath of the civil war, Mao Zedong embarked on a comprehensive modernization program with the most notable being the 'Great Leap Forward' initiative that focused on heavy industries.<sup>5</sup> China also demonstrated its robust military capacity and the capability to project power beyond its borders as witnessed in the Korean War and Sino-Indian War. Additionally, China became a nuclear power in the mid-1960s and tested its first nuclear weapon in 1964 at the Lop Nur test site. By the 1970s, China had assumed an increasingly prominent role in global affairs which included a permanent seat at the UN Security Council and, largely as a result of Nixon's proactive diplomacy,

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<sup>5</sup> Even scholars working in the subfield of 'rise and fall' realism have noted the robust growth of China as it ascended to great power status (Organski 1968, 342). Other scholars working within power transition theory, however, have offered a more negative assessment of Mao's modernization efforts, finding that "he left behind a China with a dysfunctional and backward economy" (Lai 2011, 44).

it had also become a de facto balancer against the Soviet Union. It is perhaps not surprising that the United States and other incumbent powers began to perceive China as a great power (Thies 2016, 103). Indeed, Yongjin Zhang (1998, 92) traces the rise of China to a great power as beginning in 1949 and culminating in the 1970s when it began to contribute to the structural international political order.<sup>6</sup> “For all of these reasons,” concludes Levy, “the People’s Republic of China [became] a member of the Great Power system from 1949 to 1975” (1983, 43).

The preemptive paradox model seeks to address a stark shortcoming in the realist literature that is unable to account for the absence of any counterbalancing coalition despite the significant growth in China’s power during this time period. Moreover, the historical record reveals that while many incumbent powers regarded China as a threat they still chose to peacefully accommodate and engage China. The preemptive paradox model offers a reasonable account as to why no existing great power sought to contest China’s ascendancy between 1949 and the mid-1970s. In particular, none of the incumbent powers maintained any vital territorial interests in mainland China and were more concerned with balancing against rival great powers during the height of the Cold War. This outcome once again corresponds to the bottom-left quadrant of the preemptive paradox typology. The case of China is also reminiscent of the United States as they were both were able to achieve great power status without external conquest that would challenge vital territorial interests of incumbent powers.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Ross (2006, 369) even identifies China as the *sole* great power in Asia following the decline of the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

## Contribution & Importance of Dissertation

Incumbents have greeted the emergence of new great powers using military force to contest their rise, but incumbents have also acted in a contradictory manner by choosing not to respond whatsoever. This variation in the outcome is perplexing from the perspective of most existing realist theories of international relations. For example, the interaction between major and minor powers lies outside the scope conditions of power transition theory which is primarily focused on only the most powerful states in the international system. While other theories such as balance of power and balance of threat do possess some explanatory leverage they still face a number of salient anomalies when investigating great power behavior in light of a rising peer. In many cases incumbents chose not respond to disturbances in regional balances of material power or did not counter the aggressive intentions of rising states.

This dissertation also highlights the importance of studying the relationship between different state types. Much of the existing literature focuses only on the great powers themselves and their relationships with one another. Power transition theory is most straightforward in its emphasis on the dynamics between the two most powerful states in the system, but many scholars working within the realist paradigm also limit their research to interactions among only great powers since they have the greatest impact on global affairs. Indeed, Goedele De Keersmaecker finds that many scholars working within the realist paradigm have intentionally ignored the study of rising powers and consider them to be irrelevant. As a result, she argues that such exclusion “gives us a limited lens on international relations” (2017, 115). Therefore, one of the central tasks of this dissertation was to argue that understanding the implications of the rise of new

great powers is an equally important undertaking. The phenomenon has been neglected by the wider body of international relations scholarship despite containing critical insight on the occurrence of interstate war. Moreover, states that successfully attain the rank of great power have the greatest impact on global affairs and understanding their ascendancy yields valuable information on potential alterations to interstate dynamics.

Lastly, the findings of this study contrast with realist theories by demonstrating that interstate war and conflict is avoidable despite increases in material power or even bellicose behavior.<sup>7</sup> This dissertation contends that a scarcity of resources and security do not inherently trigger conflict – even when a revisionist state pursues territorial expansion. Great powers maintain a wide range of vital interests that span many different issue areas. Unless an aspirant directly challenges an incumbent's interests deemed vital by domestic elites and are territorial in nature, then conflict is not likely to occur.

This study sought to explain how great powers respond to the rise of a new peer and is premised on domestic interests. Policymakers first establish the primary goals and desired end states they wish to achieve, and serves as the starting point by which incumbents formulate their military strategy. States will employ military force to protect existing interests from threats or use offensive force when an opportunity presents itself to acquire additional benefits. As Schweller has argued, the rise of great powers is a “product not only of internal pressure but also of threats and opportunities in the external environment” (1999, 3).

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a central argument of this dissertation is that realism is undermined by its assumption that states are on an inevitable collision course for war. Schweller argues, for example, that “because there is no Leviathan in world politics to enforce agreements made between, or to keep the peace among, nation-states, international conflict is inevitable” (1999, 5).

But given their vast array of interests and finite military resources great powers must somehow prioritize their military strategy and be selective in the application of force against rivals. This dissertation therefore introduced a typological outline based on two additional variables that illustrate how incumbents formulate their strategy. First, incumbents generally face two potential types of rivals which include another great power or the rising candidate power. In general, incumbents are most concerned about rival great powers since they inherently possess the capacity to undermine their security and interests. The second variable of the typology is the timeframe for action which is bifurcated into the short and long-term. As to be expected, incumbents are most likely to use military force in the short-term since there is little time to implement precautionary defensive measures. In contrast, states have more policy options available to them in the long-term which may include a diplomatic resolution of conflicting interests or even the build-up of internal military power.

Incumbents are ultimately most concerned about rival great powers in the short-term since they possess the capacity to undermine their interests. This result helps account for the empirical paradox surrounding the relatively low rate of preemption against rising great powers. Aspiring powers generally have a more limited global presence which reduces the chance of a conflict of interest, possess relatively weaker military capabilities, and face numerous obstacles in their quest to attain great power status. In other words, despite the patent emergence of a new peer, existing great powers will still opt to contest other major powers since they have the greatest bearing on their national security and interests.

The hypothesis articulated by this dissertation comports with other research areas, particularly scholars who study contemporary military policy. Donald Snow, for example, has defined national security in terms of vital and less-than-vital interests which combine to form the underlying criteria by which states operate: “When the interests of states come into conflict, the question of which states’ interests will prevail also arises, and this leads to trying to determine how important interests are, where and how they are threatened, and thus what means will be employed to attempt to achieve them” (2017, 34). Given that states value certain interests more so than others, Snow formulates a typology to demarcate the threshold at which states will employ military force and contest rivals. Similar to this dissertation, he argues that territorial threats are most likely to provoke military action whereas disputes over tariff schedules would only necessitate a nonmilitary response. This basic assumption lies at the heart of this dissertation as the identification of national interests represents the starting point at which states formulate their military strategy, particularly in face of the rise of a new great power.

As discussed earlier, one of the most striking findings of this dissertation is the rarity of military conflict and incidents of contestation given the large number of potential great power dyads. This result is the product of vital national interests which are both rare and finite. The inviolability of state borders and broader territorial possessions are few and far between, thereby lowering the probability of interstate conflict. Given that aspiring great powers seldom challenge the territorial interests of incumbent powers we are not likely to see high incidents of contestation.<sup>8</sup> Even when an aspirant seeks to

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<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Ian Lustick (1997) argues that the rise of all great powers has been marked by some degree of conflict. Instead, this dissertation counters that it is essential to establish a temporal framework with which to conduct such

undermine an incumbent's territorial possession other great powers are not likely to participate if their own vital interests are not threatened. Meanwhile, the recent decline of interstate conflict may be attributed to the sanctity and norm of state borders which have become increasingly regarded as being fixed.

This general decline in great power conflicts may also be the result of an interactive effect with the contemporary emphasis on economic matters rather than territorial disputes. Indeed, in 1975 a Congressional panel found that "the nature of foreign policy problems facing this country has changed dramatically since 1947. So has the nature of international power. Increasingly, economic forces define the strength or weakness of nations, and economic issues dominate the agenda of international negotiations" (Rosenwasser and Warner 2011, 21). The Congressional finding corresponds to the fundamental assumption proffered by this dissertation that economic disputes are less likely to elicit a direct military response and is consistent with the findings of other scholars. "The decline of successful wars of territorial aggrandizement during the last half century is palpable," observes Mark Zacher, who adds that "there has not been a case of successful territorial aggrandizement since 1976" (2001, 244). More recent studies also seem to confirm the hypothesis that increasing economic interdependence corresponds to a decline in interstate war (Gelpi and Grieco 2008; Martin, Mayer, and Thoenig 2008; Hegre, Oneal, and Russett 2010).

This dissertation demonstrates how and why incumbents respond to the emergence of new great powers. It seeks to fill a salient lacuna in the current

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analysis. While certainly true that most states have engaged in interstate war at some point in their history, my research focuses exclusively on the time period leading up to a state's attainment of great power status and discovers that many dyads abstained from violent conflict. Moreover, this dissertation is only interested in the behavior of existing great powers in response to the rise of a new challenger.



international relations literature and offer useful insight on the occurrence of interstate conflict. Overall this study reveals that the emergence of new great powers does not necessarily induce global instability and that the international system is able to incorporate new states with minimal conflict or major war.

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- Zacher, Mark. "The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force." *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001): 215–250.
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## Education

- PhD Syracuse University (2017)**  
*Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs*  
Fields: International Relations, Public Policy
- MA Syracuse University (2012)**  
Economics
- MPP Harvard University (2010)**  
*Kennedy School of Government*  
International and Global Affairs
- BA University of Colorado (2003)**  
History

## Academic Positions

### **University of New Haven: Assistant Professor of National Security**

August 2017 – Present

- NSEC 1100: Intro to National Security Studies
- NSEC 4578/6678: Homeland Security & Terrorism
- NSEC 2251: Quantitative Applications in National Security
- CJST 6613: Quantitative Applications in Criminal Justice

### **SUNY Cortland: Adjunct Professor**

January 2016 – December 2016

- POL 112: Introduction to Political Research

### **Syracuse University: Adjunct Professor**

August 2016 – December 2016

- PSC 202: Introduction to Political Analysis

### **Syracuse University: Teaching Associate**

August 2014 – May 2015

- Administrative support to assist incoming doctoral students.
- Developing and organizing department conferences and seminars.
- Curriculum development of the Political Science Research Workshop (PSRW).
- Peer mentoring with new graduate students and teaching assistants.

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### **Syracuse University: Teaching Assistant**

August 2010 – May 2017

- PSC 124: International Relations
- PSC 202: Introduction to Political Analysis
- PSC 324: Constitutional Law I
- PSC 329: The Modern American Presidency
- HST 102: American History since 1865

### **Harvard University: Course Assistant**

August 2009 – May 2010

- IGA 302: National Security Organization & Management
- IGA 303: Defense Resource Allocation & Force Planning

## **Publications**

### **Peer Reviewed**

- “Using Combat Losses of Medical Personnel to Estimate the Value of Battlefield Trauma Care in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.” *Defence and Peace Economics* 26, no. 5 (2015): 465-490. (Co-authors: Ying Deng, Chris Rohlf, and Ryan Sullivan.)
- “The Colonial War Revisited: Coding the Military Outcomes.” *African Security Review* 21, no. 3 (2012): 68-74.
- “Home Away From Home: Dynamics of Counterinsurgency Warfare.” *Comparative Strategy* 31, no. 3 (2012): 235-252.
- “Victory Over Terrorism: Essential Services as Counterinsurgency Strategy.” *Joint Force Quarterly* 53 (2009): 110-115.

### **Op-Ed**

- “New York City Terror Attack is the New Normal.” *The Hill*, December 11, 2017.
- “ISIS Turns to Lone Wolves for Christmas Attacks as Caliphate Crumbles.” *The Hill*, November 29, 2017.
- “Las Vegas Highlights Islamist Terrorism is not America’s Greatest Domestic Threat.” *The Hill*, October 4, 2017.
- “We Should Question US Rail Safety in Wake of Failed London Train Bombing.” *The Hill*, September 25, 2017.

### **Works in Progress**

- “The Missing War and the Rise of the United States.”
- “Understanding Assassinations.”
- “The Rebel Alliance: An Application of the Advocacy Coalition Framework.”
- “Never Mind the Soup, Let Them Eat Cake: Understanding Asymmetric War.”
- “Warfighting Regimes: Combatant Commands & Grand Strategy.”

### **Miscellaneous**

- “Sculpting a Smarter Command: Strategies for Improving Expertise at AFRICOM.”



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## Professional Employment

### **Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism (Syracuse, NY)**

August 2015 – May 2016

- Research Assistant

### **Department of Defense: Consultant (Africa Command, AFRICOM)**

October 2009 – April 2010

- Identified mechanisms to augment relevant expertise at the Command.
- Proposed managerial strategies to improve AFRICOM's decision-making abilities.

### **Department of State: Policy Advisor (Baghdad, Iraq)**

May 2006 – June 2008

- Served as US Embassy liaison and advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq.
- Offered GoI leadership strategic recommendations for economic, political, and reconstruction efforts.
- Diplomatic engagement and mediation to facilitate inter-ministerial dialogue.
- Ensured coordination between local and national levels of Iraqi government.
- Collected HUMINT and miscellaneous intelligence to facilitate political analysis.
- Provided DoD and DoS principals briefings and analysis of Iraqi operations.

## Awards & Scholarships

- Syracuse University: *Roscoe-Martin Dissertation Grant* (\$750)
- Syracuse University: *Outstanding Teaching Assistant (OTA) Award*
- Harvard University: *James N. Snitzler Scholarship* (\$10,000)
- Harvard University: *Emma Gildersleeve Lane Scholarship* (\$1,317)
- Department of State: *Franklin Award for Public Diplomacy*

## Professional Training & Software

- Future Professoriate Program
- Certificate in University Teaching (April 2017)
- Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR)
- STATA, L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X, R, SPSS