

**THEORISING THE ABSENCE OF BALANCING BEHAVIOUR: COMPETING  
NEO- REALIST EXPLANATIONS**

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
for award of the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**2021**

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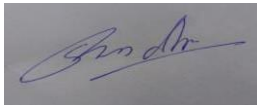
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I declare that the thesis entitled “THEORISING THE ABSENCE OF BALANCING BEHAVIOUR: COMPETING NEO-REALIST EXPLANATIONS” submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.



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## Acknowledgements

I would foremost like to thank my supervisor Prof. Rajesh Rajagopalan, without whose constant support, patience and guidance this thesis would not have come into being. His love and passion for International Relations theory has been a sustained source of strength and inspiration during the writing of the thesis. The research outline of the thesis almost entirely took shape while attending his *Realism and World Politics* class lectures and discussion.

I am also thankful to the University Grants Commission for providing me with the Senior Research Fellowship, which allowed me to have a sense of financial security while pursuing research. I would also like to acknowledge professors, batch-mates and staff of Centre for International Politics, Organization and Disarmament. It is within the confines of this institution that my love for academics, research and International Politics as a discipline has taken shape, for which I shall always remain grateful.

I am most thankful to Dr. David Blagden, Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M Paine for taking time out to read and review large parts of the thesis. Their insightful comments helped raise questions which I had mistakenly thought were settled. Their interventions guided me towards new paths of enquiry.

I would also like to thank some of my friends who bravely volunteered to engage me in conversations on subjects outside their fields (and sometimes interest) out of sheer empathy and camaraderie. Their feedback and criticisms have left a strong imprint in the final output. As such, I would like to mention the names of Bhargavi Charan, Gaurav Saini, Jinaly Dani, Gitanjali Prasad and Nicholas Rixon.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my parents Indrani Raimedhi and Ambika Raimedhi for their unconditional support as well as faith in me. Their care and understanding has been indispensable for the fulfilment of this project.



Sidharth Raimedhi

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
EDC	European Defence Community
EMU	European Monetary Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
MLF	Multilateral Force Treaty
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
PRC	People's Republic of China
GMD	Guamingdong
ROK	Republic of Korea
CIA	Central Intelligence of America
NSC	National Security Council (U.S.)
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty (Nuclear)
MBFR	Mutual and Balanced Forces Reduction Agreement
Comintern	Communist International
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
ICBM	Inetcontinental Ballistic Missile



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Overview**

The continuing lack of balancing against the United States since the end of the Cold War has led to a vigorous debate on the merits and pitfalls of Waltzian Balance of Power theory (Chan 2012; Nexon 2009; Kaufman et al 2007; Levy and Thompson 2010). There has also been a certain understanding that the abstract and formal character of Waltzian theory may be exacting costs on the theory in the form of greater inapplicability on the real world (Wohlforth 1997; Levy and Thompson 2011). This insight has opened the door to series of new ‘intermediate’ Balance of Power theories (Levy and Thompson 2011; Blagden, 2011; Fiammenghi 2011; Brooks and Wohlforth 2002). These theories derive their basic axioms and formal structure from Waltzian Balance of Power theory and yet hope to add some element of practical law that either clarifies the scope conditions of the theory or better explains international processes and outcomes. In other words, they accept Balance of Power theory as a useful model for explaining outcomes and recurring patterns in international politics, but also acknowledge that the theory may need to be somewhat modified in order to better account for contemporary state strategies as well as international history. In essence, these theories argue, “yes, states balance against the strongest power in the system...But not if the strongest power is....”. Hence, every new modification of balance of power theory is also a theory that specifies exceptions to the rule and thus – scope conditions. The exception for William Wohlforth is preponderance (too powerful to balance/after hegemony). For Jack Levy and William R. Thompson, it is maritime states and for Blagden and others it is the insularity of states that explains the lack of balancing against the U.S. The problem of there being as many balance of power theories as there are theorists seems to be intricately tied to the puzzle of a lack of ‘balance’ against the U.S.

This thesis seeks to understand which theory best explains the ostensive non-occurrence of balancing against a particular country (United States) over its long history. Another aim of this project is to narrow the gap between ‘Balance of Power’ as a theory and its actual practice in the real world.

Since all the foregoing hypotheses had only emerged as responses to the fact that balancing behavior against the U.S in the post cold war world has been conspicuously missing, this thesis assesses if the hypotheses square well with responses to American power in different stages and in earlier periods. The only way to help determine the empirical validity of the competing hypotheses is by testing them on cases where the antecedent conditions are very similar to the empirical case which had generated those hypotheses in the first place.

## **Background**

The United States today assumes the role of a global hegemon with no peer rivals. For most of the post cold war period, its military budget has been almost as big as that of the next ten countries combined and yet it is blessed with numerous allies (Wohlforth and Brooks 2008; Shiffrinson et al 2012; Beckley 2018). To make things even more peculiar, the biggest economies of the world (possibly barring China) not only do not seek to balance against American power, but they seem to be more concerned about the opposite – retrenchment of U.S power. This does not bode well for Waltzian Balance of Power theory. The theory expects countries to balance against unbalanced power. Waltz had written confidently a decade into the end of the cold war “As nature abhors vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power” (Waltz 2000: 28).

But could it be that the puzzle is not all that new? It is well known that the fall of the Berlin wall had immediately caused panic and uncomfortable security concerns, not only in the Soviet Union but also in Paris and London (Vernet 1992; Costigliola 1994). The prospect of a soon to emerge unified Germany had momentarily unnerved these countries. But why did not the prospect of a Unipolar America cause similar concerns in the same capitals? One could go back even further. It is debatable whether the Cold war between the United States and Soviet Union could be characterised as an instance whereby the Soviet Union sought to balance against U.S power. There had always existed a significant section of historians and IR scholars who had emphasised the unwillingness of the Soviet Union to engage in and continue in the Cold war (Lukacs 1966; Leffler 1993; Copeland 2001; Layne 2003 and Campbell and Logevall 2013). This view differs from both the Traditional and the Post-revisionist view which emphasised the aggressive and expansionist nature of Soviet

foreign policy to explain the beginning of the Cold war (Gaddis 2006; Ulam 1971). The puzzle of most powers aligning with the much stronger U.S. against the Soviet Union has long been recognised (Walt 1985, 2002). But if the revisionists are right, is it also not a puzzle that even the Soviet Union did not seem keen on balancing the U.S.?

For instance, Christopher Layne happens to be the strongest proponent of Waltzian Balance of Power politics in the present context; but even his revisionist history portrays the Cold War as essentially a conflict emanating directly out of the U.S' quest to achieve extra-regional hegemony in Eurasia (Layne 2006). Waltzian Balance of Power theory predicts that growing concentration of power in the most powerful state provokes other states, out of fear, to seek to balance against the stronger state. Cold War revisionism turns that prediction on its head by suggesting that it was the strongest state which sought to balance against the weaker state. Christopher Layne however fails to discern the anomaly. In much the same vein, if the Soviets were unwilling to initiate the cold war, they were also much more willing to end it in the late 1980s – thereby leading scholars to try to explain the somewhat peculiar ‘trust’ that their leaders put in the U.S. at the time (Kydd 2000). For too long Balance of Power theorists have simply assumed, somewhat uncritically, that the Cold War fit right into their framework. Several prominent historical narratives (Lukacs 1961; Copeland 2001; Leffler 1998) demonstrate that this ought not to have been taken for granted.

If the Post-Cold War World and the Cold war are somewhat puzzling for Balance of Power theory, then the rise of American power from the beginning of the gilded age till the First World War seems to be even more anomalous. Over an extended period of time, the United States had achieved regional hegemony, something no other country had achieved in the modern World, and that too with the minimal resistance. It could interfere in the global Balance of Power from a completely different pedestal and a unique advantage. Why could not the great powers of the time prevent the same from happening?

Writing in 1881, the historian John Seeley predicted the future behemoth-like growth of two empires flanking Europe – the U.S. and Russia. His recommendation to his own country (Britain) to deal with such an undesirable prospect was the national unification of the British Empire. European actors pondered on the growing inequality between the U.S. and

European countries as well. Hitler had argued that upholding the balance of power required Britain to ally with Germany. Whereas Trotsky, while admiring American ascendancy, dreaded, “Will Europe be able to stand it? Will it not sink into nothing but a cemetery?” (Trevor-Roper 1961: 30; Trotsky 1930: 270-271).

Instead, great powers balanced against a rising Germany as well as a rising Russia for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas Russia’s rise led to multiple alliances forming against it – the Central Powers, the Axis pact, the Anglo-Japanese alliance – the rise of American power in the same period saw no equivalent or comparable response by great powers.

In recent years, scores of scholars of International Relations have focused on the uniqueness of the present context i.e. the lack of balancing against the U.S. in the post cold war world. New concepts have had to be invented in order to explain the discontinuity; soft balancing (Pape 2005; Art 2005; Paul 2005), strategic hedging (Medeiros 2005) institutional balancing (He 2008), opaque balancing (Layne 2006) and so on. Almost all scholars assume that it is only the contemporary response of different states to American power that is a puzzle. However, the broad historical record suggests that responses of great powers towards the United States had always been somewhat odd. Indeed, it is primarily a problem for Balance of Power theory, but it also a problem for the discipline of International Relations no less.

For good or worse the present theoretical debate on Balance of Power theory is wedded very closely to the concrete matter of American foreign policy and responses to the same. As such it seems necessary to test the competing theories on empirical cases which have similar antecedent conditions as the present case to clearly discern the implications of the study on the contemporary context.

This project seeks to test three competing (intermediate) Balance of Power theories across different stages of American ascendancy in order to try to assess what best explains such of balancing against the U.S. Recent critics (Levy and Thompson 2011; Brooks and Wohlforth 2002) of the Waltzian Balance of Power theory have claimed that his theory does not apply in the present context because the antecedent conditions are different. Levy and Thompson (2011) claim that Waltzian Balance of Power theory is not meant to be applied to trans-maritime systems but only to continental systems. William Wohlforth and Stephen G.

Brooks (2002) argue that Waltzian Balance of Power theory applies as long as the potential hegemon is striving towards hegemony but becomes inapplicable after hegemony had been achieved. David Blagden posits that it is insular states that do not elicit counter-balancing behavior. In the next section I provide a brief discussion of four competing balance of power theories and how they relate to the puzzle at hand.

### **Waltz and Balance of Power theory**

According to Kenneth Waltz, the Balance of Power is akin to a law (Waltz 1979: 117). Anarchy entails the recurrent patterns of war and power balances. Just as peace gradually gives way to war, so does the occasional imbalance gives way to balances. For Waltz, Balance of Power theory is a micro-theory in the sense of micro-economics. A pattern of outcomes is created as the result of unintended consequences of the actions of the actors participating in the system (Waltz 1979: 119-121). Waltz identifies two primary means available for balancing behavior – internal (building capabilities) and external (alliances). As such he also mentions the instance whereby an alliance had formed between France and Russia in 1894 after a lapse of fifteen years since an imbalance had been created by the German and Austro-Hungarian alliance formed in 1879. He subsequently argues that in order to test the balance of power theory it is not enough to just look at the result after 15 years or before that, since the exact result may not make itself clear due to ‘friction’. It is equally important to gauge the behavior of the nations involved within those 15 years to discern whether the behavior seemed congruent with the broad outlines of the theory. It is in accordance with the foregoing methodological spirit that Waltz himself had written two articles (Waltz 1993; 2000) which consisted of analysis of the behavior of different States after the end of the Cold war. In evaluating theories, Waltz had written “Yet Charles Kegley has sensibly remarked that if a multipolar system emerges from the present unipolar one, realism will be vindicated. Seldom in international politics do signs of vindication appear so quickly. Multipolarity is developing before our eyes: To all but the myopic, it can be already seen on the horizon. Moreover, it is emerging in accordance with the balancing imperative” (Waltz, 1993: 4).

However, within seven years Waltz had written the following regarding the balancing behaviour against the U.S “The explanation for sluggish balancing is a simple one. In the

aftermath of earlier great wars, the materials for constructing a new balance were readily at hand. Previous wars left a sufficient number of great powers standing to permit a new balance to be rather easily constructed” (Waltz, 2000: 54).

Christopher Layne (2003) attempts to demonstrate that preliminary symptoms of balancing behavior against the United States can already be discerned in the behavior of European nations and their attempt to form the ESDP (European Security and Defense Pact) as an entity independent of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Layne argues that multipolarity is inevitable and that it may come into existence as the result of growing lack of credibility of American deterrence commitments. As he writes “Regardless of how multipolarity comes about – as the result of balancing against the United States, or as a result of other arming themselves against regional rivals – the consequences for America’s hegemonic grand strategy are the same” (Layne, 2003: 151).

Susan Martin, however, makes the very pertinent distinction between ‘balancing’ as process and ‘balance’ as outcome. The author points out that a balance in the system may not have been the result of ‘balancing’ per se and neither does ‘balancing’ guarantee a balance. Such a distinction is indeed useful. For instance, hypothetically speaking, China’s continual rise – without undertaking balancing against the U.S. - could indeed establish some form of rough balance in the international system. But the achievement of a balance in the system does not mean that it has come about because China has been balancing the U.S. ‘Balancing’ has to do with unit intention; ‘balance’ on the other hand is systemic outcome. But this does leave out the question as to how strongly the former is related to the latter.

She further argues that, “the only way to identify a balancing strategy is to look at the intentions or motivations behind a state’s actions. The importance of examining motivations and intentions is reinforced by the observation that states may pursue the same policy for different reasons” (Martin 2003: 70). Examining motivations and intentions seems to be the key to adopting ‘an act of transition’ (Singer 1961) that is needed when one moves from one level of analysis (system or balance as outcome) to another (unit or balancing as process).

### *Balance of Threat Theory*

Martin's appreciation of assessing motivation also leads her to endorse Walt's balance of threat theory – since it allows “allows an exploration of other possible responses to threat; it also facilitates an investigation of the conditions that influence a state's choice of response” (Martin 2003: 70). It is not clear as to how a shift from ‘power’ to ‘threat’ necessarily aids in efforts to ‘explore’ state perceptions, motivations and strategies. The benefit of a ‘power’ based theory is that it establishes a testable relationship between a feature in the system (imbalance of power) and a general response to the same (balancing). It allows us to predict and anticipate events. For instance, using the theory, one can look at a map of Europe in late 17<sup>th</sup> century, measure the varying power levels of various great powers, and with some certainty predict that more states will be interested in or already engaging in balancing France rather than Portugal or Poland. The theory further explains why yesterday's allies have turned into today's adversaries (U.S. and Soviet Union since 1946, Britain and Russia prior to the Great War and so on).

Balance of Threat theory, on the other hand, is unable to generate such expectations or explain shifts in alliances. Its reliance on multiple wide-ranging variables (offensive intentions, offensive capabilities, aggregate power and proximity, as well as power thresholds) gives it a more post-facto character. It generates statements that approximate tautologies - States are threatened by threatening states, thereby leading to balancing. After all, Walt is likely to have relied on his theory to anticipate less overt forms of balancing against the U.S. in the post cold war world. In a 2003 interview he had compared the U.S' position to that of Wilhelmine Germany in 1914 and suggested, “What we are witnessing is the progressive self-isolation of the United States” (Walt 2003). The U.S' deployment of offensive capabilities (including missile defence), retention of forward power projection bases, theoretical innovations regarding preventive war and its awesome levels of aggregate power do seem to tick several ‘threat’ boxes. Instead, there has been more counter-balancing behaviour aimed against Russia and China in the period. Just by virtue of two of the four constituent variables of balance of threat theory – i.e. aggregate power and offensive capabilities – the U.S. ought to have faced some counter-balancing behaviour. It instead saw greater willingness to form partnerships and engage with American power.

Finally, Balance of threat theory is hard to test. This is so because the four variables that make up for what constitutes 'threat' include almost every possible motivation of state behaviour. In a sense, it is obvious that states will have motivation in choosing to balance a certain power over another. It does not help if a theory, in covering tracks, chooses to list out almost every possible motivation that a state has in balancing a power. In other words, every attempt to look for reasons why one state had balanced against another, is almost certain to generate a causal variable that is already a part of the four sub-variables that constitute 'threat' in the balance of threat theory. In contrast, the Levy-Thompson thesis, for instance, specifies that states mostly balance against land-based continental powers and do not balance against sea powers. Wohlforth and Brooks specify that states do not balance against a power that has crossed a certain threshold of power – i.e. too powerful. Such theses are testable and falsifiable – since they choose very few determining variables and thus leave out various other meaningful causal variables to explain the same phenomenon. Evidence of lack of balancing against the U.S. when it was not preponderant would contradict/weaken Wohlforth's thesis. Similarly, balancing against sea powers would also contradict/weaken the Levy-Thompson thesis. Evidence of balancing against an insular power would also contradict/weaken an insularity based balance of power theory. It is not clear as to under what circumstances balance of threat theory is weakened.

Balance of threat theory seeks to explain the puzzle of balancing, during the cold war, against the much weaker Soviet Union instead of the U.S. However, even if, during the cold war, most powers had balanced against the U.S. instead of the Soviet Union, balance of threat theory would have still remained standing. The U.S. was incomparably more powerful than the Soviet Union. Its power projection capabilities, nuclear weapons and formidable air power meant that it possessed greater offensive capabilities than the Soviet Union. In terms of intention, the U.S. did have greater aggressive intention towards the Soviet Union and China than vice versa. It is only when it comes to proximity (from most great powers) that the Soviet Union found itself in a more 'balance-worthy' position than the Soviet Union. Walt himself repeatedly mentions 'force projection' capabilities as well as 'long range bombers' as being classical examples of offensive capabilities. However, the U.S. was incomparably ahead of the Soviet Union during the cold war by the alliance blocs were decided and put in place (Porter 2006: 4-8).



### *Non-hard balancing*

Layne also mentions four new kinds of balancing behavior that the United States will have to come to terms with in a Unipolar World – Terrorism, Soft Balancing, Opaque balancing and Semi-Hard balancing. Some scholars argue that non-traditional forms of balancing are being pursued since states have to deal with an overbearing hegemon (Art, 2005; Posen, 2013; Lieber and Alexander, 2005; Walt, 2004). In their scheme of things, it is expected that till a certain time period states will depend on non-traditional means of balancing behavior only to replace them with more traditional means once a more conducive environment is achieved. Stephen Walt (2004) also argues that the propensity and disposability of states to balance against the U.S will also depend to a large degree on the behavior of American foreign policy itself; as such as long as the United States does not adopt a threatening posture other states are less likely to adopt a counter-balancing posture towards the United States. Echoing Walt, T.V. Paul describes soft balancing as something “which involves the formation of limited diplomatic coalitions or ententes, especially at the United Nations, with the implicit threat of upgrading their alliances if the United States goes beyond its stated goals” (Paul 2005: 47).

According to Robert Pape (2004), the United States has gotten a pass from Balance of Power politics because of its high reputation for non-aggression. Thus, Balance of Power is a function of the hegemon’s behavior and not its power. Along with John Mearsheimer, Pape also argues that the U.S. is spared counter-balancing behavior because of its traditional offshore balancing strategy. As such, relying on this thesis, Pape had argued that the U.S. on-shore war in Iraq as well as the Bush administration’s “strategy of aggressive unilateralism is changing America’s long-enjoyed reputation for benign intent and giving other majors reason to fear America’s power...encouraging other countries to form counterweights to U.S. power” (Lieber and Alexander 2005: 112-113). Needless to say, great powers have not lived up to Pape’s expectations since.

While surveying and persuasively rejecting all arguments and evidence for soft-balancing against the U.S., Lieber and Akexander (2005) posit their own reason to explain why great powers are not balancing against the U.S. in the post cold war world. Contrary to the argument of soft-balancers, U.S. grand strategy since 11 September 2001 has not led to

counter-balancing because great powers (India, Russia, China, Europe) sympathise with U.S. goals - eliminating terrorism and WMD proliferation (Liber and Alexander 2005: 134). This does not explain, however, lack of such balancing against the U.S. since or prior.

### *Offensive Realism*

John Mearsheimer's basic argument for non-balancing against the U.S. consists of two primary variables. The first is *the stopping power of water*. In this analysis, states do not fear or balance American hegemony as much since the existence of large amounts of water on both sides of the U.S. mainland prohibits it from projecting power effectively into distant landmasses – making the achievement of extra-regional hegemony (or territorial conquest in the Eurasian mainland) counterproductive and hence unlikely. As a consequence, the U.S. has been limited (by water) to being satisfied as a regional hegemon – instead of pursuing world domination. Its strategy, therefore, has been to prevent the emergence of any similar disposed hegemon in any of the crucial regions of the world – Europe, Asia and the Middle East. The U.S., has thus, adopted the role of an 'offshore balancer', whereby it reserves its power in the background while allowing regional actors to maintain or restore the balance in the region. In this strategy, the U.S. throws in its own weight into a conflict when regional actors are unable to balance the aspiring potential regional hegemon. Historically, the U.S. had adopted relative isolation from European power politics because Britain had performed this role ably for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The U.S. intervened directly in both world wars when regional powers in Europe were unable to hold the line against Imperial and Nazi Germany.

There are however a few shortcomings with such an explanation. Christopher Layne among others have pointed out that it is not accurate to describe the U.S. as an offshore balancer since 1945 (Layne 2006; Leffler 1998). It was the balancer of first resort, not last, during the cold war. Its system of extended deterrence towards its Trans-Atlantic and Asian allies, its cooption of the security responsibilities of its allies, its forward based military presence in Europe and mainland Asia, as well as two wars fought in the Asian mainland underscored its role as on-shore hegemon instead of an offshore one.

Secondly. The historical record does not testify to Mearsheimer's minimalist account of U.S. objectives vis-à-vis various regions. The U.S.' objective since 1945 has been more ambitious and expansive than the mere offshore balancing of any bid towards regional hegemony by a single power in those regions. The U.S. had sought to entrench itself more deeply into the security calculations of its allies in Europe and Asia, thereby using the opportunity to shape their security preferences and strategic direction. More fundamentally, U.S. cold war strategy concerned itself not just with containing Soviet power but also pacifying German and Japanese power. Thus, Mearsheimer's incorrect prediction regarding an American retrenchment from Europe and Asia in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union flows logically from such an arguably inaccurate description of American grand strategic goals. Thus, he sees U.S. strategy during the First World War and the cold war in much the same way. As he had explained while trying to explain post cold war NATO continuity, "By way of comparison, World War 1 ended in 1918, but U.S. troops were not completely withdrawn from Europe until 1923...simple inertia has also been an important factor in delaying the American withdrawal" (Mearsheimer 2001: 48). It may be argued that predictions regarding the dissolution of NATO as well as American post cold war retrenchment made by both defensive and offensive realists (Mearsheimer 1990, 2001; Waltz 1993: 76; Walt 1998) emanate from the same misunderstanding of U.S. grand strategy during the cold war. Charles Glaser's and Christopher Ball's accounts of NATO on the other hand fully engage with intra-European power politics and foresees how NATO would continue to be desirable and relevant in the post cold war world (Glaser 1993; Ball 1998).

Thirdly, as Layne rightly points out, Mearsheimer's use of 'stopping power of water' seems to be uni-directional. If water prevents a regional hegemon from dominating another region that is separated by water, why does the U.S. concern itself so much with the task of preventing regional hegemonies in distant continents? Furthermore, water itself did not seem to have stopped American invasions of European countries such as Italy and Germany in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its invasion of North Korea in 1950-51 as well as its war in Vietnam further demonstrate that the U.S. does have the ability to threaten the core security interests of powers that are separated by water from the U.S.

## **Preponderance of Power**

It is possible to discern a tradition of scholars who seek to analyse and understand patterns of behavior and even individual empirical cases from the vantage point of Preponderance of Power (Campbell 2013; Leffler 1993). The theory argues that preponderance of power acts against the forces of Balance of Power from occurring (Campbell 2009). In other words, there is a threshold in terms of power, beyond which states become immune to counter-balancing tendencies or dispositions (Wohlforth and Brooks, 2002; Fiammenghi, 2011; Campbell, 2009). Preponderance of Power is synonymous with that threshold beyond which counter-hegemonic strategies become imprudent and hence unlikely. As David Fiammenghi writes “Kenneth Waltz provides a rigorous definition of structure and describes the mechanism through which structures shape actor behavior. He says little, however, about when and why balancing should or should not occur. The security curve explains both balancing and hegemony. By identifying the security threshold, it is also possible to hypothesize on when to expect balancing.” (Fiammenghi, 2011: 153).

The pay-off structure, according to Fiammenghi’s Security curve and Wohlforth’s Preponderance theory, changes qualitatively so that in the new environment there are greater costs and risks attached to balancing against the hegemon than there would have been if the hegemon had not crossed the certain threshold. As such, the theory prescribes that a hegemon ought to further increase its power in order to further deter counter-balancing strategies. Fiammenghi’s Security Curve approach and Wohlforth’s Preponderance theory are not identical, there are significant differences in their causal mechanisms but their fundamental outlook and theoretical expectations are by and large very similar. If applied in the case of the U.S., the theory would expect counter-balancing behavior to occur prior to its achievement of hegemony. It would also expect that secondary powers would jump at the opportunity a rising China presents, in terms of balancing the U.S. In much the same vein, counter-balancing against the U.S. can also be expected to strengthen during phases when American unipolarity is weakened. For instance, the period 1968-1981 can be expected to contain greater impulses towards balancing the U.S. due to various factors – greater soviet nuclear parity with the U.S., the rise of Germany and Japan , as well as American overstretch in Vietnam.

Gareth Porter, in his book *Imbalance of power* (2006), explains America's war in Vietnam as a consequence of an immense imbalance of power, in America's favor. American decision-makers were propelled into a war because they had high confidence that their military superiority meant that their objectives would be met easily and that the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China could not hope to deter America or force it to agree to compromise. Porter's basic argument is that imbalances drive the preponderant power to act unwisely since power is no longer constrained and disciplined by other powers. Such an interpretation in fact resonates with Waltzian analysis, "Francoise Fenelon argued that a country disposing of greater power than others do cannot long be expected to behave with decency and moderation" (Waltz, 1991: 668). Waltz had expected the U.S to lose its sense of moderation after the end of the Cold War since counter-balancing would have to wait for a few years. In this, Waltz echoes other noted balance-of-power realists – such as Inis Claude, "When a literal balance exists, ambitions are moderated and fears are soothed. This is the standard recipe for international peace and order" (Claude 1989: 79). Interestingly in Porter's account, there had been an imbalance of power even in the 1960s which explains America's subsequent international behavior and entry into the Vietnam War.

In his book *Preponderance of Power*, Melvyn Leffler articulates American foreign policy in the last years of the Second World War as well as during the early cold war years in terms of Preponderance of Power. In other words, the guiding principle of American foreign policy was not the construction of a stable post-war balance of power in which America could itself rely upon or participate, but what guided American foreign policy was its own Preponderance of Power. It was this preponderance that determined American policy towards Britain and the dissolution of its empire and also towards a hostile policy towards the Soviet Union, which in turn had already created the conditions for the Cold War. Similarly, Craig Campbell and Frederik Logevall (2012) insist that, during the Cold war, the Soviet Union had been contained and deterred for all purposes within the first decade of the same. The Cold War had still however continued because American preponderance allowed various domestic groups to perpetuate the conflict for the pursuit of their varied interest.

Although, the works of Campbell (2012), Porter (2006) and Leffler (1993) do not immediately deal with the contemporary concerns of Wohlforth and Brooks (2002) and Fiammenghi (2011) a certain similarity in approach can be discerned. Whereas Balance of Power theory, by connotation attributes agency to threatened states and balancers, Preponderance theory seems to attribute more agency to the hegemon or the preponderant power. Waltzian Balance of Power theory would assert that it is unwise to seek hegemony and that after acquiring a certain amount of power a hegemon has no choice but to face counter-balancing behavior. Preponderance theory on the other hand would argue that the hegemon has more choice than just to suffer the consequences of achieving the status of a potential hegemon. Furthermore, Waltzian Balance of Power theory would have little faith in the ability of the preponderant power to conduct itself with wisdom and moderation, whereas Wohlforth and Brooks seem to have more faith in American conduct during preponderance (Brooks et al 2012).

### **Geographic Balance of Power**

Jack Levy and William Thompson (2011) argue that there exists more than one kind of Balance of Power and it can be differentiated as 'Trans-maritime balance of power' and 'Continental balance of power'. A Trans-maritime system is one where two kinds of power co-exist - trading based maritime powers whose predominant share of capabilities turn out to be naval; and Continental powers whose pre-dominant share of capabilities are in terms of land power or land armies. From their historical survey of more than four hundred years of European history, Levy and Thompson (2010) have found several patterns and key indicators which point toward the hypothesis that balancing coalitions occur primarily against large land powers and rarely occur against sea powers. This is primarily so because states are not threatened by large concentrations of naval power as they do not threaten the fundamental territorial and political sovereignty of states, whereas the same is not true of large land armies. Furthermore, Maritime powers tend to acquire more allies against land powers than the other way around and there is a co-relation between greater strength of Maritime powers and lesser chances of balancing occurring against them. Additionally, since there is a strong probabilistic relationship between being a pre-dominant sea power

and being the protector of the global common goods other states find it profitable to bandwagon with the primary Maritime power in the system.

David Blagden seeks to improve the Levy-Thompson analysis by claiming that power is differentiated only because geography is differentiated (Blagden 2011). Land powers have hardly had the luxury to transform themselves into maritime powers and maritime powers have been predominantly either insular powers or peninsular powers. Thus the empirical record for both the sea power hypothesis and the insularity hypothesis will point in the same direction since there is a great amount of convergence. But, theoretically, it is useful to identify ‘insularity’ as the primary independent variable rather than ‘nature of power’ since the influence of the former upon the latter is immensely strong. It is argued that coalitions emerge against land powers simply because Land powers have neighbors which are threatened by their rising power. Whereas when an insular state acquires power it does not threaten any of its neighbors because it has none. Thus a complementarity of interest is achieved between an insular power and nations in the continental land mass which are threatened by the potential continental hegemon. Moreover, it is argued that considering the U.S to be a sea power is problematic since it also happens to be the systems leading land power as well (Blagden 2011). If Russia or Germany had the kind of ground war capabilities that the U.S at present has, then presumable European countries would be more concerned about and seek to balance those countries (Blagden 2011: 191).

In his study of the contrast between European and Anglo-American thinking on Balance of Power, Per Maurseth (1964) finds that European thinkers had been far more cognizant of the role of geography and in particularly the special role that geography allowed Britain to perform in holding the European balance. Continental commentators frequently recognised the special role Britain performed from her position of advantage for the preservation of the European equilibrium. In much the same vein, A.F. Pollard had elucidated the dichotomy and non-symmetry that was inherent in British conceptions of the balance of power, “The balance of power in Europe was, in fact, a doctrine according to which Europe was to provide the balance and Great Britain to have the power. Continental Powers were to be

balanced for Britain's convenience; and for us it was an ideal system so long as we kept outside the balance, and merely held the scales” (Pollard 1923: 61-62).

Is it possible that in its attempt to emulate economic theories, neorealism had let go of this duality that lies within the idea of a ‘balance of power’? Does the theory or law indeed have an insider-outsider distinction to it? what enabled states like Britain and later the U.S. to adopt the privileged and powerful role of an outsider? Such a distinction itself may point towards the paradox of an ‘imbalance of power’, whereby balance of power operates to constrain and weaken insiders (continental states) while empowering outsiders (insular states). Recognising that this is a problem for theory-building, Waltz indicates why he was unwilling to allow for some functional differentiation in his balance of power theory, “For those who believe that if a result [balance] is to be produced, someone, or everyone, must want it and must work for it, it follows that explanation turns ultimately on what the separate states are like. If that is true, then theories at the national level, or lower, will sufficiently explain international politics”. If the result is produced by the motives and intent of some states then, “A balance of power theory could not be constructed because it would have nothing to explain” (Waltz 1979: 121).

John Mearsheimer invokes the stopping power of water to explain the impossibility of a global American hegemony and also America’s role as a conservative offshore balancer (Mearsheimer 2003). But critics argue that Mearsheimer’s use of the concept seems unidirectional as it only seems to stop the projection of American power across the oceans and not the armies of Continental countries such as Germany and Russia (Layne 2006). George Liska employed a similar use of insularity, but he emphasised that water bodies exist for the benefit and advantage of insular powers and for the severe disadvantage of continental powers (Liska, 1977). According to Liska, geography acts against the global balance of power but works in favor of the continental Balance of Power. This framework can be congruent and complementary to Blagden’s (2011) analysis of the role of insularity on Balance of Power theory.



Geography is indeed invoked by almost all Balance of Power theorists. ‘Proximity’ comprises one of the variables of Stephen Walt’s Balance of Threat theory (1985). Christopher Layne (2006) refers to the two oceans surrounding America to argue why the U.S need not have entered both World Wars or adopt the strategy it had adopted since. Even William Wohlforth, Brooks and Ikenberry (2012) seem to be echoing David Blagden when they write “When properly specified, realist balance of power theory does not predict counterhegemonic balancing against the United States: the conditions that sparked internal and external counterbalancing against past leading states – notably the existence of contiguous peer rival groups – do not apply” (Brooks, Wohlforth and Ikenberry 2011: 20). Contiguity after all is the inverse side of the same coin of insularity. Although the role of insularity had been acknowledged in several works (Friedman 2011; Corbett 1988; Peterson 2011; Spykman 1944; Dehio 1963; Morgenthau 1948; Mahan 1890) it has been done in an ad hoc manner and not systematised within a theory. The correspondence between David Blagden and Jack Levy/Thompson on the same issue seems long overdue.

Having outlined the contours of the theoretical debate concerning Balance of Power, the following section aims to present the broad nature of the literature available on the case studies.

### **The United States in a Multipolar World (1865-1945)**

#### *Britain and the U.S.*

Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century American foreign policy is seen as the era when the U.S. came to terms with empire. Fareed Zakaria (1998) however considers America’s delayed self-promotion into the status of a global power as somewhat puzzling. He rightly observes that most great powers pursue wealth and power in tandem (like Prussian Germany and modern day China) but the United States turned out to be an exception since it started pursuing power only much later. Another pattern could be discerned, that emerging great powers (such as Germany) provoke reactions from other great powers which seek to balance them. Even in this case the United States turned out to be an exception.

The fact that Anglo-American geo-political rivalry or war did not occur does not sit well with various IR theories – including both power transition and balance of power theory. A.F.K Organski, for instance, sought to explain the same by referencing the U.S’ peculiar growth trajectory – which consisted mostly of internal development as well as an acceptance of the British led free trade based world order (Organski 1968: 362). Even a balance of power realist such as Henry Kissinger explains this lack of animosity as the function of the lack of a ‘clash of interest’ (Kissinger 1995: 354). This is somewhat odd, given that one can easily identify a series of such clashes of interest in the long history of Anglo-American relations – including over empire, economic policy, maritime parity, territorial disputes over Oregon, Texas and Central American and so on. Both Donald Cameron Watt and W.M. Roger Louis, for instance, note extensively the bitter and serious clashes of interest between the two - both during the height of the Second World War as well as during the cold war (Watt 1984; Louis 1977).

It is possible that Anglo-American relations comes across as less tense than it has been only because Britain took it upon itself to defuse tensions by submitting to American will and policy. Levy and Thompson argue that Britain’s core interests for most of its modern history consisted of protecting its trade routes – and therefore maintaining naval supremacy (Levy and Thompson 2010, 2011). If such were its strategic priorities, then why did it not see in the tremendous rise of the U.S. and its fleet a mortal threat to its core strategic interests? Incidentally, U.S. naval officers did anticipate, in the early 1920s, that Britain could initiate war against the U.S. in order to prevent its economic decline and thereby hold on to maritime supremacy (Vlahos 1980: 104).

Well known prominent historical accounts of pre World War U.S.-Britain relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century emphasise a continuity from peace agreements in 1814 towards ‘ripening’ friendship and eventually alliance during the Great war (Allen 1954; Perkins 1968). But such accounts do not investigate the relationship from a theoretical point of view. It is almost taken for granted that the two English speaking, protestant, liberal democracies were bound to find an ally and partner in each other. Economic and cultural inter-dependence makes the ever closer friendship seem even pre-destined at times. Therefore, such accounts do not engage with the bilateral relationship as a puzzle or as the anomaly that it is – at least to IR

theory. The 20<sup>th</sup> century had seen multiple great power conflicts that were caused by simultaneous rise and decline of powers. How did the U.S. and Britain escape this fate?

Noting that realists often study the outbreak of war and conflict, Charles Kupchan (2012) seeks to explain the outbreak of peace instead – in particular, the peace that held between the U.S. and Britain. Leaning heavily on the outbreak of peace between former rivals U.S. and Britain, Kupchan identifies three attributes that states ought to share in order to establish and maintain peace. These attributes are – institutionalised restraint, compatible social orders, and cultural commonality. Hence, in some sense Kupchan perpetuates the Whiggish line of interpretation regarding Anglo-American rapprochement and friendship. Kupchan's account also relies on multiple variables that make his theory somewhat unfalsifiable and description heavy. Furthermore, his analysis of the Anglo-American rapprochement overemphasises both bilateralism as well as unit level diplomatic management. It fails to put the relationship in a geopolitical perspective, i.e. in the context of the rise of Germany and British rivalries with France and Russia. Mirroring the same methodological feature, his account of Franco-German rapprochement post Second World War leaves out the role the U.S. plays in the same.

#### *Germany and the U.S.*

Nancy Mitchell, in her book *Dangerous Dreams* (1999), charts out the archival history behind the late 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S rhetoric of a German threat to Latin America. Scrounging through German archives, Mitchell seeks to demonstrate that Germany posed no threat to Latin America and the war plans drawn by Germany towards the U.S were entirely defensive and more at the level of theoretical military exercises. Her analysis provides a very useful history of British, American and German perceptions of each other primarily by detailing the war plans of the same countries towards each country. Though, her work is primarily factual and historical, its theoretical implications can be easily derived. For instance, by demonstrating that the German policy towards Latin America was intentionally misconstrued by the U.S Government and intelligentsia in order to justify its own greater activism in the region, Mitchell provides a confirming evidence for Offensive realism over Defensive realism.

Both Paul Kennedy (1972) and Alfred Vagts (1939) examine the often forgotten Samoan crisis that erupted between the U.S. and Bismarckian Germany in the 1880s. Incidentally, the crisis had also led to a very illuminating series of correspondences between Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck and his friend, the celebrated U.S. civil war General Carl Schurz (Schurz et al. 2010). The crisis allows us to examine German perceptions of American power, geography and policy at a time when the two powers enjoyed relative parity.

In his book titled, *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Strategic Planning, 1888-1941*, Holger Herwig (1976) captures the enormous constraints and dilemmas that Germany faced (especially its navy) vis-à-vis countering U.S. threat and power ever since its rise as a great power. In it he also unearths (for the first time) and examines German war planning and invasion plans against the U.S. – in particular the creation of Operations Plan 3. The study also throws light on persistent German notions of American incompetency and chaotic inefficiency - this in turn partly explains the Navy's bellicose stance vis-à-vis the U.S. (in opposition to Hitler and Kaiser Wilhelm) during both world wars.

Although the U.S. was the last great power to enter the Second World War, that too at a time when Germany was already engaged in total war against the Soviet Union, a few scholars and historians note and emphasise the role the U.S. played in Hitler's long term strategic planning. Setting Hitler's regional wars in its geopolitical context, this view sees Hitler as being conscious of the future looming American threat to Germany and Europe. This cognisance in turn further propelled Nazi Germany to achieve continental hegemony before it was too late and thereby prepare for the final inter-continental war. As such, Gerhard Weinberg (1964) points out Hitler's zeal in embarking on a crash building program of a long range bomber that would be capable of flying to New York and back without refuelling. He also references Hitler's attempt at acquiring air and sea bases in the Atlantic as well as his interest in building a fleet of super-battleships.

Ian Kershaw (2008) also similarly places the U.S. at the heart of German decision making in 1940-41. In his account, Hitler's frustration with his inability to coerce Britain into surrendering had led him to invade and seek to neutralise the Soviet Union - in order to deny Britain its last 'continental hope'. In this view, frustrated with its own inability to project

power towards Britain (and to some extent the U.S.), Nazi Germany sought to prevent an Anglo-American intervention in Europe by launching an invasion of the Soviet Union.

### *Japan and the U.S.*

U.S. Cold War nuclear strategy was often based on the imperative of not falling victim to a Pearl Harbor style Soviet ‘bolt from the blue’. Such a framing of worse case scenarios and dangers often presumed that Japan’s attack on the American fleet stationed in Pearl Harbor was a complete surprise. This view had come under attack even during the early cold war days when a range of revisionist historians had called into question the historical orthodoxy on the Pacific War between the U.S. and Japan. These historians – often bitter Roosevelt critics – constructed the ‘backdoor to war’ thesis. They argued that the U.S. adopted an intransigent position towards Japan’s various offers of peace in the run up to the war – motivated by the desire to enter the European war by provoking a conflict with Japan (Tansill 1952; Morgenstern 1947; Beard 1948; Waller 1953). This controversial view, was met by its own critics who defended the Roosevelt administration. This school includes viewpoints that consider the attack to be a complete surprise to the Roosevelt administration. It also holds that the U.S. had negotiated in good faith with Japan and that misperception may have occurred since the oil embargo that was put in place became much more expansive and punishing than the embargo the President intended (Feis 1950; Langer and Gleason 1952 and 1953; Rauch: 1950).

Over time there has also emerged a neo-revisionist interpretation of the road to Pearl Harbor, represented most notably by Marc Trachtenberg (2008), John Schuessler (2010) and the less academically inclined Robert B. Stinnett (2004). What marks out Trachtenberg and Schuessler’s account is their engagement with the controversy from an IR and diplomatic history perspective. Unlike early cold war revisionists, they do not castigate Roosevelt as being despotic or tyrannical or malign in nature. They frame the President’s diplomacy in the context of his fears (understandable from a realist IR perspective) of the European balance of power being broken due to isolationism in the U.S. – thereby endangering American security interests in the future. The argument also does not focus in on whether the President ‘allowed’ Pearl Harbor to happen - but on the policies that the

administration put in place as a consequence of its European anxieties. These policies, in turn, made war with Japan more likely – something the administration knew.

Dale C. Copeland (2015) in his recent work critiques the Neo-revisionist school. He argues that the Roosevelt administration negotiated sincerely with Japan and with the objective of avoiding a Pacific War. However, the administration was also concerned that a return to peace with Japan – i.e. pre embargo (August 1941) – would allow Japan to embark on its long desired war against the Soviet Union. The U.S. saw such a war to be against its core interests since it would have eliminated the last remaining continental hope for preventing a German hegemony over Europe.

Where does this literature meet balance of power theory? The traditional account of the Pacific war is most consistent with any notion of Japan balancing the U.S. If Japan intended to corrode American power by launching an attack on its main Pacific fleet, while also forming an alliance with U.S.' primary adversary (Germany) then it could be conceivably argued that Japan had indeed balanced against the U.S. The revisionist and post-revisionist school on the other hand does not allow for such a proposition to stand.

Furthermore, the episode also allows us to probe fundamental questions pertaining to Japan's grand strategy at the time. Was Japan balancing China when it entered into conflict with its Asian neighbor in 1937? Was Japan motivated primarily by the Soviet threat, despite a non-aggression pact with the latter? How did Japan deliberate on the various geopolitical threats it faced, and which potential hegemon did it choose to balance against?

Although there is an enormously large literature on U.S. Relations with Germany, Britain and Japan in the period 1865-1914 (LaFeber 1998; Sydney L. Pash 2014; H.C. Allen 1955; Bourne 1967; Iriye 1977; Kajima 1976; Marder 1940) there are very few works which engage directly with the question of balancing behavior. Sydney L. Pash (2014) for instance writes an excellent account of the transformation of U.S. perception of Japan after the Russo-Japanese war but seeks to explain the subsequent friction between the two countries by simply assuming the open door policy to be the main driving force behind American strategies and calculations. Literature which seeks to comprehend the broadest contours of the strategies of the foregoing three countries towards the United States in synthesis and

reference to each other is very scant. After all it is very difficult to answer why Germany did not balance against the U.S without referring to Japan and Britain's policy towards the same.

### **The U.S. in a Bipolar World (1945-1989)**

#### *Soviet Union and the U.S.*

The Cold War for long had been considered the playground of Realist theories (Kennedy, 2000). Waltz's own theory had been shaped in the middle of the Cold War and was meant to apply directly to the debate on the stability of a bipolar World. However, the recent reviewing of Cold War archives, including those of Soviet Union and China demonstrate that the central puzzle of the Cold War for the Balance of Power theory is the imbalance of power between the U.S and the Soviet Union (Wohlforth 1998; Evangelista 1998; Kennedy 2000; Copeland 2000; Porter 2006). Waltzian Balance of Power theory predicts/anticipates the weaker and more threatened state/s to take measures aimed at blunting the power of a potential hegemon (stronger state). New evidence on the Origins of the Cold War illustrates the stronger state taking measures aimed at blunting the power of the weaker state.

The mainstream broad literature revolves around three different schools - the Traditionalists, represented most prominently by Thomas A. Bailey (1954) and Herbert Feis (1957). There is a certain overlap of perspective between the traditionalists and mainstream Neorealist cold war history (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2003; Walt 1985) – with both groups seeing the cold war as emanating from Soviet expansionism and the American hesitant efforts at containing Soviet outward thrusts. The traditionalist account portrays the U.S. as naïve, trusting and unprepared for a geopolitical contest. The Soviet Union under Stalin, in contrast, is portrayed as imperial, scheming and expansionism. The chronology thereby travels from the agreements made at Yalta in February of 1945 to Stalin's reneging of the promises made during the same by brutally occupying Eastern European countries, and finally to the American response by way of the Truman doctrine and the Marshall plan. In fact, and somewhat oddly, the most authoritative 'realists' such as George Kennan and Walter Lippmann were actually opposed to American cold war strategy. They saw the Soviet Union as posing almost no military threat to Western Europe and formal alliances

with European powers as unnecessary. They further saw Europe as a burden and risk to the U.S. and advocated the reemergence of Europe as a great power, while promoting ‘superpower disengagement’ and also supporting early German reunification (Harper 1994; Beisner 2006; Layne 1989; Porter 2011; Steel 1980; Gaddis 2005). In this sense, the non-academic early cold war realists could have agreed more with the revisionists (see below) and also had a less rigid and less bipolar understanding of the cold war than the later academic realists.

The Revisionist view is most notably represented by William Appleman Williams (1959) and Walter Lafeber (1976). In this view, the U.S. is not portrayed as a somewhat innocent republic that only wanted to stay away from continental engagements across the Ocean. This view emphasises the long American tradition of imperialism and global activism – particularly its pursuit of the liberal ‘open door’ doctrine. This liberal doctrine drove the U.S. to entrench itself in and dominate far off regions in order to advance the causes of American businesses and monopolies. Whereas, Waltz, Walt and Mearsheimer see Soviet power and policy as being the primary cause of the cold war, Christopher Layne (also a realist) happens to agree with the revisionist side of cold war history (Layne 2006). The revisionist view also emphasises the power asymmetry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, as well as the latter’s defensive strategic posture. The Soviet Union did not seek a cold war. Its policies in Eastern Europe had more to do with traditional Russian concerns pertaining to an invasion from Western Europe rather than the willful dissemination of communism.

A wide array of more contemporary scholarship indeed tends to validate the revisionist side of cold war history. Diplomatic historians and IR scholars such as Melvyn Leffler, Daniel Yergin, Dale Copeland, Frederick Logevall, Gareth Porter, Norman Naimark and others have demonstrated that it was indeed the U.S. that was both more powerful and more active in the early cold war years. Its goals and objectives were far more expansive and radical than that of the Soviet Union. Whereas the Soviet Union was guided by caution, realism and calibration, the U.S. was influenced by its own preponderance and infinite visions of containing power politics itself. This new scholarship differs from earlier revisionists on account of the fact that the later was closely associated with the *New Left*



movement of the 1960s. As such, the revisionists had put U.S. economic and capitalist interests at the center of their analysis. The new cold war history on the other hand understands America grand strategy during the cold war in terms of security and great power politics.

The Post- Revisionist account is represented most prominently by the likes of John Lewis Gaddis (1972) and Thomas Paterson (1973, 1992). The Traditionalists explain the origins of the cold war as being caused by Soviet aggressive diplomacy, the Revisionists identify American Grand Strategy and behavior as being the root cause of the cold war. Post-Revisionists, on the other hand, seek to synthesise both accounts by somewhat evenly distributing agency and blame, thereby emphasising the tragic nature of the conflict. Summing up the Revisionists' view and its endurance over time, Thomas G. Paterson writes, "Most historians, emphasizing strategic-economic elements, now accept the proposition that the United States behaved as an expansionist imperial power in the postwar period, pursuing a deliberate, purposeful, not an inadvertent and aimless, foreign policy, flexing its unmatched muscle in a shattered international system" (Paterson 2007: 391). It may be discerned that neorealism's cold war history resembles the traditionalist view more than it does the revisionist view – whereby the U.S. undertook security commitments all across the globe half-heartedly and only in order to contain Soviet power.

Geir Lundestad also notices that the emergence and pre-dominance of each school very conveniently happened to coincide with the popular prevailing mood of the country (Lundestad, 2000: 70). Traditionalism was strong during the first decade of the Cold War, representing the nature of the early years of the conflict where the West felt aggrieved by the actions of its former ally. Revisionism set in during the Vietnam War as large sections of citizenry held the U.S to be the aggressor in the War. And lastly, post-revisionism seemed very congruent with the spirit of the *détente*. It seems the evolution of Cold War historiography bears a striking resemblance to American pre-cold war historiography.

The above mentioned debate between the three schools asks questions that are of more importance to biographers than to Balance of Power theorists. As Lundestad writes "In many of the writings of the Cold War there is the assumption that the status quo is more or less sacred, that trying to change the status quo was 'aggressive' while the side upholding

the status quo was 'defensive'. Yet, as E.H. Carr argued in the *Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, 'the moral criterion must not be the aggressive or defensive character of the war, but the nature of the change that is being sought'" (Lundestad 2000: 70).

William Wohlforth (2000) argues that Balance of Power theorists have been avoiding reviewing the Cold War. Post-Cold war history and the unearthing of new archives ought to have led to theorists scrambling to test their theories using the help of new archival materials. As he writes, "If scholars thought that historical data about the Cold War might alter the fate of influential theories, surely they would look forward to new releases with some nervous or eager anticipation. This suspense, which is so typical of science, is conspicuous by its absence among scholars of international relations." (Wohlforth, 2000: 126)

Christopher Layne, in his seminal work *The Peace of Illusions* (2006) offers a revisionist account of Cold War history according to which the conflict is explained as the consequence of the attempt by the United States to achieve extra-regional hegemony. He argues that his account goes against the accounts of most Balance of Power theorists who had assumed the United States to be the status quoist power and the Soviet Union as the revisionist power. Subsequently he also traces the formulation of the American grand strategy back to during the last years of the World War. The Soviet Union in this account, had undertaken major steps to withdraw from Europe rather than to contemplate an invasion of the same.

Another recent revisionist account of Cold War history written by IR theorists is *America's Cold War*, written by Craig Campbell and Frederik Logevall (2012). The authors argue that the Soviet Union had been essentially contained successfully by the 1950s but domestic interests in the U.S had started acquiring a life of its own which was interested in pushing the U.S towards continuing the confrontation with the Soviet Union. Their work is also important because one of the authors identifies himself as belonging to the Preponderance school of realist theory along with Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth.

### *The People's Republic of China and the U.S.*

The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, alliance and mutual assistance seems like a formidable alliance that had come about on the basis of both ideological commonality as

well as Waltzian balance of power logic. Mao Zedong and his Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had already decided, before taking power, to lean towards the side of the Soviets in the newly emerging cold war. Within months of signing the alliance treaty, the two powers cooperated with North Korea to launch an invasion of the U.S. oriented South Korea. Can this be considered to be an instance of external balancing against the U.S.? A range of very accomplished historians and scholars have revisited cold war China in recent years – spurred by the release of archival sources in various formerly communist countries (Radchenko 2009; Luthi 2008; Jian 2001; Friedman 2015; Khan 2018). The scholars, however, come to very divergent conclusion regarding China’s cold war grand strategy. They differ on what China’s fundamental goals were, what had caused the Sino-Soviet alliance of 1950, and what had led to the split of the alliance. Did Mao use ideology for power or vice versa? Whereas Sergey Radchenko (2009) and Sulmaan Wasif Khan (2018) adopt a more realist national security interpretation of Mao’s China, Lorenz Luthi (2008), Chen Jian (2001) and Jeremy Friedman (2015) see the same as being driven by ideological goals.

In many regards, such divergences mirror heated disagreements during an earlier time – when ‘China hands’ (various officials and scholars) emphasised Mao and the CCP’s nationalism and realist/geopolitical apprehension towards the Soviet Union. Such a view underestimated the role of communist ideology in Mao’s foreign policy choices and also emphasised traditional Sino-Russian historical and territorial disagreements and conflict (Tucker 1982; Cohen 1997; Schaller 1985; Clubb 1957; Gurman 2010). In contrast, early cold warriors – in response to the Korean war – castigated the China hands as either naïve or political agents of international communism. They saw Mao’s China as being driven by radical ideology, which in turn explained his alignment with the Soviet Union and his anti-American antipathy (Kubek 1963; Flynn 1971; Wang 2010). In many regards, the contemporary ideology focused scholarship on China marks a return to interpretations of cold war China in the early cold war years.

The 1990s had seen somewhat of a golden age of debates and scholarly interpretations of cold war China and Sino-Soviet relations. Dieter Heinzig (1998), Niu Jun (1998) and Sergei Goncharov (1995) among others presented in great detail and lucidity the road to the 1950 alliance – highlighting buried and hidden antagonisms that animated inter-party relations

between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It can be said that IR theory and Neorealism has severely under-utilised and ignored such rich scholarship on one of the most important great powers and alliances of the cold war. This is unfortunate for various reasons. For one, China's independent streak itself imbued the cold war with a certain tripolar character – represented most clearly in the popularity of discourses on triangular diplomacy of the 1970s. Secondly, China's strategic choices allow for testing of 'balancing' and 'balance of power' theories. Given that the U.S. was so preponderant in the system in the 1950s and 1960s – why did the alliance split when it was the only chance both powers had in balancing a hostile, powerful and ideological rival power such as the U.S.? What led Mao's China to form a tacit alliance with the U.S. in order to balance a much weaker Soviet Union?

### *Europe and the U.S.*

The interests and strategies of European powers during the cold war has been severely un-engaged by IR theorists and scholars. This is understandably a consequence of the framing of the cold war as a bipolar contest, where the superpowers are seen as competing for influence and domination over war-exhausted and weakened European powers. The cold war was indeed mostly about Europe – in particular about Germany and its future. As such, the choices of France, Germany and Europe would eventually decide who stays in Europe and under what terms. Europe also had the opportunity to emerge as a third force – freely playing both powers off against each other – or decidedly shifting its own weight on one of the sides. Much of the responsibility and burden for such an independent or even balancing Europe happened to have fallen on France – and specially de Gaulle's France.

The scholarly literature on de Gaulle's foreign policy is somewhat divided and truncated. Was he motivated by French grandeur? or by Antipathy towards Anglo-America? Did his pursuit of a great power status for France lead him towards conflict with the U.S.? Did he and the U.S. have a fallout because of their distinct and separate visions of the cold war and Europe? Contemporary scholars who argue that post cold war France seeks to balance the U.S. completely overlook French grand strategy during the cold war. Discussions of a modern ESDP as a counter to the U.S. and NATO fail to mention the European Defence Community of the 1950s. Similarly, those who argue that the 2003 cooperation between

France, Germany and Russia represents embryonic balancing against the U.S. do not pay heed to de Gaulle's French exit from NATO, the 1963 Elysee treaty with Germany and his visit to Moscow to Eastern bloc states in 1966.

Meanwhile, Michael Sutton (2007) and William Hitchcock (1998) present a picture of European integration or the construction of 'Europe' during the cold war that was basically a strategic compromise between French concerns pertaining to a restored Germany and U.S strategic interest in bolstering Germany for the containment of the Soviet Union. This view is also consistent with later accounts which draw a connection with French fears pertaining to a stronger Germany in the 1980s and the European Monetary Union (Dyson & Featherstone 1999; Marsh 2009; Sarotte 1989).

French, British and German choices during the end of the cold war also need to be incorporated by IR theory. Did France welcome German reunification as a means to balancing the U.S.? In Frederick Bozo's account, Mitterrand sought to expunge Europe of the U.S. as a means of ending the cold war, "A Europe emancipated from the United States – hence less disturbing for Moscow – might even bring the USSR in time to abandon the logic of confrontation, and perhaps release its hold over Eastern Europe" (Bozo 2009: 9). Tilo Schabert's (2009) work (based on privileged access to Mitterrand's personal and official documents) presents an account of Mitterrand's Germany policy that not only refutes accusations of obstructionism but also argues that reunification itself had come about mainly owing to Mitterrand's consistent efforts and vision. Other accounts however, note that he was much more concerned about German reunification and sought to prevent or delay the same (Costigliola 1994; Soutou 2014; Hutchings 1997).

### **Key Terms and Definitions**

This sections seeks to define and provide an exposition of key terms that are used in this thesis. Special attention is paid to the term 'balancing' since despite being such a key concept to the realist research paradigm, it still has emerged as a source of greater confusion and disagreement amongst scholars. As such, presenting key features of what is meant by 'balancing' is crucial in helping us evaluate whether a certain policy or action counts as balancing. I will be using the following definitions in this thesis:

**System** A group of states comprise a system when the behavior of each is a necessary factor in the calculation of others (Bull 1984: 1).

**Balance of Power** is both a process and an outcome. As a process, it is the behavior of units which is aimed at blunting the threat posed by strongest unit in the system. Thus, a perfect balance is never really achieved but is characterised somewhat by the process itself. Balance of Power as an outcome is the situation where no unit has either achieved hegemony over the system or is in a very strong position towards achieving the same. Balance of Power as an outcome is produced as a by-product of the behavior of individual states balancing against each other. Alternatively, such a balance could also come about through chance and accident and without being caused by the balancing behavior of states. Furthermore, it need not be assumed that the states themselves strive towards a systemic balance or equilibrium (Waltz 1979).

**Insularity** is the geographical condition of a state which does not have contiguous neighbors. Thus there are two kinds of insularity, natural (geographical) and artificial (geopolitical). As Colin Gray defines it, “Insularity may be a literal geographical reality, as with Britain after her Scottish "back-door" problem ended in the 1740s, or with Venice. Also, insularity may be a strategic rather than a literal truth, as with the United States in this century. Finally, insularity may be contrived by engineering artifice, as was true for Athens and for the Dutch Republic” (Gray 1994: 26). Examples of insular states include Japan (1858-1931), Britain (1580-1945), U.S. (19<sup>th</sup> century-present), Venice (9<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century).

**Maritime states:** States whose primary defences are constituted of naval capabilities. This is associated with states which border the sea pursue wealth through overseas trade and commerce and colonialism. As Andrew Lambert defines the same, “a state with a strong economy based on the sea, and often an effective navy focused on the defence of seagoing commerce” (Lambert 2019: 384). Examples of maritime states include the Dutch empire, Portugal (1492-1580), the Netherlands (1600-1812), Britain (1580- present) and the U.S. (1789-present).

**Continental States:** Continental states are associated with states that have limited access to the open seas. They also share their land borders with one or more states and thus have

to build large armies in order to protect the same. Their focus on securing land borders makes them lag behind maritime or insular states in pursuing overseas commerce, wealth and colonies. Examples of continental states include Germany (1871-present), Russia, China, France, Austria, Brazil and so on.

### *Defining Balancing*

The debate on whether there has been counter-balancing against the U.S. in the post cold war world seems to be primarily definitional. Wohlforth and Brooks define balancing as, “Balancing, whether hard or soft, is about protection from the security threat emanating directly from a potential hegemon” (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2005: 105). They also accuse proponents of soft balancing as being unable to definitionally distinguish balancing behavior from diplomatic bargaining (Brooks and Wohlforth 2005).

The same debate – on how to identify certain behaviours as the balancing kind – occurs in the correspondence between David Blagden and Levy and Thompson (2011). David Blagden seems to suggest that states can be considered to be undertaking internal balancing when they adopt asymmetric strategies to blunt the power projection capabilities of offshore or insular powers. As he writes, “Even during the Napoleonic Wars, the Royal Navy’s dominance ended at the 3-mile limit to which French shore batteries could fire a cannon ball—and since then, the technological tide may well have been on the side of the sea deniers” (Blagden 2011: 194). He argues that in the contemporary context China seems to be adopting similar strategies – in the form of Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities – to deny American power projection in its littoral region. Echoing Brooks and Wohlforth, Levy and Thompson find such an understanding to be too broad and more descriptive of ‘rivalry dynamics’ rather than ‘balancing’. Furthermore, China’s objective in building such capabilities centre on neutralising American coercive capabilities rather than global power projection in order to balance the U.S. As they write,

“The concept of the denial of sea control, however, naturally raises the question of ‘denial of control over what?’ If the aim is ‘denying the lead power sea control in the lesser power’s coastal waters,’ Blagden may be right that mines, submarines, and land-based aircraft are useful...Defending against particular threats from particular adversaries is different from

counterhegemonic balancing to prevent a single state from achieving such overwhelming capabilities that it is able to dominate all other states in the system. Coastal and littoral defenses serve the former function, not the latter, and they are not a useful measure of counter-hegemonic balancing” (Levy and Thompson, 2011: 201).

It is easy to discern that debates on ‘balancing’ against the U.S. has indeed suffered from widely divergent views of what counts as balancing. Examples cited over time – greater momentum towards an independent European defence force, greater cooperation between Russia-India-China, cooperation in the UN on a single issue, denial to use of bases to the U.S., terrorist attacks, aid to regimes that are opposed by the U.S., joint military exercises and arms transfers – have been employed sporadically and without much attention given to the long term strategies and motivations of the states undertaking them. As such, such predictions have failed to withstand the test of time.

The following section discusses what this thesis means by ‘balancing’ in order to separate mere ‘policy bargaining’, ‘rivalry dynamics’ and other such phenomenon from ‘balancing’. This is done in order to lay out the guiding assumptions of this thesis. These assumptions pertaining to balancing are open to reconsideration based on the research carried out in this study.

#### *Balancing and its recurring features*

Balancing as a concept is a subset of and has in turn been derived from the larger outcome based phenomenon of balance of power. Balance of Power theory itself is based on the premise that states balance against any power that can be regarded as the strongest or most powerful unit in the system. As such the theory, in its most abstract form, classifies states into two categories. The first is the threatened states that choose to balance against the hegemon (potential or actual) and the second is the potential hegemon (the threatening state) itself. To take just one example, in the run up to and during the First World War the hegemon identified was Imperial Germany and the balancing states comprised of France, Russia, Britain and eventually the U.S. The latter states were concerned that Germany could potentially attempt to establish hegemony over Europe and thereby achieve dominance over all other states in the system. In more practical terms, states feared that Germany would



invade and absorb France or Russia or both and thereby destroy the existing balance of power in the system. Germany thereby knew that it could not hope to fight a war against Russia without taking into account France and vice-versa. This is so because it was in the clear interest of both balancing states (France and Russia) to prevent Germany from eliminating either one of them as a factor in the system since this would allow Germany to dominate the remaining or surviving power.

Britain, equally interested in maintaining the balance, decided to throw in its weight on the side of France and Russia because it considered Franco-Russian alliance to be weaker than that of Germany-Austria-Turkey. Eventually, the U.S. chose to intervene militarily during the war in order to compensate for Russia's elimination from the war in 1917.

The same story more or less repeated itself in 1939-1945 and also in various similar contests in earlier periods. Broad coalitions would form against the perceived strongest unit in the system - Revolutionary France (1794-1818), France during the 7 Years War, France during the wars of the Spanish succession and France yet again for most of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as well. Spain faced similar coalitions during an earlier period and so did the Holy Roman Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Based on this long history of recurring coalitions, arms racing and wars against the strongest unit of the system, we can identify certain features of balancing behavior. The following section aims to discuss these common features –

### *Initiative*

Balancing states more often than not take the initiative in contesting the power of the Potential Hegemon (PH). This happens to be the case primarily because of two reasons. Firstly, PH states often prefer to avoid wars/conflicts on multiple fronts. They would rather eliminate weaker states in the system one after the other – i.e. *sequentially*. For example, U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing asked in a pamphlet in August 1917, “Imagine Germany victor in Europe because the United States remained neutral . . . Let me then ask you, would it be easier or wiser for this country single-handed to resist a German Empire, flushed with victory and with great armies and navies at its command, than to unite with the brave opponents of that Empire in ending now and for all time this menace to our future?”

(Lansing 1917). Making the same point, Hitler argued, “It is ridiculous to think of a world policy as long as one does not control the Continent. The Spaniards, the Dutch, the French and ourselves have learnt that by experience. When we are masters of Europe, we have a dominant position in the world” (Cameron & Stevens, 1973: 93).

Balancing states, being as aware of the advantages of sequential conflict, attempt to deny the PH such an advantage. Therefore, both France and Britain (and the U.S. later) preferred to enter into conflict with Germany to prevent it from overrunning Russia and later France. Balancing states would rather enter into conflict sooner (with more allies and actors still existing in the system) than stand aside as the PH eliminates all other actors sequentially and consolidate their gains. German Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg concluded in July 1912 thereby, “Russia needs peace to consolidate itself. For this reasons...its present rulers want to be on good terms” (Fischer 1975: 139).

Secondly, PH states have traditionally risen to their positions owing to their advantages in population and resources, being somewhat large continental states. As such they tend to grow more disproportionately (law of uneven growth) than other states in the system. Hence, Jack S. Levy and William Mulligan (2017) ask the very pertinent question regarding Russian strategy during the July crisis of 1914, “Why did Russia, rising relative to Germany, not adopt a buying-time strategy?”. Germany and Japan sought to balance Soviet power in the 1930s because they feared that with time, Soviet Russia would be able to convert its latent capabilities (in terms of populations and resources) into actual power – thereby manifesting in greater expansionism and greater military deployments. With the same insight, Robert Gilpin terms “the realization that the law of uneven growth has begun to operate to one’s disadvantage” as one of several “preconditions for hegemonic war” (Gilpin 1981: 202).

Balancing states thereby operate from a closing window of opportunity – which once closed makes balancing a much more cost inducing and uncertain proposition. As Hitler reasoned in 1941 after Operation Barbarossa, “The more we see of conditions in Russia, the more thankful we must be that we struck in time. In another ten years there would have sprung up in Russia a mass of industrial centres, inaccessible to attack, which would have produced armaments on an inexhaustible scale, while the rest of Europe would have degenerated into

a defenceless plaything of Soviet policy” (Roper 1988: 586-87). By the same token, PH states are generally more interested in pacifying balancing states (at least temporarily) and delaying conflict until it crosses a certain threshold whereby it is more confident on confronting several balancing states simultaneously. As the noted Prussian strategist Clausewitz had described this system of incentives, “If it is in A’s interest not to attack B now but to attack him in four weeks, then it is in B’s interest not to be attacked in four weeks’ time, but now” (Clausewitz 1976).

### *Coalition making*

Balancing states find themselves with greater number of allies than do PH states. This itself is a function of two mutually enforcing causes or variables. Firstly, more states are concerned by and interested in confronting the dominant/PH state as they act according to the principle of ‘hang together or hang alone’. As Waltz describes, “Balance-of-power theory leads one to expect that states, if they are free to do so, will flock to the weaker side. The stronger, not the weaker side, threatens them if only by pressing its preferred policies on other states” (Waltz 1993: 74). PH states find fewer, less meaningful or more unwilling allies than do balancing states. Germany in the First world war found two allies – both being threatened by Russian power in turn. In the Second World War Germany found one ally – bandwagoning Italy - whereas the balancing coalition consisted of Britain, U.S, France and the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, the U.S. formed strong alliances with West European states, Turkey as well as Japan and China. The Soviet Union on the other hand had to be content with no ally amongst the great powers – thereby ‘allying’ – if it could be called as such – with its numerous satellite states in Eastern Europe.

### *Power, interests and Policy*

This point pertains to conflicts of interests among states that are not an instance of balance of power politics but is better explained via alternative concepts. Not all security dilemmas or arms races are functions of balancing or balance of power politics. The conflict between Israel and Palestine, India and Pakistan, Greece and Turkey have more to do with the after effects of colonialism or territorial disputes than balancing or balance of power. Such conflicts can become part of larger balancing coalitions or assume a meaning over time that

approximates balance of power politics but by themselves are not ‘balancing’ conflicts – or conflicts which have occurred because of one state’s ‘balancing’ behavior towards the other. The India-China dispute for instance has aspects of both post-colonial territorial disputes as well as balancing behavior. Similarly, the Franco-German rivalry that had begun from 1871 can be said to have begun over territorial disputes but acquired a balancing character over time (over the terms of the 1871 peace and the status of Alsace –Lorraine). Furthermore, great powers may have conflicting interests over territories, markets and colonies independent of the balance of power. Britain and France clashed over colonial interests even as they were aligning towards each other vis-à-vis Germany in the 1890s and early 1900s– Just as Britain and Russia during the same time. Although allies, the U.S. had significant differences with Britain and France over its decision to go to war with Egypt in 1956. Even allies may seek to influence or constrain each other for various reasons – but such actions differ from ‘balancing’. Balancing states engaging in balancing actions focus on the ‘power’ of the PH state and not merely its policy. A classic rationale of balancing as a power reduction policy is provided by King William III in 1701 when he had given instructions to begin negotiations for an anti-French coalition, “for the Preservation of the Liberties of Europe, the Property and Peace of England, and for reducing the Exorbitant Power of France” (Hatterdorf 1991: 16). A similar sentiment is provided by Napoleon and almost foreshadows General Ludendorff and Hitler during both World Wars, “The second war of Poland will be to the French army as glorious as the first. But our next peace must carry with it its own guarantee, and put an end to that arrogant influence which, for the last fifty years, Russia has exercised over the affairs of Europe” (Napoleon’s Address 1812).

Britain sought to balance the Soviet Union during the cold war not merely because of territorial disputes or because the two had conflicting policies on trade, decolonisation or some other such factor. Soviet power in itself and the potential it had for achieving domination was sufficient in causing Britain to be concerned by and to counteract Soviet power. The same could be said of Chinese balancing of Soviet power in the 1970s and 1980s. If the PH can appease the balancing state by merely conceding on a policy issue (a pledge of non-intervention or non-aggression; ideological concession; withdrawing support to a third party, allowing the annexation or intimidation of a third party and so on) then the dynamic was most likely not one of balancing in the first place. Balancing states are

motivated by power differentials primarily. Balancing states seek to balance power, not merely change policy. Therefore, it may not be sufficient to identify acquisition of hard power and its targeted state (necessary condition) to identify ‘balancing’. It is equally important, if not more, to broadly identify the underlying motivation for such acquisitions – policy, interest or power (sufficient condition). Even Bashar Assad’s Syria or Maduro’s Venezuela may acquire hard power with the intent of preventing American intervention. But this cannot be construed to infer a policy that is as extensive and committed as ‘balancing’. Classifying a policy as balancing behavior simply by identifying the acquisition or deployment of hard power vis-à-vis the target state seems like an efficient way of categorising balancing behavior only in comparison to other more implausible categorisations – soft balancing, institutional balancing and opaque balancing. But such a method or definition is not useful by virtue of over-inclusion.

In sum, there are three powerful indicators that point toward balancing behavior - power counteracting motivation, success in alliance making and initiation or initiative. Most debates on whether states have balanced against the U.S. in the post cold war world have occurred from not ignoring the first imperative – identifying power counteracting motivation. Several scholars (Levy & Thompson 2010; Dehio 1963; Walt 2006) have brought up the second imperative – success in alliance making. Balance of power and balancing theorists have more or less ignored the third feature. Although, Waltz does describe the 1891 Franco-Russian alliance as being caused by the imbalance of power that had occurred with the German-Austrian alliance of 1879, he mostly seems to assume that it ‘balancing’ consists of weaker powers responding to ‘power imbalances’. As such, Waltz – as well as Walt, Mearsheimer and others – do not concern themselves with the question as to who showed greater initiative towards starting the cold war.

### **Rationale for this study**

The puzzle in Balance of Power theory regarding the lack of balancing against the U.S has propelled different scholars to offer new theories or re-calibrate older theories in order to account for the anomaly. In other words, a concrete particular empirical puzzle has provoked the churning of abstract general theories. It may be argued that methodologically it could be more prudent to attempt to comprehend the empirical puzzle in a more holistic

and historical manner (albeit in a no less theory driven manner) rather than merely engage in patchwork theory. It may be more amenable to find the answer to the particular empirical puzzle by working around the puzzle itself. At the cost of repetition, the answer to ‘why are states not balancing against the U.S today?’ may be brought out by the question ‘how have states generally responded to various stages of American power?’ Instead, Wohlforth (1998) in effect asks the question ‘how do states respond to preponderance to power?’ And Levy/Thompson had asked ‘Do states balance against Sea Powers?’ (2010). This project seeks to answer the first question by posing a broader question in turn ‘how have states generally balanced against American power since its rise?’

Also what comes out of the literature review is that there does seem to be a great amount of continuity in American foreign policy than is usually assumed. Every era seems to be a repetition of the last era in some sense. America had always been propelled into frenzied activity from relative passivity. In every era, the threat to American interests had been exaggerated and American power seems to have acted more on the basis of opportunity and initiative rather than minimalistic security concerns as expected by Defensive Realism. German activity in Latin America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century provoked the U.S to build itself both a large navy and a grander foreign policy. Soviet Union’s attempt to consolidate its territorial conquests after the Second World War allowed the U.S to adopt a grand strategy that was based on active overseas bases, a doctrine of massive retaliation, multiple protective alliances and an overall grand strategy based on containment as well as possible rollback.

### *Implications for Theory and Policy*

By making counter-balancing behavior against the U.S. the only litmus test of realism and its usefulness/validity in the post cold war world, scholars have formed an unfortunate association that does not bode well for the reputation of realism. This is especially unfortunate since states still seem to behave according to the tenets of realism. Despite economic interdependence, the spread of cosmopolitanism and globalization, states are found to prioritize security, self-help and engage in strategic rivalry. Even as there is a dearth of alliances against the U.S. (and hence balancing), there is no similar dearth of

balancing behavior when the focus is on great powers such as Russia and China. NATO expansion, the U.S.-Japan alliance renewal as well as Quad are all examples of balancing behavior that testifies to the continued relevancy of both realism and balance of power theory. A good realist theory in IR only needs to achieve the following goals – specify scope conditions, provide underlying drivers and variables (laws) that best explain the widest range of outcomes – and have as few outlier cases as possible. An attempt at answering if and why great powers have not balanced against the U.S. historically may help discover a Balance of Power theory that best explains international outcomes and leaves the least out of its explanatory range.

The implications of readjusting or modifying (if found to be doable and necessary) balance of power theory go beyond the realm of academics and is bound to have significant real world consequences. Statesmen and decision makers, contrary to conventional understandings, do think theoretically and cognitively lean towards one version of balance of power theory or the other.

The Eisenhower administration engaged in broad and sweeping discussions of the balance of power in Asia and Europe in 1953 in order to assess the wisdom of past policies and to determine the path to take regarding Japan's future, China's role in the balance and so on. In the wake of the shocking and unexpected Soviet-German pact of September 1939 Winston Churchill relied on his historical understanding of both Russian 'national interests' and the European balance of power in order to lay the intellectual foundation for a policy of driving a wedge between the two powers. Incidentally, Soviet ambassador to Britain, Ivan Maisky, relied on a similar understanding to convince his own government to consider an alignment between Soviet Union and Britain as natural and necessary – despite ideological misgivings and conflicts over the Soviet-Finnish war and the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (Gorodetsky 2015: 370-371). Both Hitler and Kaiser Wilhelm relied on their balance of power theories to expect either British tolerance of Germany's continental aims or Anglo-American animosity to emerge from their commercial and naval competition.

In much the same vein, statesmen and decision makers of today are equally likely to be influenced by some version of balance of power theory – consciously or unconsciously. For instance, if Waltzian Balance of Power theory is valid then South East Asian states should see the rise of China as the beginning of a global aggregation of forces (internal and external) aimed at balancing American power. Since powers flock to the weaker side (Waltz 1979: 127) they ought to expect China gaining greater allies – Japan, Russia, Europe, India – over time. Such a forecast makes bandwagoning or accommodating to China’s rise a more attractive option than either hedging or balancing.

Similarly, if it is indeed the case that naval capabilities do not elicit counter-balancing behavior then decision makers in Zhongnanhai ought to direct greater resources towards sea power. And if insularity is the key to avoiding counter-balancing behavior then the same leaders should expect such diversion towards sea power to either have no impact on counter-balancing behavior or to even have a reinforcing impact on the same.

As India has begun to strengthen its relations with other powers in order to adjust to China’s rise it will be interested in gauging the strength of the will of countries such as the U.S., Japan and Australia in balancing China. Furthermore, India will be most interested in figuring out whether present relations between Russia and China are moving towards an alliance or a rupture. (Gokhale 2020; Ganguly 2020). In this instance, varying balance of power theories would make distinct and contrasting predictions. A Waltzian balance of power theory would expect greater convergence between Russia and China, whereas an insularity based balance of power theory would expect greater divergence between the two – similar to the cold war. A balance of power theory that sees Russia as a balancer of U.S. power is also likely to predict greater convergence than divergence – owing to Russian long term policy of adversity/balancing towards the U.S.

### **Scope Conditions and Methodological Issues**

The first case study starts at 1865 because that is the year when the civil war had been concluded. With the end of the civil war, America was in a better position to seek expansion as the slavery issue had been settled (slavery had gotten in the way of expansion earlier



since annexation of new territories would have meant the reconfiguration of the balance of power within the republic on the basis of ‘free’ states and slave-holding states). Furthermore, the U.S. truly emerged as a nation with great power capabilities as a function of the second industrial revolution that had occurred since the 1870s. The first chapter, on British responses to the U.S., does however delve into British strategy towards and conflicts with the U.S.

The thesis is guided by the Neo-realist research paradigm. As such, the thesis will only test balance of power theories that are part of the neo-realist research paradigm. These theories all assume – following Kenneth Waltz - that ‘anarchy’ is the most influential structural imperative that guides and explains state behavior in the international system. The primary goal of a state is survival and hence security. Given the structural condition of anarchy, states engage in self-help behavior to survive and secure themselves in the international system. It is this self-help based pursuit of security that, in turn, incentivizes states towards ‘balancing’ behavior. However, in this case, this is where all agreements end. Disagreement sets in when the subsequent question is posed – viz. – which states and under what conditions elicit balancing behavior? In Waltz’s understanding, the answer is obvious – it is the most powerful state in the system that elicits ‘balancing’ behavior since the same has the most power to achieve domination over or threaten all other states in the system. It is this expectation that had led Waltz to expect counter-balancing against the U.S. in the post cold war world.

As such, the findings of the research are unlikely to have any bearing on other schools of international studies. Hence it will also differ substantively from the works of scholars such as Colin Dueck (2008) who had explained American foreign policy historically through unit level variables such as American tradition and American institutions such as the Congress. In much the same vein, the thesis avoids borrowing unit level variables such as Japanese militarism or the Anglo-American cultural affinities or the ideological nature of Soviet Union or Communist China. This thesis seeks to test three balance of power perspectives against the historical record – ‘Preponderance of Power’, ‘Power distribution’ and ‘Geography of Power’. It needs to be clarified that the word ‘geography’ is used only to

connote variables pertaining to the role played by water bodies in the operation of balancing behavior.

The research work is primarily for the sake of theory testing and refining, and not for the sake of historical knowledge or understanding per se. As such the pursuit will be limited to the discovery of broad theoretical facts – such as what drove Imperial Germany to not balance against the U.S? Or what led Britain to allow the U.S. to achieve and consolidate regional hegemony in North America? The research is provoked by a theoretical puzzle and hence seeks to resolve or throw light on theoretical problems – with the aid of history. Since even theoretical arguments at times find themselves unable to resolve a disagreement without reference to external facts, this project seeks to exploit empirical research works in a much targeted manner for the sake of theoretical clarity. The question of when balancing occurs and against whom lies in the realm of either meta-facts or empirical theories. For instance, the concept of ‘balancing’ itself is, first of all, is a concept – and not a discrete empirical observation, such as a declaration of war or a summit meeting or an aid mission. Hence, scholars differ and disagree strongly on how to define and identify balancing behavior. Discerning ‘balancing’ requires the aid of both conceptual clarity as well as some empirical knowledge.

Establishing that ‘balancing’ has occurred requires an engagement with a State’s broad strategic objectives, foreign policy goals and finally its concrete and immediate policy decisions. For instance, Layne (2006) identifies the signing of the Treaty of Elysee between France and West Germany in 1963 as an instance of balancing. This is clearly a policy decision that was undertaken by two governments that may have an interest in balancing American power. However, in order to convincingly conclude that such a step represents balancing we may need to also probe as to what exactly motivated each state to take such a step. This naturally leads us to ask fundamental foreign policy questions such as – what were French (or de Gaulle’s) primary foreign policy objectives at the time? How did French leaders frame their most pertinent threats and challenges? Eventually, such an investigation may lead us to a certain contradiction. An understanding of French strategic objectives may strongly suggest to us that it was unlikely that France sought to rid Europe of U.S. presence in 1963. It is in this manner, that this thesis seeks to understand various foreign policy

decisions by great powers in response to U.S. power – by relating broader strategic objectives, threat perceptions and immediate foreign policy decisions.

Thus the project may also be said to be modeled on and inspired by previous works, such as, Jack Snyder's research work on *Myths of Empire* (1993) where he sought to test three dominant explanatory hypotheses - realism, misperception and domestic politics on five empirical cases of overexpansion. Another influence has been the edited volume *The Balance of Power in World History* (2007) authored by several pre-eminent IR scholars. Both foregoing books rely almost entirely on secondary sources and masterfully bring together different compartmentalised sections of literature on their topics to draw patterns, generalise and simultaneously test different theories.

### **Plan of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into six chapters that discuss the balancing choices of six great powers with regard to the U.S., in addition to an introductory and a concluding chapter. The first three core chapters cover the multipolar period of 1865-1945. The last three core chapters cover the period of cold war bipolarity – 1945-1989.

The first substantive chapter discusses British perception of and responses to American power in its various stages – 1818-1865, 1865-1914, and 1919-1945. It concludes by emphasising British inability to balance American power as well as its unwillingness to do so at a later time – given rising threats from the European continent.

The second chapter discusses German perception of and responses to American power in its various stages – 1870-1890, 1891-1914, and 1914-1939. It focuses on the contrasting geographies of both rising powers and its implications for the bilateral balance. German perception of American power was constantly overshadowed by its fears pertaining to Russian and later Soviet power.

The third chapter discusses Imperial Japan's perceptions of and responses to American power in its various stages – 1848-1884, 1885-1905, 1905-1933, and 1933-1945. The chapter puts Japan's apprehensions pertaining to American power in the context of its balancing of great powers on the Asian mainland (China and Russia). The chapter ends with

a discussion of Japan's motivations for attacking the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor on 7 Dec. 1941.

The fourth chapter discusses the Soviet Union's perceptions of and responses to American power during the cold war. The chapter is divided into three periods – 1945-1964, 1964-1983, and 1985-1990. The Chapter discusses the power gap between the two superpowers, the question of who initiated the cold war rivalry, as well as Soviet perpetuating concerns with its neighbouring powers – West Germany, Japan and China. The last section seeks to address the puzzle of Soviet 'trust' in the U.S. prior to and during the end of the cold war.

The fifth chapter discusses the People's Republic of China's perceptions of and responses to American power during the cold war. The chapter is divided into three periods – 1945-1950, 1950-1964, and 1965-1979. The chapter discusses China's reasons for initially allying with the Soviet Union and the causes of its split with the same later. The chapter also addresses the alleged ideological nature of China's alliance choices and attempts to provide a power based explanation of the same – one which emphasises China's concerns over Soviet hegemony.

The sixth chapter discusses Europe's (but mainly France's) perceptions of and responses to American power during the cold war. The Chapter is divided into three periods – 1945-1958, 1958-1968, 1968-85, and 1982-91. The chapter seeks to explain France's motivation in both welcoming American power in the continent while also challenging NATO in the 1960s. The chapter also offers a realist balance of power based account of de Gaulle's alleged Anti-Americanism by emphasising France's continued security concerns pertaining to a rising Germany in the cold war.

### **Research Problem/Questions and Hypotheses**

This thesis seeks to explain why there has been no counter-balancing behavior against the U.S. in the post cold war world (primary question). It does so with the help of existing balance of theories within the Neo-Realist tradition. It seeks to answer the primary question by in turn asking the question (secondary question) – how have great powers generally perceived and responded to different stages of American power in the system. The great powers being studied are Britain, Imperial Japan and Imperial Germany (1865-1945); as

well as the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China and Europe (1945-1989). By studying great power behavior across such long time periods, this thesis also finally seeks to answer the question as to – which balance of power theory best explains the anomaly of the lack of counter-balancing against the U.S.

There are three Hypotheses that are being tested in this thesis – One, Preponderance of Power yields in a curvilinear relationship between power and counter-balancing behavior. Two, States do not balance against Maritime powers the way they balance against Land Powers (differentiated power). And the third and final hypothesis being – States do not balance insular powers the way they balance against continental powers.

The First hypothesis (Preponderance) explains the lack of counter-balancing against the U.S. in the post cold war world as a function of the U.S. being too strong for a coalition of powers to be able to match or balance against. Given American preponderance, the costs of balancing is too high and none of the great powers would find the prospect of attracting the focused enmity of the U.S. to be appealing. In terms of implications for theory, this hypothesis makes a modification to Waltzian Balance of Power theory by adding a scope condition – non-preponderance. Balance of power politics and 'balancing' operates against the strongest unit in the system as long as the same unit is not preponderant. As such, the hypothesis would expect greater counter-balancing to occur if and when U.S. preponderance weakens. The theory also, by implication, suggests that counter-balancing against the U.S. was more prevalent when the U.S. was not preponderant in the system – either during the cold war or during its rise in the period 1865-1945. This thesis seeks to test the preponderance thesis by investigating whether such balancing did actually occur when the U.S. was not preponderant in the system.

The Second Hypothesis (maritimity) explains the lack of counter-balancing against the U.S. in the post cold war world (as well as historically) as a function of the U.S. being a maritime state. Maritime states do not threaten other great powers the same way that continental land powers do. This is so because states fear invasions and territorial annexations the most and naval capabilities are not suited for the same. The pursuit of type of capabilities (maritime or land based) itself is a function of state choice. As such, the hypothesis would expect

greater counter-balancing to occur to the degree the U.S. pursues land power over sea power. By the same token, the thesis would anticipate lesser counter-balancing to occur against a state when it pursues naval capabilities. In terms of implications for theory, this hypothesis makes a modification to Waltzian balance of power theory by adding a scope condition – balancing occurs only against continental land power based states and not maritime states. This thesis is testable because the U.S. did have a sizable land army of close to 12 million ground troops by the final months of the Second World War – comparable to the Soviet Union. The hypothesis can also be tested by proxy – i.e. – by studying great power responses to the pursuit of naval capabilities by states such as Germany, Soviet Union and so on.

The third hypothesis (insularity) explains the lack of counter-balancing against the U.S. in the post cold war world (as well as historically) as a function of the U.S. being an insular power. Insular powers are less threatened by continental powers and themselves, in turn, do not threaten such powers. Insular powers also tend to forsake strategies that involve territorial invasions and annexations – as such measures add little to their net security. In terms of implications for theory, this hypothesis makes a modification to Waltzian balance of power theory by adding a scope condition – balancing occurs only against continental states that have adjacent (or neighbouring) great powers, and not against insular powers. This thesis is testable because the U.S. has been arguably insular since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The hypothesis can also be tested by proxy - i.e. – by studying great power responses to the rising power of other insular powers such as Britain and Imperial Japan.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis proceeds at two levels of analysis. First, at the theoretical level it concerns itself with balance of power theory and its apparent struggle to make sense of great power responses to American preponderance in the system. As such, it considers a range of newer intermediate balance of power theories - themselves modifications of Waltzian balance of power theory – that offer explanations for the lack of counter-balancing against the U.S. At the second level, the thesis studies, examines and compares the perceptions and policies of various great powers towards the U.S. through its various stages of ascendancy. At this level, the thesis tests the intermediate balance of power theories against the historical record

in order to assess whether they do help explain non-balancing against the U.S. In more concrete terms, the thesis (1) tests whether great powers did indeed balance against rising American power and before it achieved systemic preponderance, and if not why? (2) tests whether the U.S' adoption of a maritime strategic identity helps explain such non-balancing, and (3) tests whether the U.S' insular geopolitical position helps explain the responses of great powers towards the same.

## **Chapter Two: Britain and the United States**

Of all great powers considered in this study, Great Britain stands out as the strongest candidate to balance American power. In fact, as this chapter shows, British policy towards the U.S. did have the appearance of balancing behavior in the period 1821-1850. Britain also happened to be the only great power to set foot on American soil through force, as it did during the war of 1812-1814. Britain also co-existed with the U.S. in the Western Hemisphere during different periods of American rise – from when it was only a fraction of British wealth, population, and power to when it outgrew Britain in all three indicators. The two powers had significant conflicting interests, which caused them to collide several times over territorial issues. Although the U.S. has been clearly an insular power since 1865, it is worth noting that unlike Japan and Britain, the U.S. did find itself surrounded by other powers for some duration after its birth in 1776. The U.S. was born as a continental state that had only achieved insularity over time. This was aided by the gradual withdrawal of several European powers from the North American continent.

Therefore, Britain found itself having to coerce, deter, engage and defer to American power through various stages of its evolution and especially during a period when the U.S. was not geographically as invulnerable as it has been since 1865. In many ways, Britain figures as a pioneer in engaging with American power, with many of its choices presenting themselves as precursors of other great powers' engagement with the U.S. ever since.

British balancing choices also appear to be the most crucial compared to all other great powers considered in this thesis. Britain stood in between other European powers and the U.S. As such, Britain was in a position to either exercise a veto against balancing American power, or it could greatly facilitate such balancing owing to its naval dominance and territorial possessions in the North American continent. Just as British support of the Monroe doctrine precluded European colonial expansion in the Western hemisphere, British geopolitical position in between the two worlds also would be the most decisive determinant of balancing behavior towards the U.S. itself. Incidentally, the same factor seemed to be in



place in the Pacific as well. Britain was Imperial Japan's only key ally (1902-1919). In a sense, Britain was both Germany and Japan's best hope for forming a counter-balancing alliance against the U.S. In some sense, British non-balancing of the U.S. could be seen as the first cause in the chain of choices that led to systemic non-balancing of the U.S. into the 20<sup>th</sup> and even the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **Aim**

In this chapter, I argue that Britain had four primary reasons for choosing to not balance the U.S. – Firstly, central to balancing the U.S. was *the military question of invading the U.S. owing to its geography*. Any invasion of the U.S. was likely to be an extremely costly enterprise with very little expectation of success. Secondly, there was *weak intent*. Growing American power presented a threat to various British interests – its hold over Canada, its interests in Central and South America, its role and status as the preeminent naval power – but such power never presented a serious threat to British territorial integrity and sovereignty itself. Thirdly, *the continental threat* always occupied the privileged position of being the primary focus of British balancing choices; whether this was Russia for most of the 19th century, France when it embarked on naval modernisation, or Germany for most of the first half of the 20th century. The continental threat achieved foreign policy primacy because only a European continental state could aggregate sufficient capabilities and intent to threaten or actually invade British home territory. And finally and fourthly, other than having a greater interest in balancing continental powers Britain was moved in its U.S. policy by the perception that both insular powers shared *a common interest in preserving the balance of power in Europe*. The above four mix of negative and positive causes combined in different stages and in different degrees through multiple events and various processes to result in a non-balancing outcome.

The first section of the chapter discusses the British American balance in North America through the period - 1818-1865. This phase saw the two countries compete over Texan independence, Oregon, the Crimean War, Central America, and Mexico amongst other issues. The U.S. was far weaker than Britain in terms of aggregate power for most of this

period and yet managed to assert itself over various negotiations with Britain owing to its favourable geography. More often than not Britain would have to compromise on its own interests in order to avert a costly confrontation.

The next section discusses the period 1865- 1914. There were significant clashes of interest but the period saw Britain shift from hesitant underbalancing to active appeasement of the U.S., culminating in enthusiastic British support to the U.S. during the Spanish-American war. In retrospect, the appeasement seems timely as it had just come about on the heels of the rise of German power in the continent. Britain would enthusiastically call for and support greater American involvement in Europe and the World in order to balance other far weaker great powers.

The third section discusses the interwar years which began with British-American naval parity (resented somewhat by Britain) and American economic, diplomatic and material dominance. British leaders found themselves in another opportunity to assess the British-American balance of power (this time favouring the U.S..) and decided to yet again appease the same and balance future continental threats - France and Germany

## **Background**

By 1865 Britain and the U.S had roughly the same population. The British Empire stretched worldwide and its navy outmatched the navies of the next two most powerful navies combined. But since 1865 Britain had increasingly started concentrating on European affairs and mostly ignored the balance of Power vis-à-vis the U.S in the Western Hemisphere. Germany, under both Kaiser Wilhelm and Adolf Hitler, had at times expected Britain to balance against rising American power. it was assumed by both that just as maintaining a balance in Europe was vital to Britain's sense of security a similar form of balance would be aimed at vis-à-vis the U.S. Unfortunately for both Hitler and Wilhelm, Britain chose to not balance against the U.S. This pattern of British decision making understandably puzzled German leaders. Bemoaning the ever-worsening outcome for Germany in the final months of the Second World War, Adolf Hitler opined,

[Churchill] has made the same mistakes as those generals make who wage a war according to the principles of the preceding war. . . The crucial new factor [since Pitt's day] is the existence of those two giants, the U.S. and Russia. Pitt's England ensured the balance of world power by preventing the hegemony of Europe—by preventing Napoleon, that is, from attaining his goal. Churchill's England, on the other hand, should have allowed the unification of Europe, if it wished to preserve that same balance of power" (Trevor-Roper 1961: 30).

After all, there is something to Hitler's diagnosis of British foreign policy before and during the Second World War. The 'crucial new factor' that he identifies had been highlighted as far back as 1885 by the historian John Seeley. In his classic, *The Expansion of England*, Seeley forecasts the future growth of the American and Russian Empire. He had predicted that Europe would fade into irrelevance and that Britain's only means of coping with such an outcome was in turn to expand the power base of England through the Political Unification of its disparate territories and populations (Seeley 1922). Somewhat similarly, the noted Geo-politics theorist Friedrich List identified the 'geometric growth' of the U.S. as a threat to Britain and recommended an Anglo-German alliance to ameliorate against the same (Henderson 1983). Very tellingly, Seeley omits considering the newly found German Empire to be a cause of concern for British power and interests. As he writes, "Such a separation would leave England on the same level as the states nearest to us on the Continent, populous, but less so than Germany and scarcely equal to France. But two states—Russia and the United States - would be on an altogether higher scale of magnitude, Russia having at once, and the United States perhaps before very long, twice our population" (Seeley 1895: 18). Hence the question then arises, *did British leaders misunderstand the requirements of a balance of power imperative or did Hitler's understanding of the balance of power theory suffer from flaws?* If Britain had indeed acted on a global balance of power imperative, it would have balanced against the U.S and welcome the unification of Europe under Germany. Did Britain's need to maintain a balance only apply to Europe?

## **A Semblance of Balance? 1818-1865**

Britain would start ignoring the balance of power in North America with the end of the civil war. Britain had realised that she had lost the only and best possible opportunity to achieve a more permanent and viable balance in the North American continent. However, much of the momentum for a détente between the two rivals had been set by and since the Clayton-Bulwer treaty of 1848. Before the treaty Anglo-American relations could be described as defined by the balance of power politics with Britain taking the initiative in balancing American power within the continent. Britain retained offensive naval power vis-à-vis the U.S and constantly drew up war plans to adjust with increasing defensive measures on the part of the Americans. British naval bases were maintained in Nova Scotia, Halifax, Great Lakes, and Jamaica among other places. One key characteristic of the balance of power however was that neither side could envisage how a war against the other could be controlled or strategized, much less won.

Britain at times considered a naval bombardment of the East coast urban populations followed by commercial raids against American ships, but this was not seen as a policy that was capable of ensuring an American surrender. Instead, it was assessed that such measures would only encourage Americans to escalate matters, hold out and carry out commercial raids of its own. Britain also remembered how the U.S elicited European diplomatic support against Britain during the war of 1812-14, thus worsening relations with the U.S could imply greater American involvement in the European balance of power politics and in a way unfavorable to British interests (Bourne 1967; Preston 1967).

Britain did however hold on to the objective of seeking some form of balance in North America during this period. Prime minister Canning for instance writes in 1824, "I believe we now have the opportunity (but it may not last long) of opposing a powerful barrier to the influence of the U.S. by an amicable connection with Mexico, which from its position must be either subservient to or jealous of the U.S. In point of population and resources it is at least equal to all the rest of the Spanish colonies; and may naturally expect to take the lead in its connections with the powers of Europe" (Festing 1899: 267). Accordingly, over the

next decades Britain sought to attempt to maintain Texan independence, assert its rights in the Oregon territory dispute and provided diplomatic support to Mexico to bolster it as a counter-weight (Roeckell 1999; Adams 1912; Rives 1913). Thus, in 1824, the British government conveyed to the new Republican government of Mexico (itself already wary of American hegemonic designs towards Mexico) that Britain was uninterested in achieving dominion over any portion of Spain's former colonies in North America and also opposed to allowing the same to fall "under the dominion of any other power" (Rippy 1927: 3).

Britain and the U.S also competed in a limited naval arms race in the Great Lakes region and Lake Erie in the 1830s and 40s. In the 1840s Britain held talks with France to discuss the possibility of joint action in supporting Mexico and thereby balancing the U.S. However, Britain was undermined in each of these efforts. Its co-operation with France was undermined both by Mexican weakness as well as mutual mistrust with France. During crises and periods of saber-rattling with the U.S, Britain was constantly undermined by its greater imperatives vis-à-vis Europe, which meant it did not have the military-politico luxury to escalate matters in the North American continent. For instance, during the war scare of 1845-46 when the Polk administration seemed willing to risk war with Britain regarding its territorial demands in Oregon, Britain was also engaged in simultaneous crisis in the Anglo Sikh wars and French naval demands (Bourne 1967:167). The U.S fought the Mexican-American war unhampered by British diplomacy since France and Britain were locked in over the Spanish marriage crisis and the 1848 revolutions (Bullen 1974; Schroeder 1994: 767-772). British will and capability to balance the U.S clashed with British will and capability to maintain a balance of power in Europe during this time. However, whenever these two distinct interests clashed, Britain would prioritize the balance of power in Europe over the one in North America.

### *Oregon Dispute*

The Democrat Expansionist James Polk came to the White House with the publicly proclaimed agenda of expanding U.S. territory by annexing and absorbing Texas, California and, Oregon. In his inauguration speech the new President sought to advocate U.S. expansionism in the continent as a bulwark against 'balance of power' policies of European

powers, “the expansion of free principles, and our rising greatness as a nation are attracting the attention of the powers of Europe, and lately the doctrine has been broached in some of them of a "balance of power" on this continent to check our advancement” (USHOR 1845: 14-15).

Over long negotiations, the two sides finally agreed to the partitioning of Oregon treaty with Britain receiving Vancouver islands and the Columbia River. Polk had to come down from his belligerent rhetoric of ‘54-40 or fight’ and agree to a partition along the 49 parallel.<sup>1</sup> American posturing during the crisis was slightly less belligerent compared to similar crises in the future – indicating that the balance would only increasingly favor the U.S. as its industry, population, and economy grew - while Britain found itself invested in Eurasian matters. But even here, the Polk administration would make maximalist demands while posturing that the U.S. was ready for war. This posturing, however, did not necessarily reflect in either greater military spending or troop mobilisations (Rakestraw & Jones 1997: 235-237; Pletcher 1973: 309)– indicating that much like during future crises with Britain and Germany, the administration thought that the adversary could not afford to call a bluff – that too at a time when British decision-makers considered themselves more military prepared than ever (McLane to Buchanan, 1846). As the crisis continued, President Polk eventually found himself somewhat impressed and sobered by British military preparedness (Rakestraw 1997: 238-243).

#### *American annexation of Texas and California*

American intrigue through its agents and colonialists managed to wrest Texan independence from Mexico in 1836 (Smith 1941; Connor & Faulk 1971; Graebner 1980). After the expansion, the British government considered and pushed for a policy that would involve the signing of a treaty between Britain and France on the one side and Mexico on the other. The treaty would require Mexico to recognize the new Texan state as independent – accepting a *fait accompli* – and in return, it shall acquire a guarantee of territorial integrity from the European powers. Mexico dithered because it thought any such treaty could not

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<sup>1</sup> ‘54-40 or fight’ was an extreme U.S. claim, strongly backed by expansionists within the administration and outside, which sought to extend American claims in the disputed Pacific Northwest all the way till almost the south of Russian America (present day Alaska).

guarantee that the Texan government would not choose to join with the American Union on any future date.

Fears of an ever expansionist U.S. taking over even greater Mexican territory drove Britain to think in Balance of Power terms. This involved a strategic dialogue with both Mexico and France aimed at containing further U.S. encroachment. However, such a balancing objective was in turn severely compromised by both limited British capabilities to assist Mexico in case of war and its less than adequate relationship with France. Probably, the offer of joint action with France seemed as much driven by a fear of a French-American alliance in case of conflict (Rives 1913:285-287). Both the Mexican envoy in London and key American decision-makers believed that if it comes down to war, Britain would abandon Mexico and offer to merely act as a neutral mediator. The view of the American envoy in Paris at the time, William R. King, is telling,

“There should be no wavering on the subject of the annexation of Texas. The growling of the British Lion should only stimulate to immediate action. To falter in our course from apprehension of her hostility, would disgrace us in the eyes of all Europe. The act accomplished, England will complain, perhaps threaten, and her newspapers will be lavish in their abuse; but that will be all; for with all her power, she can but feel, that a war with us would be more prejudicial to her interest, than with any other nation. She will not risk the consequences. I am aware that she is exerting herself to induce France to make common cause with her on the subject of Texas, and that Mr. Guizot is much inclined to do so; but it will not succeed. It would shock the French nation, which detests all alliances with England; and the King is too wise, and too prudent to place himself in a position which would go far towards destroying his dynasty” (King to Calhoun 1844).

Subsequent events would prove Mr. King right as France was unwilling to offend the U.S. and could afford to go only as far as not being a party to recognising the annexation of Texas to the U.S. since the matter is not of sufficient “importance to us to justify our having recourse to arms to prevent it” (Adams 1963: 190).

If the U.S. had to concern itself over Mexico, Britain also found itself occupied with the Spanish marriage crisis as well as spheres of influence conflicts with France over Egypt and

Tahiti (Galbraith 1953). The then Prime Minister Robert Peel feared “the fruitful germs of war” that “will spring up [in France] in the event of war between Great Britain and the United States” (Galbraith 1953: 70) – a very daunting prospect in the 1840s considering the then ongoing transition of maritime power from sail to steam (Baxter 1942; Richmond 1946: 262-266). Interestingly, Lord Palmerston during this time was arguing that Steam navigation had rendered the 26-mile channel between Britain and France meaningless – foreshadowing future debates pertaining to technological advancements and the continuing relevance of geographic factors (Galbraith 1957: 71). Eventually, the two sides found a way to avoid war and reach an agreement on partitioning the disputed territory.

What can be discerned in the prelude to the Mexican-American war is that Britain possessed the will/intent (albeit weak will) to balance the U.S. but failed to do so because it could not find allies for the same – in either France or Spain. It was too concerned about acting on its own since it was expected that the U.S. would impose a blockade on Mexico simultaneous to a declaration of war.

Whereas the Texas issue (an independent state till then) led to conflict with Mexico, the Oregon dispute led to intense negotiation with Britain. Thus, in 1845 the U.S. found itself balancing “alternating pressure from Mexico City and London” (Rakestraw & Jones 1997: 233). When war finally occurred, the U.S. took the opportunity to annex Texas as well as California, with France and Britain choosing to do nothing in response despite significant interests in the matter (Jones 1974: 55-62).

In International Relations (IR) terms this period represents the most serious expansionist phase in U.S. history. Unlike expansionism during the late 19th century and during the cold war, this phase represented expansionism of the home continental landmass of the U.S. itself – rather than maritime territories or foreign alliances and bases. As such it is similar and comparable to Russian expansionism throughout the 19th century, Japanese expansionism in the 1930’s and German expansionism in the 1930s. Expansionist powers are more likely to provoke balancing behavior since their expansion represents a threat in itself as well as incur costs on other great powers.



However, when and by the time the same expansion of the U.S. occurred, European powers were already absent from the continent. Spain and France lacked the will and capabilities to affect any change in the region while Britain, although willing, considered the costs of such a policy too high if it were to find itself pursuing it alone. Colin Elman points out the puzzle this period presents to realist balance of power theory, “Between 1814 and 1898 the United States fought no wars at all with European great powers, a period during which it obtained Florida, Texas, California, and Oregon. This absence stands in stark contrast to the vigorous responses to France, Germany, and the Soviet Union in their respective bids for regional hegemony” (Elman 2004: 574).

Thus, Britain’s choices and actions in the period seem to fit Wohlforth’s description of great power choices in the post cold war world – where great powers are deterred from balancing the U.S. because of the gap in aggregate power and because such powers do not seek to attract the hostile focus of the U.S. upon itself by choosing balancing strategies. More significantly, Wohlforth’s description seems to fit European (and primarily British choices) actions at a time when the U.S. was *not* preponderant in the system. Thus, preponderant power alone cannot explain the peculiar response of great powers to American power.

Neither did the U.S. come across as a classical maritime state as described by Levy and Thompson. States did not bandwagon with the U.S. as there were no incentives in terms of public goods that were offered by the U.S. The primary arena of expansion seemed to be land-based and territorial in nature – with the army playing the primary role in the war against Mexico and the conquest of California. Of all possible variables, it is only American insularity and its geographical position that best explains the non-balancing against the U.S. during its moment of continental expansion.

#### *The Trans-Isthmian Canal, Crimean war and, the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty*

Anticipating the growing strategic importance of any new line of communication in the Isthmian region that could connect the two oceans, Britain in the 1840s had begun to maintain and enhance its influence amongst its various de facto protectorates in the region – with the most probable intention of denying the U.S. sole and exclusive control over such a canal. These included Honduras, Costa Rica, Belize, and Honduras. This stealthy growth

in influence was aided by U.S. distraction in Mexico (Hickson 1931; Naylor 1960). This security competition between the two powers came to a head in 1848 with the British interest in recognizing the Mosquito Indians as independent of Nicaragua (an American sphere of influence) and deserving of British *de jure* recognition (Alstyne 1899).

However, instead of a war scare, the common interest in a trans-Isthmian canal led the two sides to draft and sign a treaty that guaranteed non-militarisation and neutralisation of the canal and its adjoining regions (Hickson 1931). Despite continued lack of clarity and differences of interpretation of the agreement and further touchy negotiations, the treaty does represent an example of how insular powers had succeeded in managing a territorial conflict through negotiation. It is debatable as to how much of this relied upon British acceptance of American demands (and relative intransigence) instead of mutual compromise. Most studies draw some link between the treaty itself and the gradual British retrenchment from the region (Bourne 1961).

Meanwhile, by 1853, the Crimean war which saw Britain and France form an alliance and come to the aid of Turkey by waging war on Russia caused significant concern to the U.S. The U.S. sympathized with and offered various forms of diplomatic support to Russia during the crisis. Despite Tsarist authoritarianism, the U.S. found stories of allied atrocities in the Kerch straits credible (Dowty 1971: 194). The U.S. was also concerned by the implications of an Anglo-French alliance on power struggles in the Caribbean between itself and the European powers. As influential Senator Lewis Cass warned, “the same fleet which passes the summer in the Black Sea may pass the winter in the Gulf of Mexico” (Dowty 1971: 207).

Accordingly, the U.S. considered it prudent to force Britain into the negotiating table while it was still engaged in the war against Russia rather than wait for a time when the adversary had a freer hand. Such negotiation tactics led to Britain embarking on a provocative naval deployment in the Caribbean, meant to influence U.S. policy. In somewhat characteristic fashion (see below, Samoan crisis in Chapter 3), the U.S. press responded by threatening escalation and war, “We confidently believe that if such a war should occur, we could raise three hundred thousand men for the invasion of England with less trouble than she raises thirty thousand for the invasion of Russia” (Washington Union 1855). Incidentally, the then

American Ambassador to Britain, James Buchanan, calculated that the U.S. could get away with such threats because Britain knew it could not summon popular support for a second war (Buchanan to Marcy, 1855). Consequently, Buchanan was swept by fears that Britain could embark on a war against the U.S. as the Crimean war began to draw to an end in 1856. However, the White House and influential members of Congress were still of the view that U.S. could still afford to press its claims to the hilt since Britain was more likely to back down. (Dowty 1971: 203-208).

Summing up the state of affairs in Anglo-American relations in recent years, Lord Palmerston writes in December 1857, “We have given way Step by Step to the North Americans on almost every disputed matter” (Palmerston to Clarendon, 1857). Even the most Anti-American Palmerston however did not advocate for a policy of balancing the U.S. but only to ‘delay’ its mastery over the Western Hemisphere. It should be noted that Palmerston seriously considered the invasion of Russia proper to contain its power during the same period, whereas no similar policy or action was even considered towards the U.S.

There were instances however in this period when British strategists would challenge the idea that the U.S was impregnable. The following argument by the then Governor-General of Canada Charles Metcalf is a very useful illustration of the same, “I presume that war may be carried on in North America on the same principles, and with the same results, as in Continental Europe. I may best perhaps explain my meaning by suggesting the supposition that Napoleon Bonaparte had possession of Canada with the resources of Great Britain, and the command of the ocean. He would, it may be imagined, make short work of a war with the United States, if his object were as moderate as ours would be, namely, an honourable peace. Why might not England do so likewise?” (Bourne 1967:141). Such opinions were however routinely rejected as impractical and politically unwise. The likes of Arthur Wellesley (Duke of Wellington) and Robert Peel argued that Britain had neither the manpower, naval capabilities to undertake such a task nor did it think such a policy-wise even if Britain had the capability in light of its other commitments. Britain could never organize a war against the U.S to balance its power on the same principles, and with the same results, as in Continental Europe.

British choices in this regard are very revealing. For instance, British quasi-support to the Monroe doctrine revealed a certain strategic philosophy that would guide British foreign policy for the next hundred years, if not more. As Bourne writes, “The support that Britain gave to some of the implication if not to the letter of the Monroe Doctrine helped British interests by substantially exempting the American continent from the rivalries of the European powers. But paradoxically by shielding the continent with her naval power Great Britain also ensured that the United States could grow more easily and that Britain alone had American interests and possessions to defend against that growing power”. (Bourne 1967: 409; Cyr 1979: 119-121). In other words, Britain had already tacitly made its choice in the 1820s that it would much rather tolerate American hegemony in North America than allow for European powers to enrich themselves in the continent and thereby compromise the balance of power in Europe (Morgenthau 1948: 139-140). As Fred Rippy points out, “It has been little less fortunate that the strongest of these European powers has been opposed to the intervention of the Old World states in America while displaying small disposition to control Hispanic-American territory for itself” (Rippy 1922: 134). Some realists may describe such a policy as the epitome of folly in foreign policy, but it is not clear to the author as to how Britain suffered the consequence of such a policy.

Although British commercial and political interests in South America clashed with that of American attempts at hemispheric dominance in the latter half of the 19th century, it decided to embark on caution, prudence, forbearance and gradually give way to American power and demands (Smith 1979; Salisbury 1997; Healy 1988). The geo-strategic competition included issues such as Isthmian control, the overthrow of the Brazilian Empire in 1890, the Nicaraguan crisis of 1909, the War of the Pacific, and the Venezuela boundary dispute, among others. What also comes out from one of the most authoritative studies of Anglo-American diplomacy in the period is the ‘baselessness of most of the American suspicions and fears of Britain in Latin America’ (Jones 1980) as well as American unilateralism and bellicosity – mirroring Nancy Mitchell’s study of American fears pertaining to German influence in South America from 1890s and up until the Great War (Mitchell 1999).

Britain’s willingness to accept American rise compared to the rise of its fellow European powers was also combined with its realization that the U.S was rather invulnerable to British

sea power. There always remained the strategic problem of winning a war against the U.S without conquering it. Preponderance theory argues that the U.S did not face counter-balancing behaviour in the post-cold war world because it was simply too strong to be balanced by a coalition of much weaker states. But throughout much of the 19th century, the U.S was not preponderant in the system; it was just one of several poles. Hypothetically, Britain, in alliance with other powers could have organized enough power to be able to balance American power. The question is why Britain did not do such a thing.

Britain could have theoretically made peace with European powers, achieved a *quid pro quo* over India with Russia and France, allowed Russia access to the Mediterranean, and later allowed Germany to establish an autarchic empire in Europe with the task of establishing a joint European balance against the U.S. Britain could have knit together an alliance. But the costs of the alliance would have fundamentally contradicted the basis of British Security. Russian access to the Mediterranean, German hegemony in Europe, French hegemony over the low countries were all outcomes that were far more undesirable to British interests – as they were tied more directly to British territorial security - than American hegemony in North America. What Britain referred to as the ‘balance of power’ was primarily a regional construct, applying almost exclusively to Europe; it was never meant to be applied globally or even to other regions.

And what of the theory that the U.S was not balanced because it was a maritime power. The U.S by all measures was more a continental power than a maritime power for much of the 19th century. Its navy was weaker than that of Chile for instance (Goldberg 1984). The source of American power remained its huge landmass and significant populations that could be mobilized into an effective army. The primary threat that Britain faced from the U.S was continental – *vis-à-vis* Canada. The war plans had to engage with the possibility of an American invasion into Canada. Hence, the dynamic between Britain and the U.S was such that though both were trading nations, the U.S was not fundamentally a maritime power in its constitution. As such, the Levy-Thompson thesis cannot explain such non-balancing.

The U.S seemed impregnable because of the following main reasons – Firstly, the withdrawal of other European power from the continent, an outcome aided and enabled by Britain herself for her own security interests. Secondly, the size and landmass of the U.S

made it extremely difficult for Britain or any other power to contemplate war with the U.S. the U.S was, in other words, unconquerable and this meant Britain felt constrained in terms of planning for the outcome of such a war. Thirdly, towards the end of the 19th century, the U.S enhanced its invulnerability by actually finally building a powerful fleet. This made even the prospect of landing troops in the U.S. an almost impossible task, as the German war plans also confirmed during 1896-98 (see below). Moreover, the US took advantage of British commitments in Europe to gradually assume control over British possessions and bases in North America and the Caribbean. This slow transfer is most clearly represented in the Destroyer for Bases Agreement of September 1940.

### *Lack of Intent and British balancing*

Invulnerability was however one side of the coin that led to non-balancing, the other side which played an almost equal role, if not greater, was non-willingness. In other words, Britain lacked the will to balance American power. This occurred for the following primary reasons – Firstly, American rise in the continent threatened British positions and interests in that continent but did not necessarily threaten British core security interests the same way the rise of a European power threatened British security interests. This has to do with Britain’s own location. Britain is a threat to the U.S as long as it insists on balancing the U.S in the continent or has significant assets in the same region. A Britain withdrawn from North America would not threaten American interest and in fact be valued by the latter, as it actually was (Spykman 1942). American strategists valued Britain’s role in maintaining the balance in Europe which also manifested in concrete beneficial outcomes such as British support for the Monroe doctrine. Thus, the U.S sought to complement the British balance of power strategy vis-à-vis Europe rather than challenge or undermine it. It was Europe that was seen as the region, which, if unified under a single administration, could challenge the Monroe doctrine and work against American invulnerability (Dowty 1971: 19-25). Such mutual benefit was described by Alexander DeConde as leading to a world “policed by the British fleet, a world in which Englishmen grew rich and Americans prospered peacefully” (DeConde 1978: 7). Similarly, writing in 1902 the noted maritime strategist Julian Corbett pointed out how American interest and stake in the Atlantic trade with Britain could itself allow Britain to protect its maritime trade “by a stroke of the pen” by allowing for British

goods to fly under the American flag, “I see America not conquering us but binding herself to the wheels of our chariot and bind away say I” (Corbett to Newbolt 1902). *Such a happy complementary relationship was unlikely to occur between a unified Europe and Britain.* Britain could not merely withdraw from Europe and expect British interests and European interests to not collide, being separated by only 26 miles. Hence, even Russian power seemed less threatening than European power to Britain. This also in part explains the British decision to balance Germany throughout the 20th century, even at the cost of allowing Russian power to expand in Europe.

U.S. expansion in the early 19th century itself was greatly aided by European continental wars as well as British preference for American expansion over European consolidation. For instance, concerns over French power led the British government of the time in 1803 to aid the transfer of Louisiana to the U.S., despite it resulting in the doubling of the size of the U.S. and despite security competition between the two powers in the Western hemisphere (Perkins 1968: 166-70; Nelson 2017: 695-698). Furthermore, France chose to sell the territory to the U.S. instead of Spain in order to cultivate better ties with the U.S. as well as prevent a deeper British-American rapprochement (Lyon 1974: 202). The then U.S. President Thomas Jefferson, at the same time, sought to convey to Napoleon the consequence of French possession of New Orleans upon American foreign policy by means of facilitating the leak of a letter that he had sent to U.S. Ambassador to France Robert R. Livingston. In it, he writes, “There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural & habitual enemy. it is New Orleans, through which the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass to market”. He then goes on to threaten that French possession would force the U.S. to “marry ourselves to the British fleet & nation. we must turn all our attentions to a maritime force” while also alluding to the relative irrelevancy of French aggregate power in North America, “...for however greater her force is than ours compared in the abstract, it is nothing in comparison of ours when to be exerted on our soil” (Ford 1897: 144-146). It is worth noting that in the letter, Jefferson managed to touch upon some key hypotheses that are being considered in this study – power balances in the abstract , geographic proximity and the European balance of power.

Two quotations that reveal Napoleon's strategic thinking regarding the balance of power and the U.S. are noteworthy. While considering the sale of Louisiana to the U.S., Napoleon raised the question of American preponderance in the future, "Perhaps it will also be objected to me, that the Americans may be found too powerful for Europe in two or three centuries: but my foresight does not embrace such remote fears." (Barbe-Marbois 1977: 276). Balance of power thinking further incentivised Napoleon to strengthen the U.S. vis-à-vis Britain, "this accession of territory strengthens for ever the power of the United States; and I have just given to England a maritime rival, that will sooner or later humble her pride" (Barbe-Marbois 1977: 312). The Louisiana purchase could thus be seen as the first major sign that European powers would rather prefer a stronger U.S. than a stronger fellow European power – a characteristic that has continued and only strengthened ever since and till this day.

*Europe, Empire or North America: The British choice*

Moreover, Britain became more concerned with German power towards the end of the century. Hence she co-operated with the U.S in South America and the Pacific in order to thwart German encroachment (Samoan islands), and the threat to her empire primarily came from the dual alliance between France and Russia (Maurer 2003; Till 2006). France threatened her possessions and influence in the Middle East and North Africa (until Fashoda 1898) and Russia threatened Iran, India, and British interests in China.

Britain had three core interests – the Balance in North America, Empire, and the Balance in Europe. She prioritized the third at the cost of the other two objectives. Even though Britain and America realized and acknowledged their common interests vis-à-vis the continental powers the relationship was still not without the occasional hostilities. The Venezuelan crisis demonstrated how ruthlessly America can force upon Britain arbitration on a matter which would have been seen as entirely a matter between British Guiana and Venezuela (Grenville 1964; Lafeber 2008: 63-65). The Crisis also happened to convince Salisbury that a war between the two countries in the future had become 'more than a possibility' and ought to become a factor in British naval spending (Grenville 1964). The 1890s saw the British appease the Americans on a whole range of issues – Alaska, Panama canal, the USS Baltimore crisis between U.S. and Chile (Goldberg 1984), Newfoundland



fishing rights, Samoa. It seemed as if Britain held on steadfast to a policy of ensuring that minor snares do not acquire logic of their own and create permanent thaws in Anglo-American relations (Perkins 1968; Adams 2005).

The year 1898 witnessed Britain mired in the South African war while the U.S achieved a quick and decisive victory over Spain in the Spanish-American war. American leaders and strategists perceived Britain as a power in decline in a world where globalization and technology seemed to be favouring the great continental powers in Europe. The influential historian Brooks Adams enumerated these ideas in a penetrating criticism of British foreign policy blunders and had predicted the passing of economic power from London to New York and yet he recognized a debt when he had written, “On looking back through the history of the century, no one can fail to appreciate the part played by England...it was she who checked the aggressions of Russia and Turkey and the East: it was she who bridled the ambitions of Germany. Americans in particular have relied on her to police the globe and keep distant markets open” (Adams, 1900: 147; Hattendorf & Jordan 1989: 1- 15).

*Too many rivals* – Britain had too many rivals and clashes of interests. Its foreign policy conflicted with most European great powers in the 1890s, a situation which propelled the policy of splendid isolation with an eye on minimising these frictions. As Grenville and Young describe the context, “In November 1895 the cabinet believed that they had all the trump cards. When the cabinet met on January 11, 1896, the mood was no longer confident. The cabinet was now inclined to cut Britain’s losses in a world which appeared to have become suddenly hostile. The Jameson raid and its failure had thrown South African policy into turmoil; the Kaiser’s celebrated Krueger telegram was regarded as proof of Germany’s malevolence; Russia continued to menace India and Constantinople” (Grenville and Young: 1966). Moreover, the Russians had offered the American treasury a large loan of gold; thereby indicating that it was doing all it could to further trouble the British. In the cabinet meeting Salisbury seemed more prone towards reaching agreements with France and Russia or seeming to do so, so that it could confront the U.S rather than confronting Russia and France. However, his cabinet colleagues managed to reverse his decision and suggested that negotiations be started with the U.S regarding Venezuela (thereby accepted the recently distorted interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine). The then Colonial Secretary Sir Joseph

Chamberlain for instance did not want to under-estimate the willingness of the American people to go to war against Britain and considered such a war to be “the very worst thing that could happen to us” (Garvin 1934: 160).

It however does need to be mentioned that in terms of capabilities the American navy could not compare to the British navy (Grenville 1964:106). Any direct naval engagement would have definitely ensured a British victory; however, the British could not be sure that the war would not end in a stalemate. America was not very vulnerable to blockade because of its enormous economy and it could harass either Canada or British merchant ships in both oceans. Although the crisis brought back to attention the issue of the continental defense of Canada, the British admiralty was keener on allocating resources to other areas such as the Mediterranean and the Franco-Russian alliance (Orde 1996: 11-12). These are the same reasons why the British could not contemplate seriously a preventive war against the U.S from 1820 to 1865.

### **Appeasement and Rapprochement: 1865-1914**

#### *Arbitration and reconciliation*

The formidable pattern of arbitration and settlement of disputes through negotiation that had been gradually evolving since 1818 reached its zenith in 1871 in the form of the Treaty of Washington. The treaty settled lingering disputes that occurred during the American Civil War – damages to U.S. shipping caused by British built ships, British casualties of war, and illegal fishing in Canadian waters. Incidentally, the success of the negotiations would have an influence on the shaping of international laws of arbitration including the Congress of Berlin in 1878 as well as the League of nations.

Meanwhile, the British government and public opinion in the late 1890s were adjusting towards allowing the U.S. full control and management over the Isthmian canal, in a revision of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty which allows U.S. control but assured neutralization. In the U.S. on the other hand, opinion was hardening towards the revision itself and in favor of abrogating the whole treaty through building fortifications and abandoning neutralization.

Theodore Roosevelt, seeking to put pressure on the government, argued, “If that canal is open to the war ships of an enemy it is a menace to us in time of war; it is an added burden, an additional strategic point to be guarded by our fleet. If fortified by us, it becomes one of the most potent sources of our possible sea strength. Unless so fortified it strengthens against us every nation whose fleet is larger than ours” (Roosevelt to Hay, 1900). Henry Cabot Lodge argued that Britain did not ‘care enough about it to go to war’ and besides, British naval possessions in the Caribbean posed a threat to the U.S. anyway (Garraty 1953: 215-217). The outcome was an amendment proposed by the U.S. Senate that sought to make neutralisation contingent on U.S. security and wartime interests.

The British Foreign Office accepted the amendments despite some concerns expressed by the admiralty, as it agreed with the assessment of Theodore Roosevelt regarding advantages accruing to the U.S. The admiralty was however constrained because its assessment that ‘it is essential that she (British navy) should remain predominant’ in home waters, Mediterranean and the Eastern seas if it came down to choosing between predominance between the former and the North American continent (Lansdowne Memorandum 1900; Admiralty Memorandum 1901).

Samuel E. Moffat, editorial writer of the New York Journal tellingly argued that the secret to amicable relations between the two sides was Britain’s willingness to align its policy to coincide with American interests, “It is based upon the fact that the United States is, and intends to remain, the paramount Power of the Western Hemisphere... For other Powers the only question is whether they will accept it or collide with it. If this fundamental principle be once accepted, no country will have any trouble in maintaining harmonious relations with the United States” (Orde: 1996: 21-22).

In the midst of the controversies regarding Venezuela and the Alaska border disagreement and amid calls for greater naval spending to defend Canada and meet the American challenge, Lord Lansdowne asked the most fundamental of questions, “Is war with the U.S. a probability for which it is our duty to provide in the same way as we might provide for war with any of the Continental Powers of Europe? ...I cannot believe that this question is to be answered in the affirmative’. One of the reasons provided for the above negative

answer to the question was recognition of America's shipbuilding potential (Lansdowne memorandum 1897; Selborne memorandum 1901).

### *Germany and the Continental Threat to British territory*

British foreign policy has had to deal with all kinds of contingencies and considerations throughout the 19th century after the Napoleonic wars. It adopted the Liberal alliance with France as a bulwark against the holy alliance of the three monarchs – Russia, Prussia, and the Austro-Hungarian empire. It allied with France and Austria during the Crimean War for the defense of Turkey and in order to keep the black sea straits inaccessible to Russia. It fought with France for almost a decade for supremacy over Egypt and the Suez Canal to keep its access to India secure. Furthermore, it sought to repel Russian advances in Persia, Afghanistan to keep India secure on land and balanced against Russia in China to secure its Chinese markets and possessions. It had also fought several wars in Africa either to secure South Africa or to keep up with other European powers for the scramble for Africa (Goodlad, 1999; Otte, 2007; Lowe, 1998). However, from around 1905 Britain had to deal with a strategic problem of a kind quiet unlike anything it had to consider for over a century. The foregoing struggles had all revolved around protecting colonies, securing access to and defending India, and keeping Russia within its borders in Eurasia. The dilemmas that Britain occupied itself with from around 1905 dealt with the matter of the invasion of the homeland itself.

An invasion enquiry was established in 1902, which hypothesized France as the possible invading country. The enquiry considered such a possibility to be not too serious. Subsequently, Lieutenant-Colonel Count Repington and Secretary of State for War Richard Haldane had convinced Lord Arthur Balfour in 1905 (now in opposition) that the earlier inquiry needed to be revised in light of the changed circumstances in the continent. The assumption ought to be fixed, they argued, on Germany rather than France. Ominous references were made to Moltke's attack and invasion of the island of Als during the Prussia-Danish war of 1866 in order to demonstrate that an innovative military could invade an island despite having a naval disadvantage of 3 to 1. Moreover, earlier historical precedents such as Napoleon's raid on Ireland in 1798 were revisited in order to discredit the 'blue water' doctrine of British strategy. (Ryan 1980, Gooch 1974).

Britain considered the option of conscription seriously and popular fiction of the time regularly featured stories of an impending German invasion of the homeland, either by air or by a sudden sea-based bolt from the blue. *Thus, Britain began to see Germany as the primary threat, by virtue of being the primary threat to the balance of power in Europe. The German threat was solidified by the fact that Germany could pose a naval challenge to Britain despite being a continental power.* The naval race intensified when Germany set goals of having 38 battleships. Britain had launched the dreadnought battleship in 1906, a ship that was ultra-modern and thought to make all other battleships obsolete. Germany launched its own battleship Nassau in 1908 (Herwig 1991).

Germany launched the naval race in order to try to compel Britain into an alliance with Germany. As Paul Kennedy would describe the rationale of Tirpitz's naval buildup, "A sharp knife, held gleaming and ready only a few inches away from the jugular vein of Germany's most likely enemy, England" (Kennedy 1970:38). The rationale was that Britain was already overstretched in terms of naval power – Mediterranean, East Asia, and North America. Germany could negotiate with Britain based on naval might, if not near parity. Britain would be forced to accept an alliance with Germany as the least bad option given its naval commitments elsewhere. Such an alliance would free up British naval might for use in other theatres of conflict – thus Britain would be almost held as a hostage and compelled to ally (Hobson 2002, Kennedy 1987, Selligman, 2010). The fundamental disjuncture and folly of the German policy was that it could not foresee how Britain might perceive its balance of power imperative to be much more significant than Imperial defense. Germany thought Britain could be forced to compromise on its European policy for the sake of preserving its imperial policy. This is an incorrect assessment of traditional British policy – possibly caused by the fact that Britain had not framed its policy geared towards a continental threat since the fall of Napoleonic France. As such, German policy-makers may have become over-perceptive of Britain's imperial policy, while under-perceiving its more fundamental balance of power motivations.

Having a Germany that was both a threat to the European balance as well as capable of challenging British naval dominance from a position of relative weakness compelled Britain to choose to prioritize the European balance over all other considerations. Entente was

achieved with France in 1898, an alliance with Japan in 1902, entente with Russia in 1907 over spheres of influence in Central Asia, and continued appeasement of and rapprochement with the U.S to make her complement Britain's balance of power policy in Europe.

The naval race did help Britain formulate its strategic assessment vis-à-vis Germany but it would be incorrect to assume that Britain grew hostile to Germany because Germany started a naval competition with Britain. In other words, the German navy was not the crux of the problem for Britain – evidence by the fact that an Anglo-German naval agreement in 1912 subdued much of the intense naval competition. Britain was not opposed to the German army or navy that it could see prior to 1914 but its main opposition was to the German navy and army that did not exist but would emerge in the future from a German victory over France and Russia if that were to occur. As Lord Balfour described the problem in July 1912, “The danger lies ... in the co-existence of that marvellous instrument of warfare, the German army and navy” (Langhorne 1971: 361). Hitler happened to fall for the error of assuming that British entry into the Great War emerged from the Kaiser's folly of engaging in a naval race with Britain. It is with this strategic lesson in mind that he thought he could prevent Britain from intervening in the future European war by forsaking a significant German navy (Maiolo 2010). Britain, true to its balance of power imperative chose to balance Hitler's Germany despite it not having a navy to offend British sensibilities. In other words, Britain was fighting a hypothetical enemy, a possible greater German empire that could conceive of invading Britain. The naval race simply helped demonstrate the strength of the hypothesis. If Germany could put together such a formidable navy when it was constrained in the continent by a nightmarish coalition what would it be capable of once it felt much less constrained?

One cannot fault Germany entirely for assessing that greater bellicosity and intimidation could lead to better relations with Britain. After all, the diplomacy of the U.S vis a vis Britain was also of an intimidating nature during the 1890s and also at a time when the U.S was growing, especially its fleet. If Britain responded to the situation vis-à-vis the U.S in terms of appeasement and rapprochement, why could it not do the same vis-à-vis Germany? Moreover, Germany and Britain did share significant common interests in the 1890s. Part of the reason Kaiser Wilhelm and Holstein did not renew the reinsurance treaty with Russia,

after all, was to make an alliance with Britain easier and more possible (Rich 1965; Craig 1980: 235). The Re-insurance treaty was a secret agreement between Russia and Germany which stipulated that each side will not remain neutral in a war in which one of the signatories gets involved in a war with a third great power; except in a German-French war or a Russian-Austrian war. The treaty also made Germany concede a Russian sphere of influence in parts of Eastern Europe (present-day Bulgaria) as well as in the Black Sea. Bismarck in essence tolerated growing Russian influence in the east as the cost to pay for the prevention of a Franco-Russian alliance.

Gordon Craig argues that the lapse of the re-insurance treaty had the opposite effect on British Foreign Policy than was intended by Germany, “In 1887 it had seemed necessary to make commitments to the Austrians and the Italians in order to balance Russian power in the Near East and French power in the Mediterranean. Now this was no longer true, for, as the Russians did the obvious thing and began to move closer to France, it was clear that the Germans must protect the interests of their junior allies or see the dissolution of the Triple Alliance” (Craig 1980: 235). Realisation of this disadvantage would make Kaiser Wilhelm consider reverting to a Bismarckian strategy by 1893; one that would involve economic concessions to Russia and assurances to the same of German disinterest in the Near East. In other words, while the treaty was in effect Germany could buckpass on Britain the responsibility of balancing Russia, whereas post treaty Britain could buckpass on Germany for the same.

The Franco-Russian alliance was a formidable combination that was a threat to both Germany (core interests) and Britain (Core Imperial interests). The period 1895-98 also saw several attempts on the part of Chamberlain to consider with Germany a closer relationship (Crosby 2011; Monger 1963). All this was occurring in a context of actual greater cooperation between Britain and Germany and especially on colonial matters. One could argue that the Franco-Russian combination occupied a primary position in terms of threat to Britain, only to be replaced gradually by Germany over the coming years after 1898.

*The 1905 crises and British balancing of Germany*

The most crucial turning point came in 1905. The year saw the dual crisis of the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War in the Far East and the Moroccan crisis that involved France, Britain, and Germany. The war in the Far East was especially favourable to Germany since it pitted the Franco-Russian alliance against the Anglo-Japanese alliance. The crisis threatened to sabotage growing relations between France and Britain and also held the promise of greater diversion of Russian strength and concentration from its western frontier (facing Germany) to its eastern frontier (Steinberg 1970; Rich 1965). An enduring naval-military competition between Russia and Japan in the Far East would weaken Russia's commitment to the defence and aid of France in a future conflict with Germany, thereby allowing Germany to avoid having to fight on two fronts simultaneously. The Kaiser took full advantage of the situation and relied on his personal diplomacy with his cousin – Tsar Nicholas of Russia. The personal diplomacy was centered on Russia's attempt to make Russia sign the Treaty of Bjorko. The diplomacy in turn was bolstered by the substantive military, financial, intelligence, and coaling assistance that Germany had provided to Russia throughout the course of the war in 1904-05 (McLean 2004: 126). The treaty aligned German and Russian interests with each other and in opposition primarily to Britain (Soroka 2010: 10-12).<sup>2</sup> The Tsar did indeed sign the treaty in a moment of desperation. The decision however was reversed once the Tsar consulted his cabinet. It was pointed out to him that the treaty contradicted the prior alliance with France since the text forbade each country from intervening against the other in case of a war with a third party. As Mclean writes, “He (Tsar Nicholas) asked Wilhelm to draw up a draft treaty and declared, somewhat naively, that once Russia had signed the agreement, ‘France is bound to join her ally.’ No treaty of alliance was signed at that time, however, because it quickly became apparent that the Russian Foreign Minister, Count Lamsdorff, the vast majority of Russian diplomats, and the French government, and particularly its Foreign Minister Th'eophile Delcass'e, would not countenance such an agreement.” (McLean, 2004: 111).

Unfortunately for Germany, the decisive conclusion of the war in the form of Japanese victory at the battle of Tsushima put an end to the prospect of a protracted Russo-Japanese

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<sup>2</sup> This was immediately after the Dogger Bank incident which led to a war scare with Britain threatening Both Germany and Russia with war.



politico-military competition in the Far East. The decisive end was not simply an outcome of the decisive naval battle between the two powers. After the battle, Russia did decide on continuing the war by sending vast military reserves from the West to the East. However, the defeated power was persuaded by a combined American-French-British diplomatic effort to seek peace with Japan. The newly allied powers also bore significant pressure on Japan's government to compromise by forsaking its indemnity claim on Russia (McLean 2004).

The allied powers were motivated in this task because of their perception of the threat to the European balance. Russia was needed as a counter-weight to German power in Europe and all that could be done to avoid Russian enduring entanglement in the Far East needed to be done. By this time Russia had also started becoming dependent on French financial loans. Britain also offered to step up and assist Russia in her own war subsequent to the crisis. At the end of the day, it was the balance of power imperative that turned what seemed like a great opportunity during the early stages of the crisis into a nightmare by the end. As McLean writes,

“It would be misleading, however, to conclude that the need for loans, and Paris's and London's greater ability to furnish them than Berlin's, was the crucial factor in Russia's reluctance to ratify the Treaty of Bjorko. In reality, Russian policy was determined by an assessment of the Empire's vital interests. In the face of French reluctance to join a continental league, Russia had to choose between Paris and Berlin. The choice was not a difficult one to make, because, for all its faults, the Franco-Russian alliance had the semblance of being a partnership of equals and helped to maintain a military balance in Europe. By contrast, if Russia had decided to ally herself with the Kaiser Reich against France, she would have helped to ensure German dominance of the continent and would have seen her own status diminish from that of a Great Power to that of a client state of Berlin” (McLean, 2004: 138).

## **Interwar Cooperation and Non-Balancing: 1919-1939**

“It is a fact of supreme importance that the economic life of Europe is being blasted to its very foundations whereas America is increasing in wealth. As I look enviously at New York – I who still think of myself as a European – I ask myself: ‘Will Europe be able to stand it? Will it not sink into nothing but a cemetery? And will the economic and cultural center of gravity not shift to America?’..... the problem of ‘America versus Europe’ has been one of my chief interests. And even now I am studying the question with the utmost care, hoping to devote a separate book to it. If one is to understand the future destiny of humanity, this is the most important of all questions.”

Leon Trotsky (Trotsky 1930: 270-271)

The run-up to the Great War and its very conduct testifies to the notion that relations between Britain and the U.S were strategically complementary whereas relations between insular powers and the primary continental power as well as among the primary continental powers were antagonistic. This is reflected in a way after the war as well. It is observed that the strongest victors emerging from a major war find it difficult to not have antagonistic relations among themselves subsequently. Examples include Athens and Sparta after their common struggle against Persia, Britain, and Russia after their common struggle against Napoleonic France and the U.S and Soviet Union after their common struggle against Nazi Germany. Relations between the U.S and Britain did indeed resemble some of these characteristics during the early post-war stages. The Peloponnesian wars occurred “as a consequence of the rise of Athens and the fear it caused in Sparta” (Allison 2012). Even the building of purely defensive capabilities, such as the wall Athens built after the war seemed threatening to Spartan interests. How is it then, historically speaking, did the rise of the U.S and especially after the display of its offensive capabilities during the great war, did not cause concern serious enough for Britain to begin balancing against the U.S.?

### *Naval competition averted*

Lloyd George, the then British Prime Minister had, after all, warned Colonel House that "Great Britain would spend her last guinea to keep a navy superior to that of the United

States or any other Power” (Seymour 1926-28: 180). This was met by a symmetrical assertion by American admirals of their right to achieve naval supremacy for the sake of defending the Monroe doctrine (Vagts 1941). As Paul Kennedy writes of the time, “To the Admiralty, the most worrying fact was the remorseless growth of the US Navy” (Kennedy 1981: 259). For a while, it seemed as if the exception that Britain made for the U.S before the War was now no longer on offer. Britain had at an earlier date and since 1889 aimed at a two-power standard aimed at France and Russia, followed by a 160 pc standard vis-à-vis Germany and eventually a one power standard vis-à-vis the U.S. Maritime supremacy touched a deep chord with British leaders because of the traditional and intuitive idea that if Britain could not ensure dominance over the seas it effect became a subject of the goodwill of other powers. John Ferris describes the predicament facing British leaders in the following way,

“By spring 1919 that government had approved the '1916' and the '1918' naval construction programmes. Each of these consisted of 16 'post-Jutland' battleships and battlecruisers which would outclass all save a handful of British warships. Whereas the '1918' programme seemed to be a bargaining chip for use against Britain during the peace conference, some of the '1916' programme was already under construction. It was entirely possible that the '1916' programme and by no means impossible that the '1918' one would be completed. The Admiralty warned that unless America abandoned or Britain matched these programmes, by 1925 the '1916' programme alone would create Anglo-American equality at sea. Any further construction would make the USN the world's strongest fleet. The response of the British strategic-policymaking elite to this challenge turned on the vexed question of its perceptions of the United States” (Ferris 1991:59).

Initial responses that were contemplated included taking over the interned German navy and reviving the alliance with Japan (Tillman 1961; Roskill 1979: 103-106; Maiolo 2010: 121). If Britain had indeed taken such steps, the possibilities of an Anglo-American naval race would have increased and along with it balancing behaviour by great powers aimed at the U.S. The choice seemed clear to the Prime Minister - use diplomacy to persuade the U.S to abandon naval construction (or allow British supremacy or at the very least parity) or be prepared to go down the road of a naval arms race - which by itself could lead to bankruptcy

or war or both. Fortunately for Britain, the American goals were as reasonable and flexible as Britain's. The strongest bargaining position of the U.S was American supremacy of the seas but it could very well settle for parity if that led to better relations with Britain (Ferris 1991; O'Connell 2019; Sumida 2001). This allowed for a certain compatibility of interests.

Britain could not find alliances against the U.S and had relatively little will to do so as well. Britain could have actually embarked on an arms race against the U.S as was advocated by Winston Churchill and some in the admiralty but this was decided against out of concern that it could antagonize the U.S too severely. But surely the response to that could have been 'so what?' There was indeed a strategic answer to the 'so what?' question unlike the case vis-à-vis Germany. An antagonized U.S. would seriously undermine the British position in Europe in case another potential hegemon emerges in the continent – the primary and plausible candidates were France and a revived Germany. The European war may have been just over but in the overall British grand strategy, the balance of power in Europe was still the supreme objective bar none. Maritime supremacy was only a means to an end- the end being the security of the British home isles. *Far more threatening to the security of the home isles was an imbalance of power in Europe rather than naval parity or even sub-parity vis-à-vis the world's most eminent power i.e. U.S.*

This compatibility of interests is buttressed by the fact that much of the bickering in this period concerned British prestige rather than any actual dent in British strategic confidence and plans. As John R. Ferris writes,

“Moreover, in strategic terms it was irrelevant whether the RN and the USN were equal in strength or if one was somewhat stronger. The clashes of Anglo-American interests were not at all likely to turn upon the use or the threat of force. Should that have happened, in all probability this standard could have sustained neither a British nor an American victory. The only certain damage which the United States could inflict upon the British Empire for many years during a war, military action against Canada, could have been done just as easily without a single warship as with naval equality. Even with the two-power standard advocated in 1919, the RN could scarcely have defeated America” (Ferris 1991: 74).

After the end of the First World War, the Planning section of the United States Naval forces in Europe noted, “Four Great Powers have arisen in the world to compete with Great Britain for commercial supremacy on the seas – Spain, Holland, France, and Germany. Each one in succession has been defeated by Britain and her fugitive allies. A fifth commercial power, the greatest one yet, is now arising for at least commercial equality with Britain. Already the signs of jealousy are visible. Historical precedent warns us to watch closely the moves we make or permit to be made” (Bell 1997: 795).

As such the idea that the two strongest powers after the war might compete against each other in a wide spectrum of issues seemed quite intuitive. Notable U.S. naval officials themselves expected such a war to emerge from Britain’s attempt to prevent its economic decline and hold on to maritime supremacy – and such a choice was deemed natural and reasonable (Vlahos 1980:104). However, the war plans both countries devised for such a contingency might hold some clues as to why geopolitical competition that was anticipated by the Planning section of the U.S navy did not occur.

For one, each side assumed that only the other would start such a war and “knew that it could not predict the other's conduct with certainty” (Bell 1997: 790). Having concluded that a land invasion was impossible and that a blockade was unlikely to be drastic enough to lead to surrender, the British side could not conceptually devise a way of concluding the war. The best hope was for a blockade to lead to some stalemate, followed by negotiations – which almost begs the question as to why not negotiate in the first place. Furthermore, it was expected that in such a war the U.S. would easily overwhelm Canadian land defenses and Britain was not even likely to send enforcements across the Atlantic to defend Canadian borders and thereby engage in an extremely costly land war in which the other side has all the advantages. (Bell 1997)

Service needs to defend demands for higher budgets may very well have incentivized a less sanguine threat assessment in both countries. The same had also occurred at a time when continental threats and threats in general from other powers were more or less missing. Such a threat perception, real or contrived, did provide for enough wargaming and theoretical

exercising to enable future academics to gauge how leaders on both sides thought in terms of war, peace, and strategy vis-à-vis each other.

Scenario building also demonstrates that an outright victory or even a land invasion is ruled out on both sides, the vulnerabilities are not equal. Firstly, the U.S. is seen as having more capital ships (although the U.S. considered the RN as more capable) and secondly, the U.S. is less vulnerable to blockade as it is a self-sufficient continental system. Both are seen as equally capable of blockading the other – Britain through its bases in Bermuda and Halifax and the U.S. by possibly taking over Azores or allying with a European power. Canada was more a liability to Britain since it was estimated that an American invasion of the same will be difficult, if not impossible to repel. The British side also took into account the idea that finding a European ally in such a war would be implausible, whereas the U.S. could more easily rely on European aid and cooperation against Britain – as was the case both during the revolutionary war and the war of 1812 (Ross 1992; Eayrs 1964; Bell 1997).

What is also worth noting is that even in such a hypothetical scenario building, neither side planned an actual invasion of the other. The U.S. did not even plan a crossing of the Atlantic to enforce a naval blockade. Whereas the Canadian and British strategies were offensive and involved rapid military action it was so because they knew that time was on the U.S.' side as it could mobilise greater resources- somewhat similar to the dilemma that Japan found itself in 1941. Such a circumstance of events will be unthinkable between two neighboring continental states.

Canada emerges in these plans as a double-edged sword which arguably did more to jeopardize British security than to threaten American power. As Richard Arthur Preston writes, “It (the U.S.-Canada border) was the only one in which Britain directly faced a modern Western country of great potential strength. The defence of the Canadian border was the Empire's most difficult and could become its most dangerous, problem on land” (Preston 1978: 12). In other words, Canada compromised British insularity as much as it did, if not more, American security. *With only one-tenth of the population of the U.S and a long border to defend Canada served less as a staging ground for a possible British invasion*

*of the U.S than it did as a hostage at the hands of the U.S. to influence British policy.* Hence, Canada was described famously by the Duke of Wellington Arthur Wellesley as “All frontier and nothing else” (Bourne 1967: 406).

### *Britain and the European Balance in the Interwar Years*

In the 1920s Britain feared or had concerns about possible French hegemony in Europe. This concern drove Britain's expansion of its air force from 1921 to 1925 (Ferris 1989; Marks 1999). Martin S. Alexander and William J. Philpott describe these fears,

“French policies and France’s far-reaching military presence in Europe after the conclusion of the Paris peace treaties were thought, in London, to be suspiciously hegemonic. Besides the privileged commercial relations, France concluded with newly-independent states in east-central Europe such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, the signs of French influence included the establishment in 1919 of a military mission under General Louis Pellé in Prague and the appointment in 1921 of another French officer, General Louis Faury, as the first commandant of the Polish Army staff college. Many British statesmen and defence chiefs estimated that French policies had the potential to provoke international tensions and even give grounds for a new war” (Alexander & Philpott, 2002: 1-2).

This factor explains Britain's unwillingness to more permanently downgrade German power in the continent. During the Ruhr occupation crisis, for instance, Britain and America sided with Germany to help stave off French pressure (Braumoeller 2010; Schuker 1976). Britain was also concerned that the French-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr basin in 1923, as a response to German non-payment of reparations, was likely to strengthen the German-Russian co-operation (Salzmann 2003: 33-37). 1919-1927 saw a dynamic whereby France sought to balance German power through militarization and alliances, which in turn propelled Britain to balance French power out of concerns regarding possible French hegemony (Marks 1999: 22-28).

Anglo-American policy during these years perplexed French leaders since they could not understand why the maritime states were discounting latent German power. Furthermore,

France had sought greater American participation in Europe as a way to discourage German revanchism. To France, it seemed as if the Anglo-Saxon powers were neither willing to neither uphold the balance in Europe nor allow France to uphold it in the manner of its choosing. The evidence however suggests that by preventing France from completely dominating Germany Anglo-America sought to uphold the very same balance in Europe, considering that France was perceived to be the hegemonic threat instead of Germany. Hitler at the time seems to have understood the sources of British continental policy and described it as such, “England has an interest in seeing that we do not go under because otherwise, France would become the greatest continental power in Europe, whilst England would have to be content with the position of a third-rate power” (Schweller 1998:85).

In fact, British policy in these years strongly resembled the traditional 19th-century policy of balancing France and Russia while being tolerant of German power. And yet again Britain chose to balance one European power after another instead of forming alliances with them to balance against the U.S. and thereby defying both Waltzian and Preponderance theory would have expected.

The concern with France would however gradually be replaced by concern with Germany. Since the early 1930s, Britain feared German rearmament and a renewed bid for European hegemony. Appeasement was attempted to prevent a possible ‘mad-dog’ type unleashing of German power. Britain attempted coalition building throughout the 1930s by also trying to draw in Italy as a possible balancer of Germany.

With regard to the United States, there were serious concerns about losing the position of number one naval power. But Britain also did foresee that she herself is unlikely to come out on top if a naval arms race were to occur between the two powers. During the Spring of 1921, the British ambassador to the U.S. Auckland Geddes during a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes, provoked an angry outburst from the latter when he seemed to dither on abandoning the Anglo-Japanese treaty of 1902, “You would not be here to speak for Britain! ...You would not be speaking anywhere! England would not be able to speak at all. It is the Kaiser– the Kaiser, who would be heard, if America seeking



nothing for herself, but to save England, had not plunged into the war and (screamed) won it! And you speak of obligations to Japan” (Gardner 1987: 307-09). Eventually, Britain ended up conceding naval parity to the U.S and even sought to appease the rising power by abandoning its Eastern alliance with Japan (Kennedy 1981: 260-263). Of note to this study, Paul Kennedy argues that Britain’s pragmatic step of deference to the U.S. was made possible, among other things, “by the laws of geopolitics – for the USA, unlike France or Germany, was far enough away to be able to expand without directly encroaching upon British national security” (Kennedy 1981: 262).

Winston Churchill, for instance, at around this time put the matter in the following way “An alliance between Britain and Japan for the sake of protecting Australia and New Zealand against Japan is meaningless”. It was thought that the best way of ensuring the Empire in the east, in the long run, was by allying with the U.S. something its dominions (Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) also favored strongly. Incidentally, the principle of naval parity itself required Britain subsequently to improve its strategic relations with the U.S. since Britain could not prevail in a naval war with more than one adversary without having the U.S. as its ally; and also because Britain was itself taking a risk by accepting naval vulnerability from the U.S. (Orde 1996: 72-76). However, there were voices within the British administration that at times resented British deference to American strategic demands. Consider, for instance, the following lament by British Cabinet Secretary Maurice Hankey in 1927, “Time after time we have been told that, if we made this concession or that concession, we should secure goodwill in America. We gave up the Anglo-Japanese alliance. We agreed to pay our [war] debts, and we have again and again made concessions on this ground. I have never seen any permanent result follow from a policy of concessions. I believe we are less popular and more abused in America than ever because they think us weak” (Hankey to Balfour 1927).

Waltzian Balance of Power within the insular world would expect an alliance between Japan and Britain against the U.S, but Churchill’s sentiment points in a different direction - he asserted that War with both the United States and Britain would be a “hopeless proposition

for Japan. A giant and a boy may fight a bigger giant, but if the two giants get together the boy has got to be content with innocent pleasures” (Bell 2003: 53).

In fact, Britain, if anything started actively perceiving the Japanese as a threat to the Pacific empire. Lord Jellicose recommended the permanent stationing of a large battlefleet in the Far East to achieve deterrence against Japan on its own and without American help. Admiral Roger Keyes was in favor of greater fleet mobility to hold the Japanese in check (Bell 2003: 54).

The Anglo-Japanese alliance remained robust when the primary target was Russian Imperialism in China and Asia broadly. With the neutralization of Russia, the British realized that Japan could change its strategic direction and turn southwards or attempt to achieve territorial hegemony in the Asian landmass that would counter British interests in the region (Woodhouse 2003: 16-21). It is entirely plausible that without American interference the alliance could have survived, but it is also certain that it would have been much harder to negotiate and maintain in case Japan had in the future changed its strategic direction.

### **The Second World War and Balancing**

As Nazi Germany moved towards expansionism in Europe, Britain dug its heels in and moved towards balancing German power through an arms buildup as well as foreign alliances. Conservative members of the government such as Winston Churchill, Lord Beaverbrook, and Anthony Eden would take the charge in diplomatically reaching out to the Soviet Union and despite the latter’s ideology and pact with Germany; and annexation of Baltic and Eastern European states. Considerations regarding the preservation of Empire or peace or the implications of a Soviet victory and a communized Germany did not dissuade from its policy of maintaining a balance of power in Europe.

Britain was willing to risk a future Soviet hegemony over parts of Europe as well as American predominance in the international system – the first being costlier than the second,

as evidence by the cold war – in order to prevent a German hegemony over Europe. Britain sought American participation in the war from the start. Upon hearing news of the Japanese aerial attack on Pearl Harbor and thereby expecting unqualified entry into the war, Churchill noted his relief “Being saturated and satiated with emotion and sensation, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and thankful (Churchill 1948: 743).

## **Conclusion**

Why did Britain not balance the U.S? Was it different perceptions of threats; was it a function of American behavior towards Britain? Was it distractions in Eurasia? British actions themselves are a great clue. Britain had adopted the naval rule of being preponderant or being stronger than the combined navies of two of the strongest European powers. This rule made strategic sense since only a combination of naval powers equal or greater in strength than the British navy can hope to threaten core British security interests. This rule however was oddly not applied in the case of the U.S. In other words, a European navy is seen as inimical to British security and not an American navy. If Britain had considered an American navy to be as significant a threat as a European navy, it would have put significant constraints on America’s rise and international influence. Such a threat estimate would also have pre-disposed Britain more favourably towards an alliance with another country aimed at the U.S or at the very least, made Britain tolerant of a European potential hegemon than it actually was. German leaders (and later Stalin) were aware of the benefits of Britain having apprehensions regarding American power and hence they would attempt to influence Britain towards such perceptions occasionally.

From 1865 to 1945 Britain had at different points of time chosen to balance France, Germany, Russia but never seriously considered balancing the U.S. How is it that a German navy threatened Britain but an American navy did not? The most convincing explanation of the puzzle lies in the factor of geography. As Graham Goodlad explains, “Although the ending of the American Civil War in 1865 made possible the United States’ emergence as the dominant power in the western hemisphere, it did not present an immediate threat to

British interests. On the European continent, the most significant development of the period was the creation, through a series of wars, of a united Germany” (Goodlad, 1999:1).

Disraeli spoke in 1870 of “the German revolution, a greater political event than the French revolution of the last century”. It is also not the case that American behavior towards Britain was more **magnanimous** in this period. During the Venezuela crisis for instance the American administration adopted a very obstinate position towards British claims on behalf of Guyana. Germany, on the other hand, had been extremely conciliatory after the removal of Bismarck and her willingness to join in an alliance with Britain had also played some part in not continuing the re-insurance treaty with Russia.

Nor was it that the U.S. was less expansionist than Germany. Expansionism was on the rise since 1870 and acquired greater momentum towards the 1890s with the navy bill, the great white fleet, The Roosevelt corollary to the Monroe doctrine, the acquisition, and annexation of Hawaii, Philippines, Cuba, etc. German expansionism paled in comparison in the same period and only made some stride in Africa after 1900.

Germany was placed in a continent separated by only 26 miles from Britain. Much as British security interests and power led her to dominate and invade Ireland in the 13th century, A Europe under German hegemony would also be pre-disposed against independent British power. A Europe under German hegemony would moreover also have the means to outbuild the British navy several times over and invade British territory. In other words, German Europe would have both the strategic interest in and the capabilities to neutralize Britain. This fear and sentiment was given expression by Churchill in 1940 at a time when he was considering peace with Germany in the following way,

“It was idle to think that, if we tried to make peace now, we should get better terms from Germany than if we went on and fought it out. The Germans would demand our fleet—that would be called ‘disarmament’—our naval bases, and much else. We should become a slave state, though a British government which would be Hitler’s puppet would be set up— under Mosley or some such person” (Kershaw 2008:58).

The same was expressed by the British War Minister Richard Haldane to the German Ambassador in London in 1912 on being inquired regarding British policy in case of a European war (Copeland 2000:65). As such there was clarity within the German government in 1912 that Britain would enter a European war regardless of the naval race or Belgian neutrality. Chancellor Bethmann would write on December 20, 1912, “Haldane's disclosure to Lichnowsky was not all that serious. It merely reflected what we have long known: that Britain continues to uphold the policy of the balance of power and that it will therefore stand up for France if in a war the latter runs the risk of being destroyed by us” (Copeland, 2000:66).

British thinking in the period before the great war was clearly represented in the famous Crowe Memorandum prepared by the British diplomat and expert on Germany in the Foreign Office in 1907,

“History shows that the danger threatening the independence of this or that nation has generally arisen, at least in part, out of the *momentary predominance of a neighbouring State* at once militarily powerful, economically efficient, and ambitious to extend its frontiers or spread its influence, the danger being directly proportionate to the degree of its power and efficiency, and to the spontaneity or "inevitableness" of its ambitions.... By applying this general law to a particular case, the attempt might be made to ascertain whether, at a given time, some powerful and ambitious State is or is not in a position of natural and necessary enmity towards England; and the present position of Germany might, perhaps, be so tested” (Crowe 1907: 402).

Hence, Churchill chose to balance Germany even when Britain had no allies and Germany had just achieved hegemony in Europe. This in effect meant that British strategy would be to *prevent the emergence of a German Europe at almost any cost*. The same dynamic however did not exist vis-à-vis the U.S.

In this context, it is worth quoting Jefferson at some length since it clarifies the consistent American position vis-à-vis Europe and Britain since:

“Surely none of us wish to see Bonaparte conquer Russia, and lay thus at his feet the whole continent of Europe. This done, England would be but a breakfast: and altho’ I am free from the visionary fears which the votaries of England have affected to entertain, because I believe he cannot effect the conquest of Europe; yet put all Europe into his hands, and he might spare such a force, to be sent in British ships, as I would as lieve not have to encounter, when I see how much trouble a handful of British soldiers in Canada has given us. No. it cannot be our interest that all Europe should be reduced to a single monarchy. The true line of interest for us is that Bonaparte should be able to effect the complete exclusion of England from the whole continent of Europe, in order, as the same letter said ‘by their peaceable engine of constraint to make her renounce her views of dominion over the ocean, of permitting no other nation to navigate it but with her license, & on tribute to her, and her aggressions on the persons of our citizens who may choose to exercise their right of passing over that element.’ and this would be effected by Bonaparte’s succeeding so far as to close the Baltic against her. This success I wished him the last year, this I wish him this year; but were he again advanced to Moscow, I should again wish him such disasters as would prevent his reaching Petersburg. and were the consequences even to be the longer continuance of our war, I would rather meet them than see the whole force of Europe wielded by a single hand” (Jefferson to Lieper 1814).

It was in the interests of both Britain and the U.S that large-scale land-based European powers are kept out of the western hemisphere and hence the Monroe doctrine acquired credibility despite the U.S having little military strength vis-à-vis European powers thanks to the British navy. Moreover, post-1865 Britain simply did not have the army large enough to consider invading the American mainland. American geography, size, and population meant that only a large scale European army or a combination of European powers could contemplate an attack on the American homeland. This meant that the U.S looked upon Europe, instead of Britain, as the source of future threats because of its latent overwhelming capabilities. This happy coincidence of interests was grasped by Britain also in turn which meant that Britain sensed that as insular offshore powers both the U.S and Britain had a common interest in preventing the emergence of a European hegemon that could conceivably threaten both Britain and the U.S.

This meant that greater American power could only come at the cost of such a future European hegemon and at great benefit to Britain and its traditional balance of power policy. This strategic dynamic acquired a more concrete character in 1895 when a combination of European powers (Germany, France, Russia) co-operated with each other to neutralize the consequences of Japan's victory over China in the same year. The continental league was essentially anti-British in character and anti-insular powers in the abstract. The powers agreed on keeping insular Japan away from the Asian mainland. Britain and the U.S. in turn were more sympathetic towards Japan and post 1895 co-operated to prop up Japanese power vis-à-vis Russia. 1905 also saw a similar alliance come into being during the Russo-Japanese war. France and Russia were already treaty allies and Germany sought to take advantage of the situation to both pull Russia closer towards Germany and also encourage Russian expansion in the east towards Asia instead of West in Europe towards Germany. This German diplomatic strategy was helped by the fact that Britain and Japan were in turn allies and British bellicosity subsequent to the Dogger Bank incident greatly antagonized the Russian Tsar against Britain. Hence, much as 1895 for a while it looked like the continental alliance aimed at Britain and Japan was taking shape in the shape of the Bjorko treaty.

Stephen Walt argues that the German fleet before the Great War by itself constituted a threat to British interests. In other words, the "offensive power" of the German navy propelled Britain to balance Germany (Walt 1985). This interpretation however does not explain as to what was so different about the German capital ships that were so different from the Japanese or American fleet. A better explanation lies in Germany's geography. German ships were a threat worth balancing because they were 'German' ships and not because they represented a certain type of offensive power.

The diplomatic experiences over 1895, 1905, and 1898 and in China in the early 20th century led to the strong impression in both the U.S and Britain that basic geopolitics were driving the U.S and Britain towards a natural alliance despite the two being the strongest units in the system. In Waltzian balance of power terms, the alliance was an anomaly since the two most powerful states in the system are supposed to balance against each other.

Instead, the two powers allied with each other to balance a weaker power. According to Preponderance theory states do not balance against a power if it has achieved preponderance in the system. But the U.S had by no means achieved preponderance of any kind in the period.

British non-balancing against the U.S from 1865-1945 was a natural outcome of the British failed attempts at balancing the U.S from 1814-1865. This failure at seriously balancing the U.S was the result of various factors. These were – an inability to find allies, difficulties of invading the U.S considering its size, geography, and population, and eventually the undermining of attempts at balancing by Britain’s own policy of maintaining a balance of power in Europe. Bourne captures the dilemma that lay at the heart of these attempts, “Throughout most of the first half of the century the British therefore tried to contain the United States by erecting fortifications on the frontier and by intervening with diplomacy wherever they could. But in the long run both methods proved too difficult, too expensive and too unpopular. Of course there remained the hope that if Britain alone could not afford to maintain the balance of power against the United States someone else might help. There was also that faint hope that if only she could survive in the interval, Canada herself might one day rival her neighbor to the south. But when confederation finally came in 1867 it served rather to free Britain to some extent from an embarrassing dispersal of her forces and contributed more to her power in Europe than to her strength in America” (Bourne 408).

Just as Britain considered an offensive against the U.S for both military and political reasons the U.S was also in turn deterred from an offensive against Canada as such a move would result in a war against Britain. War with Britain would be costly and would risk the shelling of American coastal cities and an economic blockade similar to one imposed during 1812-14. Since Britain retained control over the Atlantic Ocean it could re-enforce its Canadian garrisons and tie down the U.S. At the end of the day, the U.S knew it was unable to take the war to Britain. Thus Britain and the U.S. found themselves in a strategic relationship where defense seemed to dominate over offense, at least perceptually. It’s a strategic condition very different from the one that existed between European continental powers such as between France-Germany and Germany-Russia. Richard Arthur Preston



describes it aptly, “For half a century, then, there had been not so much a balance of power as an equilibrium of weakness—with the British garrison standing as a cautionary force in Canada and the Royal Navy posing a threat in the background” (Preston 1978: 21).

Britain was unaided in her attempts at balancing the U.S by the other great powers such as Austria, Russia, Prussia, and France because these powers, in turn, were not threatened by the U.S. America could grow, increase its population and power in peace and without axiomatically threatening these great powers. Slow, gradual but also inexorable American rise could occur almost in isolation and without drawing the attention of great powers. This could only be explained by geography and American insularity. America could grow in relative isolation because it was located in relative isolation. Other great powers lacking insularity such as Spain, France, and Germany could not peacefully grow or increase its power without drawing attention to the same and in ways unfavourable to that power. This relative isolation would become less relative post-1865 with the gradual withdrawal of Britain from North American and almost all traces of balancing against the U.S would disappear.

As noted in the Introduction Waltz had written the following regarding the balancing behavior of great powers against the U.S a decade after the end of the cold war, “The explanation for sluggish balancing is a simple one. In the aftermath of earlier great wars, the materials for constructing a new balance were readily at hand. Previous wars left a sufficient number of great powers standing to permit a new balance to be rather easily constructed” (Waltz 2000: 54). But perhaps the problem is an old one since a review of the British incapability to balance also suggests that the ‘materials for constructing’ a balance were not so much unavailable as they were unemployed or even employed elsewhere.

Henry Kissinger judged, rightly, that “Churchill’s intransigence toward Germany in the summer of 1940 can therefore be interpreted as a decision in favor of American over German hegemony”. He traces the sources of such a choice however not to realpolitik, instead emphasising ‘similar’ culture and language as well as the lack of any “ostensibly clashing interests” (Kissinger 1995: 354). This characterisation is odd because Britain and

Germany also had no clashing interests in 1940 – other than the balance of power and preventing German hegemony; thereby begging the question. Furthermore, such a description ignores the series of clashing interests that the U.S. and Britain had throughout history – from Oregon to Panama, Mexico, Texas, and so on. Moreover, the allusion to language and culture goes against Kissinger’s own sense of realpolitik which required the U.S. to ally with China against the Soviet Union despite dissimilar cultures. Britain’s wartime alliance with the Soviet Union against Germany yet again demonstrates the greater power of realpolitik over sociological considerations such as religion, language, ideology, and culture.

### **Chapter Three: Germany and the U.S.**

Out of all great powers, it was Germany which actively sought, and twice, to form alliances aimed at the U.S. Furthermore, it was again Germany which sought to achieve, and again twice, to achieve regional hegemony. The U.S. would play a very important role in obstructing Germany from achieving its goals – each time. Thereby, in retrospect one can discern that Germany had all the reasons to curb American power in the period.

#### **Aim**

In this chapter, I aim to provide an explanation of German external behaviour in the period 1865 to 1945 from a balance of power perspective – with the ultimate objective of assessing its balance of power outlook and policy towards the U.S. In the first section, I discuss the contrasting geographic context of Germany and the U.S. In the subsequent section I discuss early conflicts between the young German state and the U.S. in the Pacific and the determinants of the outcome of the conflict.

In the third section, I discuss German-American relations in the context of German Weltpolitik and America's gradual embrace of its own identity as a great power (1891-1903). Conflicts over Samoa, Venezuela, Spanish-American war occurred during a period when Germany faced a relatively benign neighbourhood in Europe – thus allowing Germany to consider if war with the U.S. was a possibility. The subsequent section discusses the forming of counter-balancing coalitions against Germany in the backdrop of events such as the Moroccan crisis, the Russo-Japanese war, the German naval build-up, and German military rise in general. Such an outcome made a policy of hostility towards the U.S. extremely costly and strategically unsound – thus leading to appeasement. The next section discusses Germany in the interwar years, a period which saw French coercion of Germany – which in turn helped foster German-American cooperation. Finally, in the last section, I discuss Hitler's policy towards the U.S. and his reasons for declaring war against the U.S. in December 1941.

I conclude the chapter by arguing that German non-balancing of the U.S. is an outcome of the U.S.' insular position. Germany considered balancing the U.S. when the U.S. was emerging as a great power – that is when the U.S. was not predominant – and yet decided

to not balance *because it could not conceive of a way to bring its land power to bear on the U.S. to influence the latter's German policy*. A land invasion of the U.S. was out of the question and Germany could not find allies, with Britain being the strongest candidate, to balance against the U.S. with. At the same time, German leaders (especially in moments of crisis) were acutely aware of their country's weaknesses vis-à-vis the U.S. Unlike the U.S., Germany was surrounded by rival great powers – none more threatening than Russia/Soviet Union. Whereas Germany saw the U.S. as an annoyance to its relatively marginal overseas interests, it saw Russia as an existential threat to Germany's territorial integrity and sovereignty. As such Germany focused primarily on Russia and was most sensitive to the aggregation of Russian power.

### **Background: Contrasting Geographies**

United Germany had come into existence through the Franco-German war of 1871. Throughout the 1860s Prussia had been involved in wars which, through both happenstance and design, allowed it to unify all German states under Prussian leadership (Showalter 2004, Carr 1991). In 1871 it had taken on the most formidable power in the European continent and won a decisive victory. Thus, Germany achieved great power status in its birth.

Meanwhile, Bismarck seemed very conscious of America's fortunate geography and aware of Germany's own geographic disadvantages. This had led him to exercise great restraint regarding any German military or naval activity in South America. He admonished the German admiralty for showing the slightest interest in an offer of a coaling station made by the Venezuelan President in 1874 and 1875 as it would have violated the Monroe doctrine and since the German government sought to convey that "we here are not conducting colonial policies, and especially desire no acquisitions in America" (Herwig 1986: 143-145; Pflanze 1990: 114-116).

Germany's geographical location couldn't be more different from that of the U.S. Situated in the heart of Europe it found itself in the inescapable center of European great power politics. This strategic predicament shaped her attitude to government, civil-military relations, society, religion, and economic organisation (Dehio 1967, Kramer 2007; Hedetoft 1993: 287).

This section shall be divided into three parts. The first period is the Bismarckian period (1871-1890), followed by the Wilhelmine period (1890-1918) and finally the Weimer-Nazi period (1919-1945).

### **Bismarckian Germany: Rivalry amidst Parity (1870-1891)**

The German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1870-1891) walked a tightrope by allying with both Austria and Russia. The alliance with Austria was almost indispensable because Germany shared a frontier with Austria and already had too many geopolitical rivalries to be able to afford another hostile front. The alliance with Russia was somewhat unnatural but strategically sound since Bismarck seemed to have estimated that next to an uncertain and costly war, Russia could only be contained in Eastern Europe through friendly relations and by using its vulnerabilities vis-à-vis other European powers. Moreover, the imperative of isolating France and avoiding a two-front dilemma also made it necessary to re-assure Russia to prevent the same from going over to the side of France (Steinberg 2011). It is worth mentioning that Germany and Britain both had a somewhat common interest in containing Russia by aiding both Austria and Turkey and keeping Russia contained in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. Bismarck was however content with letting Britain do most of the assisting and consistently attempted to encourage Britain to further commit itself in the defence and aid of Austria. This was in essence a strategy of free-riding whereby Germany passed the buck of balancing a common threat to another power. Hence, British near east policy greatly aided Germany's security predicament since it could both maintain good relations with Russia and also be assured of the containment of the latter through a third power (Taylor 1971; Steinberg 2011; Rich 1965).

The Bismarckian grand strategy however started to come under scrutiny during his last years in government. In essence, the strategy weakened due to three reasons – British isolationism, more pessimistic assessments of future Russian power, greater optimism of being able to check rising Russian power through military buildup and alliances.

It was felt that the treaties with Russia were increasingly putting Germany at a disadvantage and allowing Russia unfettered expansion of its sphere of influence while preventing Germany from counter-acting the same. Furthermore, the secrecy surrounding the secret

clause in the reinsurance treaty was assessed to be giving Russia too much power to blackmail Germany (Gooch 1925; Rich 1965). Britain adopted isolationism towards the continent as a consequence of perceived over-extension and greater co-operation among the continental states in 1894-1895 (Grenville 1964). This withdrawal in essence meant that Britain would be less active in balancing Russia - thereby aggravating German concerns. At this point, it needs to be noted that the temptation to gain leverage over British policy by acquiring the capability to threaten its core interests precedes Wilhelmine Germany (see below for Wilhelm's policy of alliance through blackmail). Bismarck, for instance, proposed an entente on colonial matters to France based on the reasoning that

“I do not want war with England...but I desire her to understand that, if the fleets of other nations unite, they will form a counterbalance on the ocean and oblige her to reckon with the interests of others. To that end, it is necessary to accustom her to the thought that a Franco-German entente is not impossible" (Pflanz 1990: 130).

This similarity indicates a larger structural problem in Germany's policy towards Britain – one that goes beyond the Kaiser's personality and the *Machtpolitik* of his era. Both policies may have emanated from a combination of two factors - Germany's consistent need for an alliance with Britain as well as its inability to persuade the latter for an alliance through positive inducement.

The U.S featured only very marginally in Bismarck's grand strategy. During Germany's first year (1871) Bismarck conveyed to the American Secretary of State, “We have no interest whatsoever in gaining a foothold anywhere in the Americas, and we acknowledge unequivocally that, with regard to the entire continent, the predominant influence of the United States is founded in the nature of things and corresponds most closely with our own interests” (Junker 1995). Bismarck wanted to signal his acceptance of the Monroe doctrine and trusted the U.S to take care of German commercial interests in the Western hemisphere.

#### *Crisis in Samoa: German-American test of nerves*

In the 1880s however, German and American interests began to clash in the Samoan island in the Pacific. The two countries competed over spheres of influence in the region and consequently backed rival chieftains in the islands. Several treaties between Germany, U.S,

and Britain required each side to consult the other two parties before significantly changing ground realities in the island groups. This understanding was violated when in 1887 Germany landed 700 marines in one of the groups to violently quell a rebellion. Germany proceeded to declare martial law on all Samoans and declared one of their own favoured chiefs as King. The U.S and Britain protested these moves and refused to accept the fait accompli (Kennedy 1972).

For a while it seemed as if Germany had successfully turned all of Samoa into an exclusive German colony. However, continued misrule of the islands and the introduction of oppressive laws propelled a rival chieftain group to rebel. This violent rebellion which resulted in significant German casualties was sought to be suppressed by Germany through a declaration of a state of war, followed by annexation of the islands. This however seemed to be the final straw in terms of American 'patience' and had resulted in a national campaign that demanded American intervention at the risk of war in order to undo German heavy-handedness in Samoa as well as protect American interests. As Paul Kennedy describes,

“On the 15th, President Cleveland transmitted the relevant correspondence to Congress and invited them to act upon it. Their answer was swift and decisive: after many extreme remarks had been made against the German government by leading Senators, they granted \$500,000 for the defense of America's Samoan interests and the execution of her treaty commitments, plus a further \$100,000 for the construction of a naval station in Pago-Pago harbour, a right allowed them under the 1878 United States-Samoan treaty. In addition, they also granted a large increase in the naval estimates, which were under review at this time” (Kennedy 1972: 279).

The correspondences between the noted American civil war General Carl Schurz and Bismarck during the Samoan crisis of 1889 reveal that Schulz considered the balance of power tilted in America's favour and as such a war would more likely than not be severely disadvantageous for German interests. In terms of aggregate military strength, Germany did have a better navy and army (Schurz conceded) but the U.S was enormously rich, had immense latent power both in terms of financial and military power, and also capable of damaging German commercial trade through the use of its cruisers. Such a war would not

see immediate military clashes but entail a long game of commerce-raiding and blockading since the belligerents are divided by the Atlantic.

This would allow the U.S the time to mobilize and organize its forces. Moreover, since the U.S was the ‘one great Power with an absolutely free hand in foreign affairs’ it will be able to focus on the conflict in a way Germany may not. The U.S would find a ready ally in France, which may, in turn, tie-down German naval forces and deter it from attempting any naval bombardment of American coastal cities. Moreover, even if Germany succeeds in bombarding Boston and New York it is unlikely to persuade the U.S to agree to negotiations. Instead, aroused with patriotism the U.S would extend the war and launch newly constructed battleships by the second year of the war. Thus, in all likelihood, a German-American war is likely to be long and inexhaustible between two rising powers, ‘one of which is inexhaustible’ (Vagts 1939: 517-518).

Bismarck at first disagreed to a degree with some of the assessments. For instance, Bismarck argued that a French-American alliance would likely provoke a German-British counter-alliance. He considered it natural that Britain would be wary of American sea power and hence a German-American war also implied an Anglo-American war. Hence, he had told Salisbury “In the growth of a rivaling sea power a further encouragement for strengthening her own navy in order to be equal to all eventualities” (Vagts 1939: 520).

In this assessment, Bismarck was proved wrong by subsequent events. Britain refused to ally with Germany against even Russia in the early 1890s, a power that Britain considered to be a threat and sought to balance against. If an anti-Russia alliance could not occur it was unlikely that Britain could have allied with Germany to balance against the U.S, which Britain did not consider a threat and in just a few years would start appeasing. Bismarck also considered it axiomatic that Britain would be provoked by any rising navy into balancing against it. Similar to Levy and Thompson, Bismarck thought States balance against types of power and in Britain’s case, it would be more sensitive to rival sea power instead of land power just as Germany was more sensitive to rival land power than sea power. Levy-Thompson (2011) would only disagree with Bismarck in that they would argue that states in general balance against land power and not sea power.



Bismarck could not understand the American bellicose reaction over insignificant islands where American commercial interests were dwarfed by that of Germany's. American over-reaction and belligerence stood in contrast to the conduct of even Great Britain, which was calmer and more proportionate in its response. When things had escalated, Bismarck had no option but to back down and abandon almost 10 years of German policy in Samoa. Bismarck attempted to blame junior and consul officers and proceeded to placate the enraged Americans. The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had admitted to the British charge in Washington that the naval appropriations were only a bluff. Bismarck himself thought war unlikely but possible and he felt he could not afford to call the bluff. The British ambassador to Germany reported that "He [Bismarck] seemed anxious at the turn which events had taken in the Island and observed that the consequences of the events which were passing there might be out of all proportion to the interests engaged. Samoa was not worth the evils which might result from a collision of the armed forces of Germany and the United States and he was therefore anxious to come to an understanding on the subject by peaceful negotiation" (Malet to Salisbury, 1889). Germany faced a weak hand vis-à-vis the U.S primarily for political reasons, rather than based on military strength.

The year 1889 witnessed greater involvement of the young Kaiser and his anti-Russian 'clique' in German foreign policymaking. Meanwhile, France threw up as the winner of its recent election the highly revanchist General Boulanger and the threat of a Franco-German war seemed possible on the immediate horizon. The electoral outcome would in turn lead to a brief but intense arms race, military mobilisation on both sides, dissolution of the German parliament for the sake of a referendum of an appropriations bill as well as a war scare that lasted until 1887 (Langer 1956: 380-384). Also of concern was the risk of an Austro-Russian war in the Balkans, an outcome that would necessitate German assistance to Austria since, "If they had eliminated Austria or brought it to their heels, we know from experience that they would become so domineering towards us that peace with them would be untenable" (Craig 1980: 126).

Most substantively, however, the preceding year also saw the beginning of Franco-Russian co-operation in terms of financial and military assistance of the former to the latter. In this context Holstein wrote, "We cannot risk any quarrel with the U.S by challenging the

Americans in the Pacific. We have enough to do to keep free of encumbrances this side” (Kennedy 1972: 280). During subsequent negotiations, Germany conceded on almost every point and in a few months even offered to sell significant commercial interests in the region to the U.S. The latter could afford to be belligerent and threatening because it knew that Germany was hemmed in and surrounded by hostile neighbours whereas America itself remained free in her own neighbourhood of such great power rivalries.

America could concentrate its forces on Samoa in a way Germany could not and also over the longer time horizon could complicate German security in its own region in a way that Germany could not in the Western hemisphere. Therefore, it was imperative for Germany to not irretrievably damage relations with the U.S.

At around the same time when Bismarck was wondering what value the islands could have to the U.S. to precipitate such a reaction, the Assistant Secretary of State of the U.S. Alvey A. Adee was providing the rationale of American interest in Samoa in the following way, “They may be remote and inconsiderable for Germany, but to us they are proximate and considerable, for in the hands of a naval Power they threaten our Pacific flank, and indeed they threaten all the Pacific Coast of South America too, and Hawaii besides. Samoa offsets Pearl Harbor, and Bismarck so intends it” (Lafeber 2008: 90).

In Germany’s first encounter with American power, Bismarck had to grapple with the same problems of balancing the U.S as Britain once did a few decades back. This awareness of American invulnerability vis-à-vis Germany allowed the U.S to adopt a bellicose attitude despite having a much weaker military.

Incidentally by 1899 Samoa would witness another political crisis with U.S and Britain supporting one faction and Germany the other. The crisis was resolved when the U.S. undertook joint naval action with Britain in bombarding coastal villages loyal to the opposing faction. Germany had only one warship harboured in the region and as such could only stand by and lose political power in the islands (Dijk 2015). The Kaiser, left bitter by the humiliating experience, resolved to build for Germany a stronger navy so that other powers ‘respect it’s just aspirations’ (Nuhn 2002:104, 231).

## **Germany before the First World War: 1891-1914**

For a combination of reasons, the successors of Bismarck chose an alternative path towards German security. The new administration was uncomfortable with Bismarck's ambiguous policy towards Russia which they thought risked Germany falling between two stools. The new approach sought to bring about clarity by letting the Re-Insurance treaty lapse without renewal while simultaneously reaching out to Britain for greater co-operation vis-à-vis Russia and even France to some extent (Rich 1965; Rohl 1967). At its clearest, the strategy envisaged an alliance between Germany, Austria, Italy, Turkey, and Britain on one side with France and Russia on the other. Germany built itself a formidable navy with the initial objective of countering the Russo-French alliance of 1894, (Hobson 1996) but was also meant to compel Britain into closer relations with Germany (Epkenhans 2008; Kennedy, 1980; Massie 1991). The policy backfired in two ways – firstly it spurred Britain to outbuild Germany and thereby launched a costly naval arms race at a time when German resources could have been better spent on its army instead of the navy. Secondly, and more importantly, German naval technological capabilities alarmed Britain to a degree that Russian latent and relatively backward capabilities could not. If Germany could build itself such a formidable navy while still being focused on its continental rivals in Europe, one could only imagine the buildup of an even more formidable navy once the continental engagements were resolved. German naval might convinced more British leaders more clearly than anything else that German power was capable of overturning the balance of power in the continent.

Since the balance of power is the over-riding principle in British policy, all other affairs (colonial and American) were subservient to the former. Thus, Britain found it in itself to quickly resolve almost all outstanding colonial disputes with arch-rivals France and Russia over the next decade. Britain not only refused to join Germany in an alliance against the Entente powers but much to its shock and dismay threw its own weight in with the entente cordiale. Germany under both Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm assessed British strategic priorities incorrectly and Hitler would repeat the same mistake in the subsequent war.

*Imperial Germany probes American will and power*

Germany had colonial interests in South America, Africa, and East Asia. Being latecomers to the scramble for imperial gains, Germany and the U.S. frequently clashed diplomatically. With the establishment of a new government under Kaiser Wilhelm in 1888, Germany began to abandon Bismarck's very cautionary policy and attitude towards German affairs in the western hemisphere. The earlier manifestation of the new policy resulted in visits by German warships to South American ports to underline German interests in the region as well as seek great power status.

However, despite greater interest, Germany was still unable to acquire a South American port due to lack of funds and lack of confidence in being able to "resist" American 'intrigue' and opposition (Herwig 1986: 196).

These clashes made the Kaiser enquire as to ways and means of reducing American influence. Accordingly, war plans conceptualising how military force could be brought to bear upon the American administration in times of crisis were made. These war plans provide a crucial window into German thinking regarding the U.S at a time the U.S was emerging as a global power and Germany itself was relatively unconstrained by rigid counter-alliances. 1897-1903 provides a timeframe when Germany had some intention to balance the U.S and wanted to find out if it could. These war exercises thus help explain German policy towards the U.S in the 1903-1919 period as well as during the 1937-1945 period. Germany did not have a clear estimate of whether it could balance the U.S on its own. Once war plans were drawn and debated it became clear that an invasion of the U.S was out of the question. Germany would require bases in the Caribbean, transport troops and supplies in large numbers. The planning exercises made it clear that the mere bombing of coastal cities would not be enough to force the U.S. to sue for peace. The theoretical exercises were finally terminated in 1906 when officials concluded that the imperatives of planning a two-front war will make Germany unable to 'spare the men and material to attack the United States' (Severo 1971).

Weighing in on the ongoing debate within German political and military circles about the balance of power between Germany and the U.S. in 1898 and subsequent to the American-Spanish war, German Ambassador to the U.S. Von Holleben thought that in a war between the two rising powers the two navies would suffer equal losses. But what he feared more

was that “America, with its colossal capital power, would be superior with respect to the speed of supplementing its material”. He assessed that the German navy would have few points of attack, if any, since the Atlantic coast was being fortified. Echoing Bismarck and Germany’s predicament in 1889 he observed, “The whole thing would be a war without a valuable bone of contention [Streitgegenstand] and, since our land army could not take any decisive action in it, would be without any conceivable end. . . And besides all this presupposes that none of our European neighbors makes use of the occasion in order to settle old bills with us. That we should find an ally against the United States is very unlikely” (Von Holleben memorandum 1899).

#### *A German base in the Caribbean*

Throughout 1898 and 1899 German officials and envoys agonised over whether Germany could afford to risk provoking the U.S. by obtaining a permanent naval base in either Venezuela or the Caribbean (Dutch West Indies being offered by the Netherlands in return for Schleswig in North Germany). In the words of Admiral Tirpitz, the entire issue “came down to whether the Foreign Office intended to pursue an active policy in America in the future, when we are finally strong at sea” (Herwig 1986: 155). The issue also acquired greater significance in light of the announcement of plans for an isthmian canal to be built by the U.S. It was also felt that strong German commercial interests in the region made a clash with the U.S. likely, upon which Germany could not count on ‘benevolent’ American behaviour. In an attempt to persuade the foreign office of the value of such strategic fortified naval ports as well as to take part in the construction of the isthmian canal, Tirpitz foresaw “the formation of a common South American fleet” combining with the German navy to harass the western shores of the U.S. during times of war (Herwig 1986).

The Foreign Office, far more deferential towards the Monroe doctrine and devoid of as strong an interest in acquiring greater naval capabilities, firmly rejected any such suggestion emanating from the navy. Its blunt assessment stated that the U.S. will both build and fortify the Canal (the latter not being part of the Hay-Pauncefote treaty but demanded by the U.S. Senate). As such, the most Germany could hope for was to petition the U.S. for free movement in the region and if the same were to be rejected then Germany would have to accept such an American decision (Rucker-Jenisch memorandum 1901).

American dominance over Central America came to be established at a time when Germany was at its peak of maritime/imperial ambition. Just a year earlier in 1897, it had acquired Kiaochow from China for instance. Its colonies and commercial interests in both the Pacific and South America came to be seen as threatened by the Isthmian canal. As such, Germany had strong interests to balance American power – at least in the Caribbean. Its failure to do so can be attributed to its relatively weak maritime presence in the region, lack of allies, and unwillingness to negatively affect relations with the U.S. - given strong American resolve. Even if Germany had taken concrete measures to acquire bases in the region, European diplomacy in subsequent years would have made such a presence in the region unsustainable – given the re-emergence of continental territorial issues in Europe.

Hence, Germany would begin to withdraw from considerations of challenging the U.S. in the western hemisphere from around 1899 after realising its geopolitical weakness vis-à-vis the United States. The Kaiser, for instance, constantly warned his generals and admirals against taking any measure that could be seen as provocative to the United States. The U.S was seen as a colossal problem for the German Empire but could not be taken on under present circumstances; it would have to wait for at least another 20 years (Herwig 1976). In the same spirit, the Kaiser sent his brother on a goodwill mission to the U.S in 1902 and also seeks to build personal relations with President Roosevelt (Hase 2004).

Before 1899, Germany had launched a Europe-wide anti-American campaign and sought alliances with Russia, France, Spain, Austria, Britain aiming at the same (Hase 2004:150-160). After 1899, for a variety of reasons, Germany started cultivating relations with the U.S rather than to attempt weave coalitions against it. In 1899 Germany even went as far as to suggest and work towards allying with Britain and the U.S (Rohl 2014). This is best explained by the lack of meaningful responses by other great powers in balancing the U.S., competition with Britain in improving ties with the U.S, and a greater understanding of the lack of military options vis-à-vis the U.S. Increasing American strength in terms of the rapidly expanding navy and annexations of extra-regional territories such as Hawaii and Philippines only contributed to the turnaround.

But the Spanish-American War and its outcome also played a role in ending the brief cold war between the two emerging powers – for it demonstrated American military capabilities

and failures of European unity and diplomacy in the face of American belligerence and expansionism.

*Germany and the Spanish-American war of 1898*

The Spanish-American crisis of 1897-98 erupted over the heavy-handed suppression of a Cuban rebellion against Spanish rule which saw the death of approximately 400,000 Cubans and through the use of concentration camps. At stake was the 'Monarchical principle', the defence of European colonies that were established before the announcement of the Monroe doctrine and the implications of a new American confidence in actively competing with European powers over bases and colonies (McCormick 1963). Germany had, thus, most to lose from an easy U.S. annexation of Spanish territories, with implications both in the western hemisphere as well as in the Pacific due to the presence of Spanish Philippines, Guam, and other territories. In fact, during the crisis, Germany conveyed to Secretary of State John Hay in July 1898 that it would expect a "few coaling stations" and "a naval base" in the Philippines, along with control of the Carolines and influence in Samoa (McCormick 1992: 59).

During the crisis, Germany showed interest in weaving together a broad European coalition against the United States, but only on the condition that Germany not be asked to lead it and all nations participating in it make an equal contribution (Shippee 1925; Hilton & Ickringill 1999; Mitchell 1998: 26). Germany was thus very wary of being seen as the primary instigator and was keen on compelling Austria to become the initiator in terms of resisting U.S. intervention in Cuba. As Lester Shippee describes the back and forth among the European great powers, "Neither Austria, France, nor Germany was willing to take the first step. Each gave assurances that it would be found in the front rank of those supporting an action started by another" (Shippee 1925: 756).

The powers moreover could not count on each other to resolutely oppose U.S. action since every country had relatively more friendly terms with the U.S. than with most other fellow participants of the possible coalition. Despite numerous correspondences amongst themselves, the powers (Russia, Spain, France, Germany, Austria) could only manage to

register a diplomatic protest that was “avowedly only platonic” and seek mediation through the good offices of the papal see and the Archbishop of Ireland (Shippee 1925: 759).

The variable of other great powers being wary of drawing U.S. ire and thereby being unable to show initiative to balance U.S. power in the post-cold war world seems to be equally applicable in 1897, at a time when the U.S. was not preponderant by any means. In fact, evocative declarations of neutrality came from “all corners of the world” including China, Japan, Haiti, Borneo, and so on (Abbenhuis 2014: 181) – in great contrast to great power responses towards Germany during the Moroccan crisis of 1905 and 1911. This also happened to occur at a time when European leaders, diplomats, and heads of state seemed to be sufficiently alarmed by the rise of the American behemoth. Representing this widely held concern, the former foreign minister of Italy, Admiral Canevaro invited fellow Europeans ‘to consider the possibility and necessity of uniting against America, as the future of civilization would require them to do’ (Ellwood 2012: 24).

Furthermore, when informed of possible native support for German rule over the Philippines, Kaiser Wilhelm noted that the French experience in Mexico demonstrated that native support was not enough and that control over the Philippines is likely to determine control over the Pacific. But a lack of confidence in Britain withholding its consent from an American annexation of the Philippines propelled the German government to dispatch Admiral Von Diederichs to the islands to observe and report on developments, which could be then used to form a better opinion on German options. This was an act that was widely and sensationally reported by the American media, thereby embittering public opinion against the German empire. British actions during the affair in contrast earned the European country much praise and affection. Nancy Mitchell shows that perceptions of German misdeeds near the Philippines were as much borne out of a need for a ‘bogey’ rather than from any actual German naval actions. German actions seemed even more hostile because of how it was contrasted to British aid and support (Mitchell 1998: 27-32).

Even more illustratively, once Germany was dejected by British non-cooperation, it considered the possibility of offering itself as a valuable ally to the U.S. in terms of the global competition for colonies, in which Britain was far ahead of both Germany and U.S. Friedrich Von Holstein of the German Foreign office thought that the U.S. could also be



persuaded to cooperate with Germany in the partitioning of the Philippines by conveying the Americans that an Anglo-American general alliance would force Germany to throw its weight behind Russia and France.

The crisis in effect demonstrated that European powers neither had significant will nor capability to effectively balance against the U.S. The lack of will may be explained by the perception that the U.S. was not as significant a threat as they were to each other. Over time they were more likely to compete against each other to improve relations with the U.S. Throughout the episode, despite being rebuffed by Britain repeatedly, German leaders would rely on their balance of power theories regarding naval and colonial competition to hope for an Anglo-German understanding vis-a-vis the U.S. Germany continued to underestimate the strength of the then ongoing Anglo-American rapprochement.

The U.S in turn, under President Theodore Roosevelt, embarked on a consistent policy since 1903 through its naval diplomacy to signal/convey where its preferences lay on the continent of Europe when it came to choosing among alliances (Livermore 1958). This was a time when the situation had changed drastically with Britain and France moving towards an Entente Cordiale in 1904. Any hopes that Germany might have had of finding allies in Britain and France against the U.S had thus been more or less dashed. It is in this context that Roosevelt modified the already existing Monroe doctrine to give it a more forward-looking orientation. In other words, the defence of the western hemisphere would now require the U.S to not merely hope to deter 'foreign' powers from strategically intervening in the hemisphere, but also to influence domestic policies in South and Central American countries in order to avert the need for European powers to employ gunboat diplomacy in the region (Ricard 2006).

Also, much in the spirit of the America First vs the Interventionists debate prior to the Second World War the famous voyage of the German battlecruiser Von Der Tann (and Von Moltke in 1913) around the South American continent in 1907 was used as a point of reference to argue that recent technological breakthroughs - the transition from coal to oil, the launch of the Nassau battleships capable of traveling 6000 miles at 10 knots - meant that the wide Atlantic Ocean no longer assured security to the United States (Livermore 1958:

873). American naval buildup and its domestic support relied heavily on estimates regarding German naval power and intentions (Vagts 1939; Mitchell 1998, Small 1972).

*Germany and possible alliances against the U.S.*

The Venezuela dispute of 1902-03 occurred as a consequence of Germany and Britain engaging in joint gunboat diplomacy against Venezuela in order to recover defaulted loans. It is interesting to note that despite the operation against Venezuela being a joint Anglo-German operation in which Britain took the lead (Mitchell 1996: 185-210), the ultimate result was the surge in anti-German sentiment in both the U.S. and Britain (Herwig 1986). Of the two, again it was Germany that was much more sensitive to possibilities of American concern regarding such an operation and more forthcoming in keeping the U.S. administration in the know before the operation. The diplomatic outcome seemed to have been shaped much more by the emerging systemic balance of power rather than any actual German actions. Mitchell writes, “Geography (not proximity but the happy absence of powerful neighbors) smiled on American preeminence in the region. Germany would soon be tied down in conflict in the Continent. Nevertheless, in 1902, the United States did not yet have the raw power – military, economic, or diplomatic – to enforce the Monroe Doctrine, and it was not clear how much relative or intangible power it had.” (Mitchell, 1996: 207).

Balance of power caught up with Germany and it could no longer grow without eliciting responses. These responses marked a revolution in European diplomacy with France and Russia strengthening their alliance, with Britain and France achieving an alliance in 1904 and the triple entente of 1907. Germany was forced back into its own region after a brief sojourn into global politics. This transformation of Germany’s role and status in the international system meant that Germany antagonized the U.S. less after 1902 than during 1891-1902. The transformed situation was aptly summarized as early as 1902 by Field Marshall Waldersee. He entered in his diary that the transformation had occurred primarily for two reasons, “first because of the growing strength of the United States and its consequent tendency to intervene in all international quarrels; and secondly because of the complete change in the importance of Eastern Asia” (Meisner and Waldersee 1967: 198). In the same context, he had argued that it was unwise to declare ‘Weltpolitik’ and get involved

in entangling colonial disputes. The strategic luxury which allowed Germany to consider a world policy was now fading away and Germany found itself boxed into a regional role instead of a global one.

### *The Treaty of Bjorko and the Continental League*

It is probably a reflection of the balance of power in the Eurasian continent that the country most enthusiastic for a continental league against the Insular Powers was Germany. During the Russo-Japanese war, Germany sought to take advantage of the situation by pledging and implementing support for Russia in its war against Japan. The War put Britain and its recent ally Japan against the Continental alliance of France and Russia. Such a conflagration gave Germany a great opportunity to use the vulnerabilities of other great powers and force concessions from them. The Russo-Japanese war weakened pressure on Germany's eastern frontier and threatened to overturn the recently concluded agreements between France and Britain. During the war, Kaiser Wilhelm managed to influence Russia towards aligning closely with Germany. Russia was especially vulnerable to German persuasion because Britain and the U.S were aiding and encouraging Japan. Britain even went to the degree of threatening war against Russia as a result of the Dogger Bank incident (Connaughton 1988: 247-259). Amid such panic and weakness, Tsar Nicholas was won over to the German side momentarily. This German diplomacy was helped by the fact the Tsar sincerely felt grateful for the help Germany had provided to Russia in its conduct of the war, both in terms of naval support and diplomatic assurances in Europe. The stunning Japanese victory at the Battle of Tsushima on 27th May 1905 had managed to bring about a closure to Russia's cold war with Japan in the Far East. Russia still had the capability to continue the war by sending vast deployments of troops by rail. However, French-Anglo-American diplomacy intervened, as well as counsel from Russian ministers, and helped arbitrate a peace between the two belligerents. The western powers were able to assess that further embroilment of Russia in the far east could only result in great benefit to Germany vis-à-vis France during the ongoing Moroccan crisis. Even though Tsar Nicholas had been quiet enthusiastic towards an alliance with Germany against Britain, His ministers had thoroughly opposed such an alliance back home. Count Sergei Witte was aware that the treaty of Bjorko contradicted Russia's treaty with France and Russia needed continued French financial

assistance for its modernization/industrialization plans. Count Lamsdorf had always been the most convinced supporter of the Russo-French alliance and summed up the foreseeable disadvantages of the Bjorko treaty in the following way – “I have brought the conviction that in order to be on the best relations with Germany we need the alliance with France. Otherwise we lose our independence and a heavier yoke than the German I do not know” (Spring 1988: 583).

Moreover, Anti-British Russian attitudes had to be given up because Russia considered British help to be essential for Russia to be able to emerge as a Great Power as well as to prevent German domination of Europe (Soroka 2010: 11-13). For instance, even while Nicholas was promising a greater understanding with Germany, he was secretly consenting to greater financial assistance from Britain. The treaty of Bjorko would have died even without British financial assistance because France would have never agreed to be incorporated to it and Russia was clear that it could not go ahead with the same without the French joining in. As the Tsar put it – “I did not understand the Treaty of Bjorko as you did. In signing it, I did not believe for a single moment that my agreement with Emperor William could be directed against France; it was exactly the reverse; I always had in mind to incorporate France into it” (McLean, 2004: 136).

What began as an opportunity for German diplomacy in 1904 ended with an expansion of the counter-alliance that had been forming against Germany since 1894. Russian relinquishment of its sphere of influence in Korea and South Manchuria made it much easier to improve ties with Britain. The Moroccan crisis and its favourable resolution made France value Britain as an ally. This in turn led France to put further pressure on Russia to settle territorial disputes with Britain and reach an entente by 1907 (Soroka 2010; Neilson 1995; Spring 1988). British gradual entry into the entente cordiale further enabled Japan and the U.S’ association with the alliance. Thus by 1907 Germany was the isolated power with few allies whereas France acquired numerous significant allies, thereby leading to a role reversal in comparison to the Bismarckian era. After all, only six years earlier, the then German State Secretary of the Foreign Office had announced that “our foreign position is brilliant” (Lambi 1984: 363, 174).

Could Germany have balanced against the U.S without Continental Peace? In other words, could Germany have balanced against the U.S when it had powerful and hostile neighbours in its region? Was Continental Peace possible? It could be argued that continental peace was possible if only it was given an anti-British colour. This was so because, Britain, more than the U.S had a clash of interests with all three continental powers. Britain had significant differences with France over Egypt and Sudan. Britain had significant conflict of interests with Russia over China, Persia, Tibet, India, Afghanistan and the Black Sea straits. Britain also clashed with Germany over the naval arms race, the Boer War, Samoa, and Central Africa. Britain was so intervening in the Continent before 1895 that it made the idea of a continental league against Britain theoretically plausible. Its plausibility was further strengthened when the Continental powers co-operated to elbow out Britain diplomatically from China and from influencing the outcome the Sino-Japanese war of 1895 (Liams 1962: 54-58). It was this discomfoting response that propelled Britain towards isolationism and a better understanding with Japan. It could be argued that when the future potential hegemon was unclear Britain sought to remain equidistant from all the three continental powers and sought better relationships with the insular powers. When the potential hegemon became clear Britain further improved its relations with the other two continental powers with an eye on maintain/creating a balance of power in the Continent – characteristic of British policy in the 1920s as well.

In any case, the Continental league which seemed to work so well in the far east in 1895, dithered and fell apart in the near east on the question of the partition of Turkey. Whereas Germany had all to gain and very little to lose in 1905 by getting Russia to sign the Bjorko treaty, it was Russia which was gaining more and everyone else less by the Continental League diplomacy of 1895. Russia wanted the partition of Turkey and revival of the Three Emperors League. Germany seemed accepting at first but had to back down as a consequence of Austrian disgruntlement. British aloofness had also helped to create some distrust and panic among Russia and Germany and the latter chose caution over opportunity and decided to hold on to its older and more traditional ally –Austria. The French also could not expect much from the Continental League because Germany refused to include “Egypt” as an issue for the league, thereby removing the strongest incentive for France to consider joining such a league in the short run. (Taylor 1971: 381) Thus the continental league ended

in the face of British aloofness and continental conflicts over alliances and spheres of influence.

Just as Russia was unable to forsake France in order to jump on the bandwagon with Germany in 1905, Germany was unable to jump on the Russian bandwagon by abandoning Austria in 1895. It is worth noting that Salisbury seemed to have consciously encouraged the great powers to be wary of each other by 'distancing' Britain from the continent. Since the Mediterranean agreements of 1887 Britain had been the guarantor of the sovereignty of the Turks over the Dardanelles. These agreements were aimed against Russia and Britain was assured of diplomatic support by Italy, Austro-Hungary, Germany and France. As such, when it seemed as if Russia was contemplating a move towards seeking control of the straits either through diplomacy or through force, Britain gave the impression that it could allow for Russia to get what it wanted in the straits. This had caused alarm in Austro-Hungary. Britain could not have allowed the Continental league to get stronger by ensuring treaty obligations that reduce mutual antagonism amongst the continental great powers. By undertaking to withdraw such treaty reassurances, Britain demonstrated to the Continental powers that they had to fear more from each other than from Britain (Penson 1935; Goodlad 1999).

The rivalry between Germany and Russia further resurfaced in the Far East when Germany, partly to check Russia in China took over the port of Kio-Chow in 1897. This takeover also meant greater co-operation between Germany and Britain in China in order to balance Russian preponderance (Otte 1995). The Fashoda incident moreover established Britain in such a secure position that it realised that it needed no allies to establish naval primacy in the Mediterranean. Occupation of Egypt also meant that the opening of the straits became a far less important strategic concern. This meant that Britain no longer needed to protect Austro-Hungary from Russia and Italy had to reconcile with France since it lost its protector in Britain. Most importantly, it brought closure to Franco-British hostilities, it made an entente with Russia much more practical and it exacerbated the future security dilemma between Russia and Germany since Germany could not pass the buck towards Britain in case of a Russian threat to Austria-Hungary (Taylor 1965: 383).

*The diplomacy in the period seems to demonstrate that continental alliances are possible only in opposition to an activist insular state and on secondary issues.* The same alliance or league is likely to falter to the degree the insular state withdraws or when primary issues (on Europe) are considered. The strongest incentive the continental states had in forming or joining such leagues was to improve their bargaining position on several secondary issues. The same dynamic in various forms will recur, for instance in the Rappollo agreements and the Axis alliance with the Soviet Union.

### *Germany balances Russia*

German policy since its very creation since 1871 had centred on Russia. Whereas Bismarck had chosen to contain Russian power through engagement and personal relations, Kaiser Wilhelm had sought to manage the Russia threat by balancing it both internally and externally. Post-Bjorko, the alliances in the continent had become more rigid over time. The solidification of alliances occurred simultaneously to the dramatic rise of Russian power. Modernisation, reforms, financial aid from France and Britain had led to significant growth rates and furthered improvements in Russian military infrastructure. The railways allowed Russia by 1912 to mobilise at half the time it used to take only five years earlier. The size of the Russian army and reserves had also increased significantly along with Russian artillery. Improved relations with Japan also meant that Russia could focus almost entirely on its western frontier. Russia already had more than twice the population (166 million compared to 67 million Germans) and 40 times the landmass. The only reason Russia was not already dominant in Europe was its economic and industrial backwardness. Through the period 1905-1914 Russia had been increasingly ameliorating its backwardness and closing the quality gap (Kennedy 1989: 232-234). This led to the structural condition in which German leaders before both World Wars had started thinking and planning from a closing window of opportunity framework. War was seen as inevitable and therefore - better to wage war sooner rather than later and before Russia makes progress in matching quantity with quality - when there was still a chance for victory. Fear of Russian power was overwhelming and it led to a growing sense of fatalism among German leaders. On overlooking his estate, Chancellor Bethmann, for instance, told his son that there was very

little reason in planting trees since “in a few years the Russians would be here anyway” (Copeland 2000:64; Lambi 1984).

Such fears and the consequent implication of the need for preventive war had always been prevalent since the 1870s but their intensity depended on perceptions of increase in Russian power and Germany’s diplomatic options. Bernard Von Bulow for instance in 1887 writes, “if we fight the Russians we must not make peace until we have made them incapable of attacking us for at least a generation.” (Fischer 1969:45). What Bulow had in mind was the detachment of large chunks of western Russia from its mother-country; an objective that was realised temporarily in the Brest-Litovsk treaty of 1918. Russia seemed like a mortal threat because Germany was the only great power facing Russia in Europe and would therefore bear the brunt of Russian power in case it reached overwhelming proportions (Bergahn 1973). Rising Russian power had already resulted in several diplomatic clashes between the two powers in East Europe before both World wars. German leaders were as such pessimistic regarding peace with Russia and thought that with increasing Russian power the demands it would make upon Germany would also become more unreasonable. Even Bismarck was not immune to such pessimism as he would write in 1886, “The Russians do not possess the kind of self-restraint that would make it possible for us to live alone with them and France on the Continent. If they had eliminated Austria or brought it to their heels, we know from experience that they would become so domineering towards us that peace with them would be untenable.” (Craig 1980: 126).

What however converted general concern and fear of Russia into severe pessimism regarding German position vis-à-vis the same was a combination of two factors. First, peace with Japan enabled Russia to concentrate its forces on its western frontier. Secondly, aid from allies and general Russian industrial growth meant meaningful military reforms in terms of trained manpower and transportation via the railways (Copeland 2000; Fischer, 1969; Wohlforth 1987). German leaders thought that by 1917 Russia would be able to muster formidable offensive power against Germany and the British ambassador to Russia at the time (1913) argued along similar lines, “Unless ... Germany is prepared to make still further financial sacrifices for military purposes, the days of her hegemony in Europe will be numbered; as, even without the co-operation of England, Russia and France combined



will then be strong enough to confront the united forces of the Triple Alliance. There are, however, still three critical years to pass before that result is achieved.” (Gooch & Temperly 1927: Vol. 10, pt.2, 767).

Ambassador Buchanan further argued that the Army Bill passed by Germany in 1913 though impressive will be eclipsed by the army Russia was building as a counter-measure. Such assessments by Buchanan, Edward Grey and Nicholson led Britain to support the entente atleast in the short run and till the time Russia and France were able to counter German possible hegemony in Europe on their own (Wohlforth 1987).

German history is scarred with memories of the 30 years’ war when Austrian preponderance in Europe had led to the deaths of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of German citizens. Almost 200 years later French preponderance in the form of the Napoleonic wars would again lead to heavy German casualties. In the early 20th Century, however, Germany was united (unlike the two past geopolitical catastrophes) and it seems reasonable that German leaders felt that, unlike in the past, they need not suffer the consequences of Russian preponderance in Europe.

France only features in German calculation because of the Russo-French alliance which required France to assist Russia in case of war with Germany. France was motivated by both revanchist ambitions as well as the prevention of German hegemony in Europe. Hence the Schlieffen plan that was devised by the German general staff in 1892 envisioned a German offensive against France during the early stages of the war so that subsequent to a quick French defeat, Germany would be able to prepare for a longer and more demanding war against Russia (Mombauer 2005; Ritter 1979).

Germany considered the option of neutralizing France in 1905 when Russia was distracted in East Asia in its war against Japan and the Moroccan crisis with France had occurred at the same time. General Schlieffen was himself in favour of seizing such an opportunity when he wrote, “Now we can escape from the noose” (Fisher 1975:55). However, the possibility of British intervention in such a war compelled Admiral Tirpitz to plead the delay for such a war to a time when the German navy reaches parity with the British navy (Copeland 2001:62).

*Japan in Germany’s calculus*

German foreign policy at first had looked upon the emergence of Japan as a great opportunity and for good reason. After all, it was Japan which produced the conditions for a possible continental league in 1895 (Mehnert 1996) and again in 1905 (Hase 2004). Japan itself posed very little threat to Germany but seemed like a growing threat to potential enemies of Germany – Russia and U.S. If Japan could force Russia to turn east, then Germany comes nearer to achieving a free hand in Europe. Similarly, after 1905 if the U.S gets bogged down in an arms race competition in the Pacific its naval presence in the Atlantic will get significantly reduced (it must be noted that again it was because Germany was so much more powerful and threatening to the U.S than Japan that it decided to appease Japan while balancing Germany instead of the other way around - as Germany would have preferred). Thus Germany had all to gain from a stronger and more threatening Japan.

With the U.S resolving its disputes with Japan in 1908 with the Root agreement and Britain confirming its alliance with Japan in 1911, Germany began to turn its foreign policy in the opposite direction. Germany realised the costs of basing its Japan policy on the ideological construct of the ‘yellow peril’ and subsequently attempted to improve relations with Japan (Akira 2006). This policy itself has very few takers in Japan, as Mehnert notes “The amount of advantage German military leaders expected from the desired German-Japanese alliance seems simply grotesque if one compares it to the minimal concessions they were willing to offer Japan in return. Tirpitz volunteered to give up Kiaochow and, if necessary, some German insular possessions in the Pacific, all of which Japan had already conquered” (Mehnert 1996: 1470).

Germany failed at convincing Japan to even seriously consider an alliance. This is not surprising because Japan had everything to lose from it and Germany had all to gain. It would have asked Japan to break its alliance with Britain, the cornerstone of its foreign policy, breach the 1908 agreement with the U.S and possibly provoke it into conflict, all with very little hope of successfully balancing American power in any significant way. Japan and Germany held talks in neutral Stockholm in 1916 in order to try to improve relations (Lowe 1969: 316-319; Strachan 2001). But by July 1916, Japan had signed a treaty of agreement with Russia. This step taken by Japan convinced German leaders that Japan had only used the spectre of talks with Germany to gain further leverage in its talks with

Russia. The outcome of improved Russia-Japan relations, however, gave German leaders the hope that Japanese expansionism in the immediate future as a consequence of the agreement would provoke the U.S, which in turn would complicate the latter's involvement in the European war (Boghardt 2012: 15-17). In terms of the strategic context and decisions made, there seems to be a lot of similarity in the dynamic between the four powers (Germany, Japan, U.S, Russia) in the two world wars. In both wars, Germany sought to orient Japan against the U.S in anticipation of American intervention in the European theatre. In both wars, Japan sought to ostensibly improve relations with Germany only as a means of gaining leverage over Russia.

*Counterproductive alliances* - Not much unlike Nazi Germany's alliance with Japan, German diplomatic moves towards Germany turned out to be both desperate and counter-productive. Such moves managed to further convince the U.S of the dangers that could occur from either a German victory over France or a sudden German-Russo-Japanese rapprochement (Boghardt 2012: 48-59; Mehnert 1996). German double-dealing with Japan convinced influential policymakers of Germany's hostility towards the U.S. In both instances Germany sought to deter the U.S. through means of power – it was thought that the U.S. would be deterred from the prospect of a two-front war.

However, American initial reluctance to enter both wars was itself not a function of lack of power – but rather a lack of motive or will. By reaching out to Japan to establish wider spheres of influence aimed at the U.S., Germany made it easier for average Americans as well as the strategic elite to perceive Germany not as a mere regional and distant belligerent, but as an imperial hegemonic power with ill intent towards the U.S. Strategic diplomatic manoeuvres that would be useful against continental adversaries would be less useful vis-à-vis Insular U.S.

Despite Japan not considering Germany's diplomatic overtures towards an alliance seriously, the U.S had felt itself faced by a foreshadow of the two-front dilemma. For instance, during the crisis with Germany over the sinking of the Lusitania, the U.S had the misfortune of also simultaneously dealing with Japan's imposition of 21 demands over China in 1915. This dilemma felt in 1915 ties in conceptually very well with American diplomatic choices and war plans of 1941 and could to some degree help to explain the

choice that was taken by the U.S to wage war against Japan and Germany at the same time, an American Schlieffen plan.

*The Zimmerman Telegram* - The First World war just happened to demonstrate Germany's predicament vis-à-vis the U.S. Despite the U.S having a far more inferior military and a navy not very superior to Germany's, the German government had to compromise its war operations in order to respect and show reverence for American sensibilities. When war with America seemed imminent after the decision had been taken to resume submarine warfare after a gap of 8 months, German officials constructed the Zimmerman plan. The strategic predicament was simple - once America declares war it would have all the time in its hands to mobilise and fight the Germans at a time and place of its choosing and meanwhile Germany would simply have to wait. America had the reach to take the war to Germany in whatever form it wanted to; Germany, on the other hand, could not take the war to the enemy until it breached its insularity and also found a suitable ally.

Consequently, it sent a telegram to Mexico, promising it land which was taken away from it by the U.S half a century ago (New Mexico, Texas and Arizona). It also pleaded with Mexico to send a copy of the dispatch to Japan urging them to join the war and seize parts of California on America's eastern seaboard (Gathen 2007; Katz 1981). Mexico studied the offer and the military implications and concluded that it was highly unlikely that the Germans could assist them in any manner. The British and the American navy would easily stop any German ship from approaching Mexico with troops and supplies. Such a war with the U.S was seen as immensely risky and almost suicidal (Katz 1981: 325-331). Japan responded by emphasizing its quasi-alliance with the U.S and re-asserting the importance it gave to being a responsible great power (Horne 1923). Japan's military situation ensured that Germany could not come to Japan's assistance in any manner anyway. In short, American insularity could not be breached because Mexico suffered from American preponderance in North America and because Japan could not take on America on its own.

For instance, if hypothetically Japan and Mexico had accepted the offer, the American navy would have engaged and destroyed the Japanese navy on its own, whereas American army would have waged war against Mexico's army and triumphed over it quickly. So all that would have happened if the offers were accepted is that Japan and Mexico would have

suffered absolute geopolitical defeat, while Germany would have probably acquired a few additional months to finish the war with France and Britain (Boghardt 2012; Tuchman 2014; Tansill 1938; Vagts 1928). In other words, Germany was asking Mexico and Japan to sacrifice themselves for the sake of a German probability of winning the war in Europe.

The diplomatic and strategic failure of the telegram only helped emphasize Germany's lack of options against the U.S. The telegram was sent under the assumption that the U.S. was not insular, that contiguous Mexico could be used as a factor in miring American forces. The discovery of the telegram and its consequent propaganda value only further helped the Wilson administration in declaring and fighting the war against Germany.

### **Interwar Germany: 1919-1933**

#### *A German-Soviet Understanding: From enmity to partnership*

The Great War had significantly weakened German power. The League of Nations imposed a somewhat harsh peace on Germany and forbade it from militarising or organising a strong army. The French Premier Clemenceau had also imposed a system around Germany which had several tripwires. France along with her east European allies intended to keep Germany weak and contained through coercive policies – economic and political. Furthermore, portions of German territories and populations were transferred to neighbouring powers or turned into demilitarised zones, such as the partitioning of Upper Silesia in favour of Poland as a result of French pressure (Jacobson 1983; McDougall, 1978). These constraints drove Weimer Germany towards a conciliatory policy towards the Soviet Union, considering that the Soviet Union was not a party to the League treaties and enabled Germany to train troops within Soviet territory (Cameron 2005; Freund 1957). The second reason to court the Soviet Union was to subtly blackmail Western powers into conciliating Germany since Britain, France and even the U.S. had concerns about closer Soviet-German ties. A foreign office memo from July 1919, put the matter in the following way,

“Geographically our most necessary political and economic interests point toward a close friendly relationship with Russia. A political understanding between our two countries promises to provide Germany with valuable support vis-a-vis the Western Powers...An

economic understanding would mean the exploitation of an invaluable source of raw materials and an inexhaustible market for our industrial goods” (Cameron, 2005: 8).

Thirdly, German leaders were concerned with both latent Soviet power and actual Soviet revolutionary intentions. To contain Soviet power, Germany had adopted a curiously innovative strategy which could be described as ‘containment through engagement’ - comparable to U.S.’ cold war strategy of ‘peaceful evolution’ (Ma 2012; Zhai 2009).

This policy sought to transform the nature of the Soviet state through economic engagement and investments. It was hoped that greater contact and assistance from Germany could encourage more moderate elements in the Soviet Union and thereby change the incentive structure within the Soviet elite. Such moderation or socialisation would be conducive to German interests both in terms of trade and also restraining the Soviet leadership from supporting communist revolutionary activity in Germany. Such a policy could also be described as behaviour modification and in interesting ways can be characterized as the prototype to Ostpolitik pursued by West Germany towards the Soviet Union during the cold war. Steps taken in the Soviet Union such as the more liberal New Economic Policy (NEP) further reinforced hopes that the Soviet Union could evolve into a normal market-friendly status quoist state. This process of engagement reached its apex in the Rapallo agreements between the two powers in January 1922.

The Soviet Union meanwhile was worried about a possible attack on its territory by Poland and had sent feelers for an alliance with Germany in 1920; alliance with Germany was also desirable to the Soviet Union because it hoped for German assistance in its economic reconstruction (Himmer 1976). Furthermore, the Anglo-Soviet negotiations in Copenhagen in 1919 caused enough concern among some German officials to pursue cooperation with the Soviet Union more vigorously (Himmer 1976: 151; Debo 1981).

Thus the Ruhr crisis aptly captures the dilemmas of German policy. During the early stages of the crisis, the Soviet Union criticised French intervention and diplomatically supported and sympathized with Germany’s position. However, as the crisis worsened and led to general turmoil in Germany, the Soviets adopted an opportunist strategy of aiding German communists who were attempting to overthrow the Government of Stresemann with arms

and money. Such assistance and encouragement threatened civil breakdown and possible civil war, thereby contributing to the German government's decision to withdraw the civil resistance movement against the French occupation. Therefore, in sum, the Soviet role in the crisis was severely detrimental to Germany's interests. But German officials still kept hope that the Soviet economy would continue to evolve along NEP lines. These hopes were dashed entirely by 1927 and with the purge of Bukharin (an advocate of NEP) as well as the launch of collectivist five-year plans. In the late 1920s, a combination of factors such as the alliance between Britain and Poland and increasing Japanese power in the far east convinced Stalin that war was on the horizon.

This assessment undid NEP since, according to its critics, it stood for the progress of communism and industrialisation 'at snail's pace'. The anti-British war scare of 1927 along with the reluctance of peasants to turn in their harvest to ensure food supplies in preparation for war convinced Stalin that NEP and market liberalization went against security imperatives as well as his hold over the economy (Temin 1991: 573-593). Commitments to war preparations called for a more collectivised and top-down economy, culminating in the five -year plans and the abolition of NEP. As will be shown below, impressive Soviet industrialisation and militarisation, in turn, led to concerns regarding Soviet power in the 1930s that form the background of the Second World War.

The outreach by Weimer Germany counts as yet another attempt by Germany in its history of containing Soviet power through engagement. Bismarck is generally applauded for being able to minimize the risks and possibilities of a German-Russian war. But such a positive assessment of Bismarck's diplomacy is muddled by alternative interpretations which highlight Bismarck's failures in managing to dissuade Russian expansionism in Europe during his later years. It is this backlash to Bismarck's strategy of engagement - which was seen as a slow hollowing out of German power and influence - that had led to the more anti-Russia policy adopted by Holstein, Caprivi and the Kaiser in the 1890s. Thus the failure of the Weimer Republic in engaging Soviet power naturally led to a more hard-line policy in the 1930s. It is worth pointing out that Germany would return to a policy of change through rapprochement in the late 1960s during the cold war - albeit with greater success.

*Hitler, the European balance of power and the U.S.*

Germany was intent on building enough capabilities to deter a preventive war by France and U.K in the short-run (Maiolo 2010; Copeland 2001; Schweller 1998). To achieve this end, it adopted a policy of isolating France from the Anglo-Saxon powers (Maiolo 2010: 55). Germany knew that the Anglo Saxon powers hoped for reconciliation between France and Germany, whereas France sought commitments from the Anglo Saxon powers. To achieve deterrence in the short run, Germany primarily relied on its independent air force (Maiolo 2010: 52-55). Germany had learnt the lesson of the First World War – states needed to have power in both breadth and depth. Germany lost the war because it did not have depth, of which the food crisis was but one manifestation of several (albeit possibly the most important manifestation). Thus Germany needed to achieve independence from the Western Liberal international order and also achieve autarky in order to achieve self-sufficiency in terms of food in case of another total war.

By most accounts, it seems that Germany expected (partially hoping for one) a Major European war by around 1944, by when it will be prepared as well (especially the navy). By around 1935-36, Hitler was more or less sanguine about the future of Germany because he expected a war between Britain and Italy and another between the Soviet Union and Japan (Maiolo 2010: 55). Such wars would weaken potential adversaries and allow Germany a free hand in Europe. Once preponderance is achieved in Europe (by eliminating France and USSR) Germany will be in a position to unite Europe as a single political entity. Henceforth, either preferably with or without an alliance with Britain, Germany shall build its resources along with the whole of Europe for the eventual inevitable geopolitical showdown with North America.

Thus by 1939 Germany had not completed its re-armament programme and yet found itself in war with France and Britain. Germany's policy was one which aimed at preparing for the next total war in which its principal adversary would be France and Russia and possibly Britain. The naval treaty with Britain in 1935 was considered as a major milestone achievement by Hitler and was seen as a step in the eventual formation of an Anglo-German-Italian alliance. Hitler was also concerned about the health of the British Empire. Any sudden elimination of the Empire is only going to benefit the U.S and Japan the most.



Hitler thought rational self-interest would drive Britain only closer towards Germany. As he observed –

“[Churchill] has made the same mistakes as those generals make who wage a war according to the principles of the preceding war. . . The crucial new factor [since Pitt’s day] is the existence of those two giants, the U.S. and Russia. Pitt’s England ensured the balance of world power by preventing the hegemony of Europe—by preventing Napoleon, that is, from attaining his goal. Churchill’s England, on the other hand, should have allowed the unification of Europe, if it wished to preserve that same balance of power” (Schweller 1998: 138)

German perception of Anglo-American relations and interests - There were three principal reasons for the above assessment. First, the greatest threat to the British Empire in terms of capabilities seemed to be the United States. The U.S had achieved naval parity vis-à-vis Britain (something that no other nation has been able to achieve since the mid-18th century). Hitler also blamed the Kaiser’s naval policy for intimidating Britain into its alliance with France and Russia (Maiolo 2010: 126; Schweller 1998: 81-85). In Hitler’s estimation, if only Germany conceded and acknowledged British maritime domination, Britain would have reciprocated and become more accepting of a German free hand in the continent. Furthermore, Hitler seemed to argue for an agricultural land policy instead of a policy of Weltpolitik and trade competition which had alienated the Anglo-Saxon sea powers. In other words, Hitler clung to the thesis that it was not German power per se that forced Britain and the U.S. to balance against it but German policy.

According to Hitler, the U.S is more likely to antagonise Britain in the future than Germany because unlike the U.S., Germany accepts maritime disparity vis-à-vis the British navy. Thus, Hitler’s surprise at the outcome achieved in the naval conferences, “For centuries, England had fought ruthlessly for her naval supremacy . . . and always realized the need to drive the strongest from the field. In Washington, this England gave up her position with a grand gesture and without a struggle and renounced the alliance with Japan and transferred the leadership of world politics to the United States” (Stoakes 1992: 99).

Hitler’s belief that Britain and America were long term natural enemies and short term rivals seemed to have influenced his estimation of America’s likelihood, objectives, and

sincerity of participation in the war. On 25th July 1941, Hitler predicted “England and America will one day have a war with one another, which will be waged with the greatest hatred imaginable. One of the two countries will have to disappear” (Cameron & Stevens 1973: 14). On the 9th of August 1941, Hitler again anticipates “If America lends her help to England, it is with the secret thought of bringing the moment nearer when she will reap her inheritance”. (Cameron & Stevens 1973: 23).

Hitler was keenly aware that a Europe unified under Germany would in the future have to compete with the U.S. The key is that Hitler thought a confrontation between the two superpowers would take place in 20-30 years when Germany would be better prepared and the German threat to the Western hemisphere would become obvious to the U.S to such a degree that isolationism would become a weak political force in terms of restraining American foreign policy. Such an assessment seems to have been derived from a combination of factors – Firstly; Hitler thought isolationism was still a strong force which prohibited Roosevelt or any other President from intervening in the coming war. Secondly, Hitler thought land power was in the ascendance due to changed modern technological conditions. The ability of sea powers to intervene in land confrontations and determine its outcome was no longer as strong as it was during the time of Pitt and Napoleon. Thirdly, and this derives from the second point, Hitler doubted the ability of the U.S to be able to transport troops, weapons and resources into the European theatre with either efficiency or speed. For instance, in a conversation with Matsuoka in April 1941 Hitler noted, “America’s performance depended on her transport capabilities, which in turn would be limited by the tonnage available. Germany’s warfare against shipping tonnage represented an appreciable weakening not only of England but of America also. Germany had made her preparation so that no American could land in Europe. She would wage a vigorous war against America with her U-boats and her Luftwaffe” (Hitler- Matsuoka 1941: 455).

The fact that Britain was cautious and concerned with French and Soviet power in the 1920s further convinced Hitler that British and German interests coincided and the two powers were destined to become allies in the future. Thus Hitler writes, “If, however, Germany arrives at a fundamental political reorientation that no longer conflicts with the maritime and trade interests of England, but instead limits itself to continental goals, then there is no

longer a logical basis for English hostility, which would then just be hostility for hostility's sake. Because the European balance also interests England only as long as it prevents the emergence of an international trade and naval power that could threaten England.” (Weinberg 2006:173). Hitler thought and acted on the premise that Britain balanced against a certain type of power – the power which adopts a maritime strategy consisting of a significant navy and international trade. This theory regarding British interests and policy led Hitler to, amongst other things, refrain from strengthening the German navy, adopting continental economic autarky as well as expect Britain to ally with Germany and clash with the U.S. at some future date.

Hitler was a keen observer of American domestic politics (Schweller 1998; Kershaw 2008). Hitler knew that the much of Germany's fate in the coming war would depend on American participation or the lack of it. But Hitler's assessment of what Germany could do against the U.S, rather than the other way around was much bleaker, and qualitatively so. Hitler had written on 31st July 1940 ‘Britain had two hopes left: Russia and America, about the latter the Germans cannot do anything’. Hitler had also confided to the Japanese that he may have declared war on the Americans but he does not know exactly what to do consequently (Schweller 1998:133). The problem Germany faced vis-à-vis the United States is the same problem Germany had been facing vis-à-vis Britain during the war, albeit on a much larger scale.

#### *Nazi Germany and Anglo-American insularity*

Dunkirk had shown that the British army was no match for the German army and yet Britain could not be knocked out of the war without the German army crossing the channel. Crossing the channel turned out to be impossible. The channel that separated German Controlled Northern France was 26 miles long, the Pacific Ocean that separates the two consisted of thousands of miles. Two milestone processes in this regard are – the lesson learned from operation sea-lion and the failure of Molotov's visit to Berlin.

If Germany could not hope to cross the channel than attacking the United States becomes an even more distant dream. The problem Hitler faced was in effect not very different from the problem Imperial Germany faced vis-à-vis the U.S, which was well articulated after the

lessons were learnt from the wargaming exercises that took place between 1897-1906. What makes it even worse for Germany is that when the war on America was declared, Germany was already beginning to get stuck in a quagmire with its Continental neighbour (unlike during operation sea-lion, when Germany and Russia were ostensive allies, with Russia even aiding Germany's war mission) and the U.S. had no overseas territories that could be harassed, unlike Britain.

In other words, America was immune - so immune that it had been a problem for President Roosevelt in terms of mobilising opinion towards a future war with Germany, (Thompson 1992; Olson 2013). The balance of power between America and Germany was so skewed in America's favour that Hitler time and again decided to restraint his admirals when American ships were attacking German ships in the Atlantic without a declaration of war (Trachtenberg 2000; Kershaw 2008). Herwig describes these acts of restraint,

“He constantly warned his naval leaders to use the utmost caution regarding American interests at sea. On February 23, 1940 Hitler vetoed Raeder's proposal to send two submarines to Halifax, Canada, ‘due to psychological effect on America.’ And on May 21 he further refused Raeder's request to shell the Dutch island of Aruba (Lesser Antilles), because ‘oil centers belong to Standard Oil, the American corporation.’ Finally, when a war zone was established around the British Isles on August 17, 1940 it corresponded precisely to the war zone into which the United States had forbidden its citizens and ships to sail” (Herwig 1971: 653).

The military problem that Germany faced vis-à-vis the U.S may direct us towards the question as to why Germany did not balance against the U.S. The failure of operation sea-lion and especially the inability to arrange for enough barges to enable a landing demonstrates that Germany did not seek to balance Britain or the U.S in the run-up to the war. Even more so than Kaiser Wilhelm, Hitler's focus was on land threats and land power.

Thus, the thinking behind and challenges faced while planning operation sea-lion provides significant insight into questions such as the relevance of insularity in the modern age, the risks to insular security posed by a continental hegemon and the power of continental states to balance the power of offshore insular states. During the height of the debate between isolationists and interventionists in the U.S. (1940-41), for instance, the latter side had to

acknowledge that the German failure to invade Britain meant that a similar invasion of the U.S. was even more out of the question, "it is frequently said... As Germany has not been able to cross the British Channel, how can she cross the Atlantic?" (Committee on Foreign Relations 1941). As such the episode will be explored in some detail in the following section.

*Operation Sea-Lion, Insularity, balancing* – Having subdued France, Belgium, the Netherlands along with the rest of Europe, Germany started considering an invasion of Britain. Beginning from May, Hitler issued the final orders on July 16, 1940, in the form of "General Order NO. 16" to make preparations for such an invasion (DeWeerd 1948). The German army chief of staff Franz Halder and Hitler himself were most supportive and optimistic regarding operation Sealion. Chief Admiral Raeder, on the other hand, had always been sceptical of such plans as he had also sought to demonstrate the insurmountable challenges of any cross channel invasion by undertaking a study in 1939 called study 'North West' (McKinstry 2014). The optimists reasoned that crossing the channel could not be very different from crossing rivers, which the German army did in France. The recently concluded invasion of Norway also served as a template, during which, the German military had successfully landed in and occupied Norwegian territories in maritime operations. Moreover, Germany had already invaded and occupied a few Channel Islands such as the Bailiwick of Jersey and the Bailiwick of Guernsey that were crown dependents and lay just a few miles off the Norman coast by the end of June 1940, when planning for operation Sealion had already advanced.

But during the planning stages, German military leaders came across several challenges. The German navy had already suffered significant losses in the Norway campaign and did not have enough naval power to ensure safe passage for German transports. The British home fleet was far superior in quality and numbers to the Krieg marine. Then there was the further problem of acquiring landing crafts and barges to land troops in hostile beaches. There were simply not enough of these transports at the time of planning, but steps were being taken to build such crafts in the various recently acquired ports in the Atlantic.

But even until September Germany could not arrange specialised landing crafts. The limited barges meant that artillery and tanks could not be transported. The landing could

have been possible only in conditions of good weather and the lack of speed would make the barges very vulnerable to British coastal crafts and Motor torpedo boats. Describing the scale of the problem in terms of logistics Geoffrey Cole writes, “Many hundreds of unwieldy river barges, few capable of more than two or three knots, were requisitioned and even pre-positioned for loading, but they lacked the sea-keeping qualities required to navigate the English Channel safely and their slow speed gave the British ample warning of both assembly and attack. Channel currents of four to five knots presented a further obstacle” (Cole 2009).

The solution to the deficient naval capabilities was sought to be solved by the German air force. The Luftwaffe was subsequently instructed to destroy the Royal Air Force (RAF) to create the conditions whereby both the transports and the landing troops and supplies could be protected by way of air cover. However, it failed to achieve air superiority over southern England during the Battle of Britain which began in July 1940. Prominent admirals such as Erich Raeder and Karl Donitz believed (rightly so), however, that even if Germany had won the air war it would have not have helped improve the prospects of an invasion (Raeder 2001: 324-325; Larew 1992; Cumming 2010). Meanwhile, with every postponement British home defences were improving.

The lack of both air and sea dominance along with problems in acquiring barges constantly delayed the launch dates of operation sea lion and by September Admiral Raeder and Admiral Wagner were busy convincing Hitler that Sealion held no hope of success and instead Germany could adopt an alternate strategy of weakening the British empire to force it to negotiate. Operations could be undertaken to overrun Malta and the Suez Canal to destroy the empire in India as well as deny these Mediterranean bases to the U.S in case it decides to intervene in the war (Kershaw 2008: 70-77). Inability to master matters at sea led Hitler and his generals to believe that land power by itself could solve German inability to wield sea power. Thus Hitler declared, “Only the final and drastic solution of all land problems will enable us to accomplish within two years our tasks in the air and on the oceans” (Potts & Berthon 2007: 43). Chief of Staff Franz Halder noted the following in his diary at around the same time, “The Führer is greatly puzzled by Britain’s persisting unwillingness to make peace. He sees the answer (as we do) in Britain’s hope on Russia,

and therefore counts on having to compel her by main force to agree to peace” (Kershaw 2008: 65).

By September 17 Hitler had issued the official directive that indefinitely postponed operation Sealion. In his conversation with his naval adjutant, Hitler said, “We have conquered France at the cost of 30,000 men, during one night of crossing we could lose many times that—and success is not certain” (Berthon and Potts; 2007: 29). Before July 1940 Hitler and his army chiefs were confident that an invasion of Britain was possible. However, during the process of planning the invasion, Both Hitler and Halder had increasingly realized that despite German hegemony in the continent it could not cross the 26 miles of the English Channel.

Modern technology, airpower, German military genius and quiet frontiers had still not made an invasion of the British Isles any easier than in the early 19th century when Napoleon considered the same option. This strategic discovery had enormous implications for the grand strategy debate between interventionists and isolationists in the U.S as well. Before September the British public, American officials and the Japanese military thought that Britain did not stand much of a chance. Churchill on the other hand had always been confident that Germany would not even attempt such a costly and suicidal invasion (Hastings 2010: 81; Campbell 1994). The debates within the German military were marked by the sheer contrast in opinions between the navy and army. The army considered Sealion to be just a river crossing and could not understand why the navy could not simply perform its task and ferry across the army. The navy on the other hand, according to Liddell Hart, considered the war to be lost in September 1939 when Britain had declared war. As such the navy did at times attempt to sabotage the operation and considered an invasion to be completely impossible. War gaming exercises in 1974 confirm the navy side of the debate (Cox 1974).

### *The German-Japanese alliance*

“A dysfunctional alliance – far less coordinated than the Grand Alliance that Germany and its allies faced after 1941. It lacked common statements of purpose, common grand strategic conceptions and planning, and even, in some cases, common enemies. Rather it was a

collection of predators, none of which trusted one another.” – Norman J.W. Goda (2015: 275).

The previous section discussed why Germany could not internally balance the U.S., i.e. owing to the Atlantic Ocean and American insularity. But could it still have balanced the U.S. by means of an alliance? This section discusses why the German-Japanese alliance fell short of being a meaningful counter-balancing coalition. Differing goals, mutual mistrust and asymmetric dependency characterise this alliance. Moreover, at its most radical, the alliance was aimed at preventing U.S. entry into either the European or Asia-Pacific theatre – therefore it was aimed at deterring American intervention in already occurring wars, and not at balancing U.S. power per se.

Does the German-Japanese alliance signify an attempt at balancing the U.S.? Despite self-assurances regarding the low possibility of American intervention in the European war, Hitler was still anxious enough to try to work out an alliance with Japan with the objective of deterring the U.S from entering the war and if it entered still, to bog it down in the Pacific. An alliance with Japan could help Germany if such a pact helped deter intervention by putting the U.S in a position where it would have to fight a two-front war in case it attacked Germany. Though more meaningful than the rationale of the Zimmermann telegram the offer was still not a compelling one since such an alliance would or could work only in Germany's favour, at Japan's cost. Association with Germany would complicate Japan's negotiation with the U.S at a time when Japan was desperate for a rapprochement. Furthermore, an attack on Germany leading to a Japanese entry would indeed help Germany by diverting or dividing American strength. But it was not clear how an attack on Japan would enable Germany to come to the assistance of Japan since the German navy was no match for the U.S. Navy and also had to contend with the British navy simultaneously. This was a structural fault that was analogical to incoherencies inherent in the Zimmerman telegram. The September 27 Tripartite pact between Germany, Japan and Italy was a means of deterring the U.S. for both Japan and Germany. Rather than an instance of the two powers balancing the U.S., it was a case of the two powers signalling to deter American balancing of either or both. “The basic aim of the pact,” Prime Minister Konoe explained to the cabinet, “is to avoid war with the United States...However, I think it is necessary for us to



display firmness, because if we act humbly, it will only make the United States presumptuous” (Ikle 1956: 181-182). It was the U.S., after all, that was balancing Germany and Japan

Despite the alliance, at the beginning of the war when the German Naval office asked its Japanese counterpart if it could grant access to facilities in the far east for its pocket battleships, the Japanese refused citing its unwillingness to so openly side with a belligerent in the war and not seem neutral (Nubuo 2006). Japan did not want to risk too close an alliance with Germany because it did not want to provoke the U.S into assisting its allies in the Asian mainland (Tansill 1975; Taliaferro 2012). For Hitler, the alliance with Japan was important because it had the potential of keeping America in check and if deterrence failed than to force the U.S to engage in a two-ocean war in case it decided to intervene in Europe. However, Japan gave insufficient importance to Germany’s concerns and continued negotiations with the U.S in the hope of resolving hostilities peacefully. Germany could not even publicly utilize the alliance to signal to the U.S the implications of its intervention in Europe. Ribbentrop also urged Germany to thrust southward and take over British possessions in South East Asia immediately, but Japan quivered.

For almost a year the Japanese Government discussed and debated its problems with the U.S and how it could resolve them. However, when it did finally decide to wage war against the U.S it hardly seemed to do so keeping in mind the German factor (Presseisen 1958). It did send memorandums to Germany and Italy asking if their previous agreements would still be honoured if it waged war against the U.S, but it seems that the messages were sent out more for reasons of re-enforcing a decision already made rather than the decision itself hinging on the response of the Germany and the Italy. It is quite telling that Hitler was as surprised by the attacks on Pearl Harbor as were the Americans (Kershaw 2008: 263). It only reveals the degree of autonomy the Japanese had despite its alliance with Germany.

Moreover, if the backdoor to war hypothesis (see below) is indeed valid then the alliance would be proved to be even counter-productive. The alliance allowed the U.S. government to form an association between Japanese ‘perfidy’ after Pearl Harbor with supposed aims of German world domination. It made possible the option of intervening in Europe even if Germany itself had not declared war on the U.S. or was refusing to respond to American

provocations in the Atlantic. As Robert Jervis writes, “As conflict increased, the 1940 Japanese alliance with Germany, signed in the expectation of discouraging U.S. from opposing Japan’s efforts to dominate China, had the opposite effect as Americans saw Japan as linked to the state that was such a menace in Europe” (Jervis, 1999: 213).

Germany did manage to find itself an ally which could be used against the U.S. However, this alliance did not prove useful in any meaningful sense of the term. Germany had breached Japan’s trust by unilaterally pursuing the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact – that too at a time when Japan found itself in war with the Soviet Union in the far east - and leaving Japan in the lurch when its own interest was felt to be more important. Consequently, the alliance was weakened and Japan did not feel any strong sense of obligation or inter-dependence towards Germany. Hitler and Ribbentrop, for instance, hinted to Matsuoka in March 1941 that Germany is likely to launch an attack on the Soviet Union (Feis 1950; Coox 1972). Instead of assisting its ally, Matsuoka instead chose to sign a new treaty of non-aggression with the Soviet Union immediately - a diplomatic move which in turn allowed the Soviet Union to move a significant number of troops and military hardware from the Far East and Siberia to the Western frontier.

In hindsight, it could be argued that the German-Japanese alliance would have had more bite against the U.S. if Germany had achieved surrender from Britain and pacified the Soviet Union in some form. Such a situation would have enabled Germany to build a substantial fleet in a couple of years. But of course, it is because such a situation would have been more or less dire for the U.S that it decided to support Britain and the Soviet Union against Germany and Japan (Thompson 1992).

### *Hitler and American maritimity*

Did Hitler not balance against the U.S because it was maritime in nature? Hitler was reflective and thoughtful about the question of maritime and continental powers. For instance, as a student of history, Hitler realised that Germany needed to take advantage of the continental resources before it could challenge the insular powers,

“For me, the object is to exploit the advantages of continental hegemony. It is ridiculous to think of a world policy as long as one does not control the Continent. The Spaniards, the

Dutch, the French and ourselves have learnt that by experience. When we are masters of Europe, we have a dominant position in the world” (Cameron & Stevens, 1973: 93).

This demonstrates that the U.S. was seen as an abstract threat in the distant future. Concerning American power itself, Hitler considered it too daunting a task for the U.S. to execute an attack on Continental Europe from across the Atlantic. In a conversation with Japanese Foreign Minister Yōsuke Matsuoko on 4th April 1941, he opined,

“America’s performance depended on her transport capabilities, which in turn would be limited by the tonnage available. Germany’s warfare against shipping tonnage represented an appreciable weakening not only of England but of America also. Germany had made her preparation so that no American could land in Europe. She would wage a vigorous war against America with her U-boats and her Luftwaffe” (Schweller 1998: 132).

Consequently, three weeks after declaring war on the U.S. Hitler conceded to the then Japanese Ambassador that he did not know how to defeat America (Schweller 1998: 133). For Germany to be able to have a world policy and balance the U.S. it would have to achieve mastery over continental matters first; that is, a regional policy. The reasoning is very similar to that of thinkers of geopolitics such as Mackinder, Haushofer, Spykman and Dehio - A continental state cannot hope to match or balance the U.S. unless it overcomes its continentality. In January 1942, for instance, Hitler described the cause of Anglo-American participation in the war, “England endeavors to maintain the so-called balance of power in Europe. This means in reality that it endeavors to make sure that no European state is able to win over a certain measure...and perhaps in this way rise to a leading power in Europe” (Hitler speech 1942). The continental power had to have subservient or weak neighbours, thereby mirroring the U.S., before it could hope to project its power outward and toward the North American continent the same way Carthage could project power into Europe in order to balance Rome.

Gerhard Weinberg argues that Hitler’s second book reveals how Americans were right to worry about Hitler since it has been discovered that Hitler had given orders as early as 1937 to design and launch intercontinental bombers and super-battleships. But a very cursory study of these projects themselves reveal how expensive, impractical and vulnerable these systems were themselves, and hence almost all of them never took fruition in any serious

manner (Duffy 2004). Despite insularity, Britain was vulnerable to German air power and thus suffered from aerial bombings throughout the war. The U.S, on the other hand, was thousands of miles away from Germany and was not accessible to German aircraft due to lack of access to bases anywhere near the U.S. Whereas the U.S. could use bases in Britain, Azores and Iceland (Corgan 1992). Lack of German power vis-à-vis the U.S is demonstrated by the fact that there were no American civilian casualties of German bombing.

### *Hitler's estimation of the U.S.*

Despite the more well-known accounts of Hitler's contempt for American soldiery and its cultural hybridity, he was far from underestimating American power. Writing on the dangers to Europe resultant from rising American power Hitler wrote, "Only few of them wish to understand what it means for Germany. Our people, if it lives with the same thoughtlessness in the future as in the past, will have to renounce its claim to world importance As a state in the future order of world states, [Germany] will at best be like that which Switzerland and Holland have been in Europe up to now" (Hitler 1941: 103). Pondering further on American continental self-sufficiency and European dependency on its colonies he writes, "Many European States today are comparable to pyramids standing on their points. Their European territory is ridiculously small as compared with their burden of colonies, foreign trade, etc. One may say, the point is in Europe, the base in the whole world; in comparison with the American Union, which still has its bases in its own continent and touches the remaining part of the world only with its points. From this results, however, the unheard-of strength of this State and the weakness of most of the European colonial powers" (Hitler 1941: 180).

It is striking that when considering American power in the abstract, Hitler thought like a Waltzian, but when it came to actual balancing choices and policies Hitler acted more like along lines outlined by insularists i.e. Ludwig Dehio, Nicholas Spykman and others.

Before 1939, Hitler's military objectives were to achieve greater Germany by deterring the Western powers from intervening to prevent the achievement of the same. After the conquest of France had been achieved, Hitler had begun thinking more deliberately of European integration or the United States of Europe with Germany at its helm. Ribbentrop

had hoped for a more permanent settlement with the Soviet Union, a sort of continental League consisting of Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, Japan all expanding towards previously delineated regions at the cost of the British Empire (Schweller 1998: 123).

An analysis of the discussions reveals two things – Hitler was less optimistic of the viability of such a league (and for understandable reasons) and the plans for the league ultimately hinged on and faltered because of German-Russo differences over Eastern Europe, the Baltic states and Finland. The Soviet Union could not be enticed with the Middle East and India into forsaking its sphere of influence/control in Eastern Europe. In fact, the discussions between Molotov and German high command in Berlin in 1940 conclusively convinced Hitler that Soviet power was a ‘gathering threat’ (Kershaw 2008; Kotkin 2017: 1053-1056). Soviet power was seen as naturally jeopardizing German security in the continent. Hitler thus decided to balance Soviet power by invading it.

Disagreements and events pertaining to bases, rights and treaties with various countries that lay in between the two powers acted more as a catalyst rather than the primary cause of the war - which was to begin with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. German war planners had been observing Soviet five-year plans with great apprehension as early as the late 1920s (Copeland 2000). Speaking to SS Commander Josef Dietrich on the night of January 5 1942, Hitler sought to justify the invasion of Soviet Union,

“A few days before our entry into Russia, I told Goering that we were facing the severest test in our existence...What confirmed me in my decision to attack without delay was the information brought by a German mission lately returned from Russia, that a single Russian factory was producing by itself more tanks than all our factories together. I felt that this was the ultimate limit” (Trevor-Roper 1988: 182).

Six years earlier he had argued, “The military resources of this aggressive will are...rapidly increasingly from year to year. One has only to compare the Red Army as it actually exists today with the assumptions of military men of ten or fifteen years ago to realise the menacing extent of this development. Only consider the results of a further ten, fifteen or twenty years and think what conditions will be like then” (Maiolo 2010: 146-147).

Whereas for historians such as Ian Kershaw (2008), Norman Rich, Edward Lukacs and Gerhard Weinberg (Weinberg 1964; Rich 1992; Lucaks 1999: 133), the decision to invade the Soviet Union may have originated and occurred in November 1940; To Copeland and others the conflict was more inevitable than the consequence of a failed summit. It may appear so to Kershaw only because he ignores the consistency and scale of German fears of rising Soviet power and because he tends to characterise the war as essentially a conflict between Germany and the Anglo-Saxon powers with the Soviet Union being only a diversionary variable. In Kershaw's (2008) interpretation, Hitler attacked the Soviet Union only because of the failure of Operation Sealion and because of the perception that the Soviet Union was Britain's last continental hope. This argument is unconvincing and underplays the Soviet-German security dilemma.

After all, Hitler's actions and policies all make sense even without supposing such an America focused objective. Even if the U.S. were to not exist, all the German fears, anxieties and motivations vis-à-vis the Soviet Union would still matter – propelling Germany to launch a war to solve the Soviet/Russian problem once and for all. Hitler could not ignore the fact that the Soviet Union, for instance, had forward-deployed 20 of its 29 mechanised corps, almost 80 per cent of its newest tanks and half of its most advanced aircraft by December 1940 (Kotkin 2017: 1058).

Furthermore, the idea that Germany and the U.S. would face each other in the distant future naturally follows from a balance of power perspective if Greater Germany is achieved. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union's growing economic and military strength was a real problem in the immediate future. A Soviet invasion of Germany was a real possibility within a 4 to 6 years' timeframe and independent of other variables – a function of the continental security dilemma. Given that we know how Hitler underestimated American troops and power projection capabilities over the Atlantic, he had very little reason to worry about an American invasion of Germany independent of other factors. Nation-states are after all driven more by their immediate security needs rather than long term abstract great power ambitions.

A few factors intervened from 1939 to 1941 to make it appear as if the security dilemma between Germany and the Soviet Union was neither as strong nor as irreversible as

previously thought. Stalin had a coherent and consistent policy from the mid-1920s to play off the capitalist powers against each other and then intervene in the later stages in order to bargain from a position of great strength. In a speech to the Central Committee in 1925, Stalin revealed, “The preconditions for war are getting ripe. War may become inevitable, of course not tomorrow or the next day, but in a few years. . . But, if war begins, we shall hardly have to sit with folded arms. We shall have to come out, but we ought to be the last to come out. And we should come out in order to throw the decisive weight on the scales, the weight that should tilt the scales” (Schweller 1998: 128). Stalin’s strategy of buck-passing – forcing Britain and France to balance Germany by reaching a spheres of influence agreement with the latter in August 1939 – made it appear as if the two continental powers were not each other’s primary threats.

#### *Germany, Russia and ideas of a Continental League*

The U.S did feature very significantly in German strategic thinking during the First World war in a way that foreshadowed Hitler’s thinking regarding the same. A section of the German military was attuned to the idea that it was the U.S which was by far the ‘most dangerous enemy’ and that Germany had to establish a *Mittleuropa* to prepare for the same. General Hoffman in 1917 noted, “It is the opinion of all reasonable people that after the war we must come to an accord with Russia and Japan. That is in our interest as well as in theirs, in order to offer a counterweight to the great commercial over-weight of the combination of England and America” (Hoffman 1929: 168). Germany was thus conscious that the U.S was itself conscious of the implications of European hegemonic wars and that it would thereby remain very interested in shaping its outcome. It is because Germany anticipated American intervention in European politics in some form or other that it re-enforced the decision to establish a German empire in Europe that would provide it with the economic and manpower to be able to compete with American or Anglo-American power.

Such a formulation, which pitted German-American strategic competition as the central feature of world politics also by its very nature pre-disposes Germany to cognitively underestimate German-Russian competition. At times, Germany considered it to be in the interest of both itself and Russia that the two continental powers co-operate to compete against the two insular world powers. Thus the German geopolitics theorist Karl Haushofer had written

in 1913 regarding the imperative of a Russo-Japanese-German coalition, “A community of interests between Japan, Russia, and the central European Imperial Powers would be absolutely unassailable in the year of the opening of the Panama canal; the only power combination able to resist Anglo-Saxon tutelage, with a strong economic front to the south, with fleets on both flanks which though too weak to attack frivolously would nevertheless with a secure back to the continent be a deadly sharp weapon against any interference” (Presseisen, 1958: 25).

### **Nazi Germany balances Soviet Russia: 1939-1945**

It is now well known that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of September 1939 was in essence borne out of the German need to avoid a two-front war and the Soviet need to pass the buck of balancing the Soviet Union to the western powers in the short-run (Kotkin 2017: 841; Ribbentrop 1978: 110-117; Hilger & Mayer 1953). As Germany prepared to enter a war with Britain and France as a result of its policy towards Poland, it sought to strike an alliance with the Soviet Union by way of dividing the territory that lay between them into clearly delineated spheres of interest. Germany would win Soviet non-participation in the coming war with western powers. In return Germany would itself have to turn a blind eye to Soviet expansion in Europe – especially Finland and the Baltic states.

In line with Stalin’s strategy of bloodletting, the Soviet Union also sought to benefit economically from the partnership. Stalin thought that modern advancement in warfare favoured the defensive even more and hence the western war would be similar to the First world war- meaning a war of attrition that could last for years (Short 2008: 10). He sought to use the same time to modernise Soviet armaments industry through an economic partnership with Germany. Germany had added incentive to enter such a partnership as a means to circumvent the British blockade of Germany. The Soviet Union was to source key raw materials for Germany in third countries as well as allow Soviet territory to be used for German exports means for Iran, Afghanistan, the Far East and so on.

In this economic agreement, signed in August 19 1939, the Soviet Union would export raw materials such as petroleum, various ores, phosphates, timber, platinum as well as grains. Germany, in turn, was expected to deliver military equipment, models of various military



equipment designs and equipment for manufacturing plants. In all, the Soviet Union was to facilitate Germany's war against France and Britain through various means including the detention of British ships in Murmansk in order to help Germany. The Soviet Union was also to employ its icebreakers through the difficult Arctic Ocean route to make way for a German raider to the Pacific Ocean (Nekrich, Ulam & Freeze 1997: 151-154; Overy 2004; Ericson 1999; Wegner 1997; Philbin 1994).

It is easy to imagine how Hitler must have seen this arrangement. It would come across as opportunist political blackmail by the Soviet Union. Reflecting on the August 1939 pact, Marshall Zhukov, Soviet hero of the war, would later recall that Stalin, "was sure that he had twisted Hitler around his finger" (Kotkin 2017: 859). Hitler himself retrospectively lamented the pact, "That meant the most bitter triumph over my feelings... This arrangement resulted in a betrayal which at first liquidated the whole northeast of Europe. You know best what it meant for us to look on in silence as the Finnish people were being strangled, what it meant to us that the Baltic States were also being overpowered.... Yet I remained silent. I took a decision only when I saw that Russia had reached the hour to advance against us at a moment when we had only a bare three divisions in East Prussia, when twenty-two Soviet divisions were assembled there" (Hitler speech 1941). As such, the speedy conclusion of the war against France began the slow process of the pact turning against itself.

#### *Limits to Cooperation: The Continental Security Dilemma*

Hitler and Stalin anticipated eventual war between the two continental powers. Hitler sought to pacify the western front first and Stalin hoped to delay the date till 1942, by which time the Soviet military will be mobilised and ready. However, in between September 1939 and June 1941, the two powers had to coexist in a delicate balance where the pact was maintained but power politics could not be fully ignored – especially in the frontier that lay between them – Yugoslavia, Finland, Bulgaria and so on.

This delicate balance is most clearly illustrated by the fact that the Soviet Union's immediate response to the fall of France in June 1940 was to send an ultimatum to Romania to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union – causing much consternation in

Germany. By September and October of 1940, the Soviet Union had managed to coerce the Baltic states to sign mutual assistance treaties with the Soviet Union – essentially making them Soviet satellites. What made matters worse was the British support of Soviet territorial annexations (Presseisen 1960; Nekrich, Ulam & Freeze 1997: 143-146). Soviet provocations in the Balkans, including its support to Hungary in pressing its own territorial claims against Romania, along with greater activity in the realm of Anglo-Soviet diplomacy led Hitler to express his wish to “smash” Russia and emerge as the master of Balkans and Europe (Franz Halder Diaries 1940).

German intervention in the Balkans in order to prevent a war and protect Rumania and its oil reserves, in turn, violated the Nazi-Soviet pact as it excluded the Soviet Union. The two powers may have succeeded in cooperating to partition territories and countries that lay between them, but such success also led to the termination of the buffer zone (cordon sanitaire) that lay between them. The consequence of this change “was that previously an attack by the Germans through Poland would have given the Red Army due warning and time to mobilize behind the Stalin Line, but now no buffer zone existed” (Short 2008: 11).<sup>3</sup>

There were times when the German government seemed to be entertaining two opposing grand strategies at the same time. On the one hand, Hitler himself was concerned about the Soviet Union as the primary threat. On the other, the German Foreign Office and elements in the Navy were somewhat keen on trying to form a continental understanding with the Soviet Union aimed at Britain and possibly the U.S. The latter argument was incidentally used by Hitler himself during his meeting with Molotov in November 1940. But this has to be seen in the context of rising tensions between the two over Finland and the Balkans as well as Hitler’s concern about not provoking Soviet military action in the short run.

Moreover, continued Anglo-Soviet cooperation and Molotov’s complete disinterest in forming a continental league with Germany drove the last nail in the coffin of the idea of a continental league. For instance, when Hitler sought to reassure Soviet concerns by

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<sup>3</sup> The Stalin Line was a discontinuous series of bunkers and gun emplacements along the Soviet border front as it existed throughout the 1920s. The line was abandoned in favour of the more forward Molotov line that was conceptualised in late 1939. Germany took advantage of this transition and launched an attack at a time when the Soviet Union had control over neither the Stalin nor Molotov line (Neil 2008: 56).

explaining troop deployment in the Balkans as a response to British entry in the Italian-Greek war, Molotov ominously pointed out that the Straits had been Britain's "historic gateway for attack on the Soviet Union" and that the same presence menaced Russia too (Presseisen 1960; Kershaw 2008; Schweller 1998).

During his meeting with Molotov in November 1940 for instance, Hitler attempted to persuade the Soviet Union to accept German designs in the Balkans by offering Russia a free hand in Asia (Iran and India) while also calling to attention the long term threat presented to the continental powers by the U.S. According to a Memorandum of Conversation between Hitler, Ribbentrop and Molotov, "Hitler then said there was the problem of America. The U.S. pursued an imperialistic policy. They were trying to get the British empire into their hands. This was for the year 1970 when freedom of other nations could be seriously threatened by this Anglo-Saxon power". Such a sketch of the future threat failed to impress Molotov much, and any possibility of the same reducing Russo-German growing tensions virtually disappeared when Molotov brought the discussion to their differences over Finland, the tripartite pact as well as Southeast Europe (Rumania, Bulgaria and Turkey). Unable to satisfy Molotov in these concrete matters, Hitler returned to the American threat, "the crux of the matter was to prevent all attempts of America to dominate Europe" (Hitler-Molotov 1940).

In sum, the Soviet Union demanded the withdrawal of German troops from Finland, free transit of the Dardanelles, Soviet military presence in Bulgaria and access to Baltic ports. Two weeks after this discussion the Soviet Union made a counter-proposal in which there would be a four-power (axis and the Soviet Union) spheres of influence over the middle east as well as the resignation of Soviet rights in Bulgaria (Nekrich et al 1997: 203). The counter-offer convinced Hitler that an agreement with the Soviet Union was not possible since Stalin "demands more and more" and "a German victory has become unbearable for Russia" (Shirer 1990: 725). Prior to the negotiations, Hitler told the German ambassador to Turkey that the Russo-German combination is such that, "no combination in the world could stop us. The only question is what price we would have to pay for it" (Hassell 1948:283).

Hitler found himself making the same arguments as Kaiser Wilhelm to Tsar Nicholas during their meeting in Bjorko in 1905, calling for greater Russian activism in Asia (instead of

Europe) and cooperation with Germany in the face of the common British threat. Just as Tsar Nicholas, the Soviet leaders did not fall for this offer as they were concerned much more about the European balance of power than they were about the insular threat.

Even as Germany and the Soviet Union entered into total war with each other since June 1941, the insular powers remained concerned regarding a separate peace between the two (Kennan 1962: 362-363; Berle to Hoover 1941). Such a thaw, if it were to happen, would result in another Nazi-Soviet détente that could leave Germany in control of most of Europe. After the surrender of German forces in February of 1943 in Stalingrad, the two powers seemed somewhat balanced for a while, thus creating the possibility of a negotiated stalemate. When discussions regarding the prospects of a peace were being discussed, Hitler remarked that he would like to discuss the possibilities of peace with Stalin but was not optimistic that it was still possible (Goebbels 1948: 477). Meanwhile, both Japan and Italy sought to persuade Germany to attempt the same (Mastny 1972: 1371). However, disagreements regarding spheres of influence in eastern Europe and where frontiers should lie sabotaged hopes of a mid-war rapprochement between the two powers in 1943 when representatives from each side secretly carried out negotiations to try to seek an end to the war (Mastny 1972). Thus, the global systemic balance indeed required Germany and the Soviet Union to ally with each other but the global systemic balance was a weak motivation in the years running up to the Second World War. What mattered more were conditions of security of each continental power from each other.

Furthermore, the episode along with the secret negotiations in 1943, offers an opportunity for scholars to examine as to why Germany and the Soviet Union could not agree on a spheres of influence agreement over Eastern Europe when the U.S. and the Soviet Union managed to achieve the same vis-à-vis Europe during the cold war. The answer could lay anywhere between nuclear weapons, ideology, differences in economic conditions or even political geography. This is worth speculating on especially given that the stakes were in a way even higher for Germany and the Soviet Union to maintain peace – given that the U.S. lurked in the background.

Meanwhile, President Roosevelt and his administration prepared to lay the ground – in terms of public opinion and war morale – for a U.S. entry into the European war for balance of

power reasons. However, the administration gradually conceded that it was impossible for the German army to be transported to the shores of the U.S. through the Atlantic Ocean's "3500 miles of storm tossed ocean". Their argument hence rested on the existence of a supposed 5th column that was capable of sabotaging radio towers and airports even while possibly yielding machine guns. The second argument was that modern air-power enabled a bomber to fly from the British isles to the eastern seacoast without the need to refuel. In other words, the administration was making a case for intervention neither based on German foreseeable intentions nor the capability of the German army but on the possibility of German bombers being able to make its way to the western hemisphere someday in the not so distant future. Meanwhile, the American hero and staunch isolationist Charles Lindbergh argued, contradicting the President and the administration, that modern aviation had increased American security from Europe and vice-versa (Thompson 1992: 399). The actual war demonstrated that both Lindbergh and Roosevelt were incorrect and under-estimated the implications of America's geographic position. American insularity combined with modern aviation enhanced American security from Europe and decreased European security from America – as evidenced most clearly by the allied bombing of Germany. Furthermore, the sinking of the German battleship Bismarck in May 1941 convinced even alarmists such as Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle that an "adequate air force" made a naval invasion of the Western hemisphere "out of the question" (Berle 1973: 332, 325, 352, 370).

## **Conclusion**

Hitler's Germany was most insecure about rising Soviet Power and sought to balance the same. Regardless of the Soviet factor, Germany also desired European hegemony as a bulwark against all kinds of threats in the future. This almost followed from the lessons it had learnt from the outcome of the last war. The U.S. did not play a concrete significant role in German calculations. But Germany did have to factor in the U.S. as a possible entrant into the war and increasingly so over time. Despite active U.S. military and civilian aid to Britain, Hitler took great care to not provide the U.S. with a casus belli for war and thus restrained his navy from counter-attacking American ships or responding to American provocations. The U.S. hovered in the background during key decisions – such as operation sea lion as well as the decision to invade the Soviet Union. But it cannot be argued that

Germany would not have undertaken the same decisions if the U.S. was completely missing from the frame. Germany sought an alliance with Japan aimed at deterring the U.S. from entering the war. If deterrence were to fail then it was better to have Japan in the war than not. However, such an alliance only ended up playing to American hands since it allowed the government to declare war on Germany post Pearl Harbor. Despite the Japanese attack on Pearl harbor, the U.S. adopted a Europe first strategy during the war – confirming that it considered Germany to be the real threat and concern in terms of the balance of power.

Germany did not balance the U.S. because it was more concerned with rising Soviet Power – which posed an existential threat, unlike American power. German decision making confirms the insular thesis.

German decision making during the Cold War represented, in some sense, a continuation of its post reunifications strategic axioms. West Germany sought to balance the Soviet Union, instead of the U.S. It also sought to reassure France by all means available in order to prevent a Franco-Soviet understanding aimed at Germany. Consistent with recent history it sought to achieve alliances with Britain and the U.S. in order to both balance the Soviet Union as well as dissuade continental counter-balancing coalitions to form against Germany itself. The next three chapters' circle back often to the central role Germany played in the calculations of various great powers – both during the Second World War itself (in terms of the Pacific war) as well as during the cold war.

## **Chapter Four: Japan and the United States**

On the face of it and given the power disparity between Japan and the U.S., the non-balancing by the former of the latter does not seem to clearly falsify Waltzian balance of power theory. However, we do discern Japan making decisive and costly balancing choices during the period 1865-1945. What explains Japanese balancing choices, and primarily in favour of balancing the Soviet Union over the U.S. in the period 1865-1945? Not only did Japan seem to be concerned about a much weaker Soviet Union (than the U.S.) it often seemed more concerned about the assertion of even Chinese power over American power. Assuming for a while that East Asia-Pacific represented an autonomous balance of power system during this period, the balancing imperative ought to have aligned Japan with at least one of the other two continental powers to form a counterbalancing alliance against the U.S. or, at the very least refrain from engaging in costly balancing wars and arms races with both or either continental states. This chapter seeks to understand and explain Japanese balancing choices in the period in order to assess the reasons for its non-balancing of the U.S.

### **Aim**

As such the chapter begins, as a background, with a discussion of the maritime versus continental state identity choice that Japan made during the interwar years. Subsequently, it discusses Japanese state identity in its early years as a modern nation-state. The next section briefly describes the complicated relationship the Japanese governing elite had with a 'decaying' and weakening China in the late 19th century – a period where Japan debated between allying with China versus subjugating/balancing it. The next section discusses Japanese external behaviour in between the Korea wars with China and Russia from 1895 till the end of the First World War – a period which saw the U.S. emerge as an active great power. The next section discusses the interwar years which saw Japan being overwhelmed by continental concerns in Asia and seeking to improve relations with the U.S. in order to balance against the Soviet Union. This period also saw the U.S. seek to balance Japan by limiting the size of the Japanese navy as well as by making Britain revoke its alliance with Japan. And finally, in the last section, I seek to explain how concerns regarding Soviet power in the far east had driven Japan to seek hegemony in North-East China – thereby

causing the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. American policy in 1941 shifted decisively towards containing/balancing Japanese power, even if it meant war.

The chapter concludes by way of confirming the insular thesis – Japan could not tolerate growing Soviet power (and Chinese to some extent) even as U.S. power continued to grow and manifest itself throughout this period. The balancing (of Soviet power) imperative, in turn, caused Japan to pursue appeasement of the U.S. through various means – after the failure of which, it decided to strike American naval forces in Pearl Harbor. Japan had neither the intent nor the capabilities to balance American power. Furthermore, its only significant great power ally, that is Britain, had chosen to abandon the alliance in the wake of U.S. pressure subsequent to the World War – itself a function of British appeasement of the U.S. out of concern of the balance of power in Europe.

## **Background**

“A maritime country! A maritime people! We must be proud of these names. The reason is that a maritime country is an eternally indestructible country, and a maritime people is the ultimate victor of civilization. Since its foundation the Imperial Japanese Empire has not even once been trampled on by the horseshoes of a foreign enemy, because the maintenance of the integrity of our glorious country has, of course, depended from the outset on the national power of the Emperor, as a binding force, at the center; and because, from the geographical point of view, the protection of the sea really exists”

- Hirata Shinsaku, *Kaigun Tokuhon* [General History of the Navy] (30th ed., Tokyo, 1933), from the first page of the most popular book on the Japanese navy at the time.

The above ode to Japanese maritime power during a time of increasing continental expansion illustrates the degree of sea-consciousness that the Japanese military and strategic elite had. It acknowledged that Japan enjoyed an immense geographical advantage due to its insularity – evidenced both by its recent rise (at the cost of continental states at the Asian mainland) as well as by the fact that it had never been invaded by a foreign power in its long history.



Peter Padfield considers it a great puzzle as to why Japan, being a maritime power, did not choose a maritime foreign policy like Britain and instead chose to be both a continental and maritime power (Padfield 2009). A priori it does not make strategic sense to seek such a large continental empire in one's own region when one is an island state and also a maritime power. Padfield ponders as to why the Japanese commercial and bourgeoisie class could not be more assertive and dominant in guiding national state policy like their counterparts in Britain and the U.S. As Andrew Lambert writes, "Imperial Japan, 1867–1945, did not become a seapower, despite being an island and acquiring a powerful navy. Japan was a military power focused on continental conquest: the navy secured military communications with Korea, Manchuria and China" (Lambert 2019: 45).

A reasonably compelling clue to the puzzle lies in the lessons Japanese military leaders drew from the First World War. Japan moved towards a continental strategy only after the Great War. Members of the Japanese military elite reached conclusions similar to the ones reached by German planners during the interwar years (Maiolo 2010; Drea 2016). In the modern age countries needed to be economically self-sufficient. The blockade imposed by Britain on Germany is what eventually determined the outcome of the war, not German military strength or warfighting morale. As Maiolo writes,

"What went wrong with the German war effort became the preoccupation of the 1920s, debated in countless Japanese Army study groups and periodicals. In the search for an answer, up-and-coming officers like Ishiwara (Kanji) toured Europe and America to meet the men who had waged total war. For those who saw victory wholly as the just reward for individual heroism and the unwavering devotion of the nation to martial values, the answer was shocking: Germany had lost not because its army performed badly but because Germany's economy had failed. The Allies had won because their blockade had cut Germany off from food and raw materials. What was alarming was Japan's own economic vulnerability" (Maiolo 2010: 27)

Thus, Japan could not rely solely on foreign trade and the liberal international order if it wanted to be a secure great power. Japan had to enhance the breadth and depth of its

capabilities. The invasion of Manchuria was driven by the need to strengthen its continental foothold in Korea (Korea being to Japan what Belgium was to Britain), the need to balance the Soviet Union and also to achieve economic self-sufficiency and autarky (Barnhart 1987: 29-34). Charles Tansill described, “Japan had decided to convert Manchuria into a glorified cyclone cellar that would be safe against the adverse wind from China or even the steppes of Siberia” (Tansill 1952: 145). In its publicly released 2006 report on War responsibility, the Yomiuri Shimbun War Responsibility Reexamination Committee found, “The main instigators of the [Manchurian] incident were Kanji Ishihara and Seishiro Itagaki...At the core of Ishihara’s militarist thinking was the pursuit of the ‘Final World War Theory’ to determine the Number One country of the world in a war between Japan and the United States” (Yomiuri Shimbun 2007). However, despite being visibly the most U.S. focused decision-maker in Japan (Maiolo 2010: 24-26), Ishiwara Kanji was of the view that by 1935-36 Japan needed to prepare for total war with the Soviet Union instead of entering into conflicts with China or the U.S. In the same period, he had even preferred another naval limitation agreement with the U.S. and Britain in order to spend greater resources on the continental front (Pelz 1974: 169; Crowley 1966: 284-285; Barnhart 1987: 46). With the natural resources of Manchuria in control, Japan estimated that it could fight a total war with either the Soviet Union or the U.S if the need arose.

Was Japan balancing against the U.S? By 1935 the Soviet Union emerged as the biggest threat to Japan. Russian forces in the east far outnumbered Japanese forces; the second five-year plan was already on its way. Japan was also getting bogged down with Chinese forces which had been recently trained and equipped by Germany. The German ambassador to Japan for instance had reported till as late as June 6, 1939, that Japan was attempting to prevent American entry into the war (Kershaw 2008: 38).

The Japanese navy was alive to the possibility of a future confrontation with the U.S but within the military, it was the army that received priority over the navy (Asada 2013; Hotta 2013; Coox 1985: 1021-1032). Japan realized it could not sustain an arms race with the Soviet Union to the west and a naval race with the U.S in the east. Japan prioritised the geopolitical competition with the Soviet Union over the competition with the U.S. As such,

Japan sought to placate the U.S into allowing Japan to exercise a free hand in China. To this end, Japan had been willing to enter into naval agreements with Britain and the United States. For all practical purposes, the Imperial army did not factor the U.S. in its calculations till 1939 and only marginally thereafter (Peattie 1975; Frank 2020: 180-183).

Japanese leaders were not oblivious to the fact that the U.S was a much stronger adversary, but like Hitler, the Japanese thought the U.S was a longer term adversary. The more immediate concern and urgency for both immediate security reasons and also to be able to eventually take on the United States were the problems in China and the relationship with the Soviet Union.

### **Japan's emergence and territorial threats: 1848-1890**

The diplomatic history of Japan and its role in International Relations has till now had a somewhat uneven handling. The narrative and history has been primarily from the Anglo American perspective. Hence, Matthew Perry's courtesy call to Japan in 1853 is well remembered and seen as the starting point of Japan's contact with international politics and the end of Japanese isolationism. What is often forgotten is that it was Russian forays and excursions into Japanese territories and settlements that shook Japan from its strategic complacency, with Perry's visit acting more as a catalyst. The history hence ignores and under-estimates Japan's fear and concerns regarding Russia (Lensen 1959). It was a similar concern for instance that drove Japan towards co-operating with Britain to counter Russian power in the region in the late 1850s and '60s.

Japanese leaders had decided that Russia represented a different and much more severe kind of threat than did other powers such as Britain, Dutch or the Americans. Britain may have waged war against China on behalf of its opium trade but it assured and convinced Japan that it did not have plans to invade or colonise Japan. This represented the first encounter Japan had with this choice – to concentrate on offshore threats such as Britain and the U.S or onshore threats such as Russia and China.

Russian forays into Japan's territory or periphery followed soon after its explorers reached the eastern shore of Siberia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Calman 1992; Gordon 2003: 46-50). As Andrew Gordon writes,

“From there, they charted the coastal waters while trappers and traders worked the northern islands of Sakhalin and the Kuril chain, and then Hokkaido. In 1792 in Hokkaido, and again in 1804 in Nagasaki, Russian traders asked the bakufu to grant trade privileges, but they accepted a polite Tokugawa refusal. These overtures marked the start of several decades of sporadic but increasing and occasionally violent incursions. In 1806–07, Russian naval officers led destructive attacks on Japanese settlements in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and Etorofu islands” (Gordon 2003: 48).

The Russian response to the anticipated arrival of American forces in Japan had been to decide upon the occupation of Sakhalin islands to the north of Japan. Japanese politicians and officials debated the various options available to them given the simultaneous threats from Britain, the U.S and Russia. Some in the government even favoured forging closer ties with Russia in order to offset the British and American threat. If Japan had made that choice its history since then would have developed along very different lines. Japan could have either allied with Russia and balanced against Britain and then the U.S or it could have sought closer ties with the latter and balanced Russia instead. As it turns out, towards the late 1850s Japan had made a crucial strategic choice – that of balancing against Russia and seeking better ties with the maritime powers. The question arises as to why Japan had made that choice. Britain was clearly the most powerful nation in the system and in the future, the U.S would be very active in the Asia-Pacific region. According to Michael Auslin,

“It became clear to the new head of the shogunate, Great Councilor Li Naosuke, that Japan's relations with Russia would remain primarily territorial, unlike the almost solely commercial relations Edo maintained with the Americans, British, Dutch, and French. This placed Russia in a special category of threat. Nor was this conclusion mistaken, for in 1858 Nicholas Muravev began his activities in the Amur region. Known as Muravev-Amurskii for his exploits, the Russian cast a coveted eye on Sakhalin and sailed to Japan with seven warships in August 1859 in an attempt to overturn Putiatin's 1855 treaty. His goal was to

compel Japanese recognition of Russia's ownership of the entire island. His highhanded approach and blunt threats marked a qualitative change in the Russo-Japanese relationship. From this point on, anti-foreign Japanese viewed the Russians with suspicion, resulting in the murder of two of Muravev's sailors in the treaty port of Yokohama in late-August 1859" (Auslin 2005: 12-13).

Japanese leaders also gradually began to understand the very limited nature of insular and Britain's very limited interest in Japanese territory. The pact Britain signed with Japan in 1854, for instance, allowed British warships to use Japanese ports only in emergencies and were strictly barred from advancing into the interior. Japanese leaders also took note of Britain's relations with Siam, in which Britain forsook territorial expansion – limiting itself to port access. The Japanese interpretation remained valid at the time. British strategy towards Japan was one in which it sought to deny other great powers from using the islands to attack its interests in China. Crucially, unlike in China, Britain did not covet Japanese territory or markets (Jones 1931: 12-16; Auslin 2006: 30-34). The British threat, it was inferred, could be managed by way of appeasing the same in matters of trade (tariff rates for instance).

In other words, Japan decided to balance Russia because the threat from the same seemed qualitatively different from the threat emanating from the maritime powers. The maritime powers could blockade Japan, even bombard its cities but it did not seek to occupy Japanese territory. Clearly, like any other power Japan valued its territorial integrity more than other foreign policy goals. The territories that Japan saw as rightly belonging to it but increasingly challenged and annexed by Russian power were the Kurile Islands, Sakhalin and Tsushima.

Beginning in the late 1850s, Japan began to seek quasi-alliances with maritime powers (primarily Britain) to balance against the Russian threat. Hence, the core structure of Japanese foreign policy was formed during 1857-1862 period and one could argue that it did not alter till the end of the Second World War. Auslin writes,

“After six months of fruitless negotiation, and several armed clashes between Russian sailors and Japanese, Edo decided on a potentially risky gambit, asking the British to

intervene on Japan's behalf...The head of the shogunal councilors, Ando Nobumasa, who took over when Ii Naosuke was assassinated in 1860, believed that British strategy precluded the unnecessary taking of territory. Thus, by using barbarian to control barbarian, Japan could make up for its defensive weakness. The gamble paid off. The head of the British China Squadron, Vice-Admiral Sir James Hope, personally sailed to Tsushima in late-August 1861. Within one month, Captain Nicholas Birilev, head of the Russian squadron, left the island" (Auslin 2005: 14).

Japan's reasoning in this case controverts the Levy-Thompson thesis to some degree. British land power at the time was in no means insignificant as was demonstrated during the Opium wars against China and the Crimean war against Russia. Mizuno Tadakuni, the then chief shogunate official noted at the time "this [the opium war] is happening in a foreign country, but I believe it also contains a warning for us" (Bolitho 1989: 157). If Britain in alliance with France could defeat the land armies of Russia and China in their own territories, then it could also defeat the Japanese army in a military contest. The differing threat perception towards the Russian and British empires cannot hence be explained by differences in forms of capabilities. Japan felt no threat from British power because Japan reasoned that occupying Japanese territory would not serve British interests the same way the occupation of Japanese territories by Russia would serve Russian interest – and probably even more crucially, Britain made no claims on Japanese territory. In subsequent decades, Russian attempts at absorbing Manchuria and extending its influence in Korea would cause grave Japanese insecurity; and by the same token Japanese expansion in Korea, Manchuria and North China (driven by fears of Russian expansion partly) would threaten Russia. The two powers would militarily clash in 1905, 1919-21, 1939 and 1945 and each time territorial issues would take centre stage. Comparatively, Britain (as well as the U.S.) would militarily clash with Japan only during 1941-1945 and without invading each other's core territory.

The 1855 treaty of Shimoda between Russia and Japan divided the Kuril Islands but failed to reach an agreement regarding the border at Sakhalin (Yuichi 2000)— a disagreement that affects relations negatively till this date. Russian migration of settlers into Japanese occupied parts of Sakhalin was among the strongest challenge to Japan's Westphalian

sovereignty for the new Meiji government as it sought to emerge as a modern nation-state (Takashi 1962).

The insecurity vis-à-vis Russia would continue more or less consistently over the coming decades. In contrast, the American takeover of Hawaii, which was strategically considered to be the Gibraltar of the Pacific by officers such as Kato, hardly evoked much popular and Governmental outrage in Japan even though Japan enjoyed naval parity, if not superiority, vis-à-vis the U.S at the time (Gow 2004). But more fundamental to this study – despite British preponderance in the international system at the time and despite the display of its offensive capabilities (including the bombing of Japanese coastal cities in 1863), Japan decided to cooperate with Britain with an eye on balancing Russia. To be sure, the Anglo-Japanese understanding concerning Russia remained somewhat dormant from 1875 till about 1891 owing to the Sakhalin-Kuril exchange treaty between Japan and Russia in 1875. Greater collaboration would be rekindled in 1891 as both island states grew to be concerned by Russian plans to construct the Trans-Siberian Railway. A Japanese cabinet note of 1890 “emphasized that Japan needed to defend not only the ‘Lines of its National Borders’ but also the ‘Lines of its Economic Influence’ including the Korean peninsula”. (Yuichi 2000: 146, 138-146; Gordon 2003: 116-118).

#### *A treaty with China? From Partnership to security competition*

In 1871 Japan signed its first modern treaty with another Asian power and in accordance with the then prevailing norms of western international treaty-making and laws. The treaty of Amity between China and Japan was conceptualised as an equal treaty and written with significant Chinese input. News surrounding the departure of the Japanese delegation to China greatly concerned Western powers as they suspected that the two Asian powers were in the process of forging an alliance. There was some substance to the suspicion since the treaty contained a clause that required the two nations to seek each other’s assistance in case either was threatened or coerced by a third power. Crucially, the second article of the treaty read,

“Friendly intercourse thus existing between the two Governments, it is the duty of each to sympathize with the other, and in the event of any other nation acting unjustly or treating either of the two Powers with contempt, on notice being given [by the one to the other], mutual assistance shall be rendered or mediation offered for the arrangement of the difficulty, in fulfilment of the duty imposed by relations of friendship”. (Treat 1932:19)

Japan subsequently attempted to assure the U.S that it had nothing to worry regarding the treaty and that aid would be limited to mutual assistance and exclude military assistance (Zachmann 2009: 14-16; Treat 1932: 18-21; McWilliams 1975). This was the closest the two powers have gotten to establishing an alliance. American reactions at the time offer a clue as to the value the U.S. put in preventing such an alliance from occurring. The U.S. feared and saw unfavourably any combination of an alliance between the three dominant powers in Asia – Japan, China and Russia (Mayo 1967:403-405). However, The U.S did not have much to fear as relations between China and Japan very quickly deteriorated over the Taiwan incident of 1874. Throughout the 1870s Japan would compete with China over Korea, Taiwan, Pescadores and Ryuku Islands. The latter was invaded and annexed in 1879, marking the first Chinese territory to be annexed by Japan. Incidentally, Chinese leaders were unable to respond strongly to Japanese encroachments because of conflictual and tense relations with Russia.

Japanese military leaders also followed growing trends in Chinese domestic politics and perceived the self-strengthening movement or Tongzhi restoration as potentially threatening to Japan from a military point of view (Jansen 1967: 167-168). China had embarked on modernisation as a response to recent setbacks such as the opium wars and the unequal treaties. Domestic unification, growth or modernisation regularly caused concern in neighbouring Japan whereas American re-construction and immense growth during the same period did not cause comparable concern.

The 1880s saw competition over Korea intensifying. Zachmann points out the strategic factor regarding Korea, “Of all its tributary states, China regarded Korea as the most important. Moreover, the ‘hermit kingdom’ had an important function as a strategic shield. Thus Japanese military strategists often referred to Korea as Japan’s ‘line of interest’, or as



a 'knife dangling over the head of Japan' if under the influence of a third nation. The third nation was, of course, at first China, but also Russia, moving southwards at the time. Conversely, Korea fulfilled the same function for China...and this function became even more important after Japan's seizure of the Ryukyus" (Zachmann 2009: 16). After several rounds of unsatisfactory negotiations, assisted by the U.S., Japan decided to take matters in its own hands and incorporate the Ryuku islands (till then under Chinese sovereignty) that lay between itself and Formosa (Taiwan) (Treat 1932).

Thus, Japan and China (and later Russia) were locked into an almost inescapable zero-sum security dilemma over territory that was strategically crucial to each side. Both sides attempted various methods to try to contain the dilemma, including spheres of influence agreements and neutralisation through internationalisation.

### *Internationalisation of Korea*

Incidentally, internationalisation formed a popular idea among several thinkers and officials in China, Korea and even in Japan. The thrust of the idea was to put a dampener on regional dangerous powerplays by turning Korea into a buffer state that was impenetrable to dominance by any one of the regional powers. The Japanese view seemed to emphasise a line that can be described as Korea choosing to have "friendship with China, ties with Japan, alliance with America and caution towards Russia". Such ideas about internationalization were advocated most prominently by the Chinese reformer Huang Zunxian (1848 1905). His famous treatise *Chaoxian celüe* (A Strategy for Korea) of 1880 warned about the threat Russian power and expansionism posed to the region. It was on the basis of such ideas that the Chinese general and diplomat Li Hongzhang advised the Korean government to seek better ties with the United States (Sung-Hwan 2007; Zachmann 2009; Zunxian 1982: 105). Such an analysis and insight almost foreshadows the role the U.S. would play both in the region and in Korea during the cold war and since.

But these peaceful alternatives were fragile solutions since rising Japanese power enabled it to achieve dominance over Korea rather than mere compromise. Dominance over Korea

however played its role in pushing Japan towards further territorial aggrandisement since the protection of Korea, in turn, demanded its own buffer state. Thus Japan had fallen for the Continental territory trap which eventually turned it into a continental state vulnerable to balancing behaviour.

### *Maritime Anxieties*

The 1870s was still marked by civil unrest and rebellions of all kinds. Hence the focus of the Meiji regime was still on the army, it was summoned twice to quell two major rebellions. The focus turned towards the navy in the mid-1880s for two reasons primarily – the global naval arms race and the Chinese navy. The U.S. itself had carried out naval expansion after it realized its effectiveness during the Andean war between Chile and its neighbours (Goldberg 1984). Britain also was spurred into action by reaffirming its policy of building capabilities superior to a combined naval fleet of its enemies, as a reaction to French, Italian and German naval build-ups. But what stirred up the regime more was the Chinese army in the Asian mainland and the Chinese naval build-up. As Schencking writes,

“Ironically for the navy and those officials who had attempted to develop a strategic rationale based on a Pacific orientation, continental concerns of the late 1880s and early 1890s gave further credence to calls for naval expansion. While foreign imperial advances into the South Seas concerned many Japanese who, with the backing from the navy, had supported the notion of southern advance, Chinese naval and military development and increasing political turmoil and military insecurity on the Korean Peninsula influenced those individuals who mattered.” (Schencking, 2005: 46).

Thereby, it was in the 1880s and 90s that for all intents and purposes Japan had decided that it will not be able to tolerate a rising China – that is capable of subduing Japan in the future in any form of contest.

### *Datsuaron: Japan grapples with Chinese weakness*

There prevailed a lively debate amongst the Japanese intelligentsia in the 1880s on the subject of *datsuaron* (exit-Asia thesis). Asia's weakness was a strategic problem for Japan because it invited European imperialism close to its homeland. Thus Japan could either patiently mentor Asia so that it could resist European Imperialism on its own or it could exit Asia, which does not preclude the possibility of itself annexing parts of Asia either for its own strengthening or that of Asia or for mere fear of being left out of the Imperial scramble for territory and resources. (Hotta 2009: 56-61; Klein 2002; Satoshi 2010). Criticising then prevalent notions of Pan-Asianism and solidarity with Asian peoples, a key proponent of *datsuaron* wrote,

“We have to maintain the independence of our country Japan and ensure the welfare of our people. Even if the Chinese Empire is taken over by France and the Indian natives enslaved by the British, as long as Japan does not share the same fate, there is nothing to be sorry about. [ ... ] I hope that in opposition to the Raising Asia Society, somebody will establish a Leaving Asia Society [*Datsua-kai*]” (Hinohara 1884).

It is worth mentioning that Fukuzawa Yukichi (one of the primary propagators of the idea) foresaw how involvement in Asia meant greater exposure and vulnerability to Western encroachments (Kwok 2009). The thesis attempted to deal with the central problematic feature of a North-East Asia balance of power. Japan could have reconciled itself to the role of an offshore balancer if China was not as weak *vis-à-vis* Russia. It was, after all, Chinese weakness that allowed Russia the opportunity and capability to extend its strategic frontier till Korea and establish ports on warm waters close to Japan. A stronger China would have weakened the threat from Russia and also enable Japan to play off Russian and Chinese power against each other in the same manner Britain managed to play off France and Spain against each other in the 16th and 17th centuries. But there is a further problem with the geopolitics of North-East Asia.

Russia, for several reasons, was not a consistent power in the region. Russia's Far Eastern areas had always paled in terms of strategic importance compared to its Western regions. Russia's drive east in the mid-19th century was itself the result of Russian need to strengthen its navy to serve strategic interests pertaining to its western regions (Papasstratigakis 2011).

Thus, Russian foray into the Far East would be inconsistent, and even absent at times. This created a significant problem for Japan since absent Russia, the rise of Chinese power could itself be a significant threat to Japan. These strategic dilemma's emanating from the peculiarities of North East Asian geopolitics made it very difficult for Japan to act as an offshore balancer in the region.

### **Japan and the Korean Wars: 1885-1905**

*Japan and China compete for Korea* - In 1885 Japanese and Chinese troops clashed in Korea while supporting competing Korean factions. The clash was caused by the actions of an overzealous pro-Japan Aristocrat (Kim Ok-Gyun), who attempted to overthrow the ruling regime and expunge Korea of Chinese influence by decapitating six ministers during a postal banquet in 1884. He failed to calculate that Chinese troops vastly outnumbered Japanese troops in Korea in 1884 (Paine 2019: 18-22; Duus 1998: 52-56; Kim 2012: 293-297). Chinese troops routed both the pro-Japanese faction within Korea as well as Japanese troops. The conflict resulted in the Convention of Tianjin which established Korea as a co-protectorate of both Japan and China (Hsu 2000: 331). The late 1880s saw Japan being less pro-active regarding its position in Korea and also at times co-operated closely with China to check Russian influence in the peninsula. Even back then, however, Korea was extremely important to Japan from a strategic perspective since the domination of Korea by any country was seen as being intimately linked to the possible future subjugation of Japan itself (Nish 2002: 36).

The 1890s witnessed an arms race, mostly naval, between Japan and China and by 1895 China had managed to acquire a much larger navy than Japan with the gap between the two ever-increasing. The Japanese press and naval staff was alarmed by the 1891 port call to Japan made by a Chinese fleet consisting of newly acquired German-built battleships - Ting-Yuan and Chen-Yuan (Evans and Peattie 2012: 18-22). Japan also reconsidered some of its low regard for the Chinese navy after the relatively inconclusive outcome of the Sino-French war of 1885 (Swope 2016: 72-80). Japan possessed 32 warships under a unified joint command and 23 torpedo boats; the Chinese fleet, divided into four commands, possessed

65 large warships in total and 43 torpedo boats. However, despite a superior Chinese navy and predictions of a Chinese victory by foreign observers, Japan comfortably won the war in 1895 – a war that resulted from competing military and political presence in Korea.

The war was itself caused by the instability in the peninsula in the form of the Tonghak rebellion when protestors demanded an end of exorbitant taxes and misrule. The Korean King requested China that its troops be sent to quell the protests. This had provided Japan with the *casus belli* for sending its own troops to Korea – and this time better prepared than in 1885. Japan launched the war with a surprise naval attack on three Chinese warships near Feng island, that lay between Korea and China.

*The U.S. on the sidelines of the Korean conflict* - Prior to the war, the U.S. had put diplomatic pressure on Japan to withdraw troops from Korea simultaneous to Chinese withdrawal. This intervention was in part caused by calls by the Korean monarch to foreign powers to help stave off both Japanese and Chinese presence in his country. The U.S. invoked a certain provision, to be found both in its Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Korea of 1882 as well as the Treaty of Friendship with Japan of 1854, that requires, “If other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either government, the other will exert their good offices on being informed of the case to bring about an amicable arrangement”. The then U.S. Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham let the Japanese government know that the U.S. President “will be painfully disappointed should Japan visit upon her feeble and defenseless neighbor the horrors of an unjust war” (Kajima 1975: 92-97; Dorwart 1975). This is another instance in which we see an intersection between Chinese and Korean notions regarding the internationalisation of Korea (undergirded by the U.S.) as well as an early precursor of U.S. post-war grand strategy which sought to (and still seeks to) protect smaller powers from their larger regional powers. It is probably no accident that the largest deployment of UN forces had occurred in the Korean peninsula in 1950 – under U.S. leadership and in order keep South Korea independent of China and Russia and indirectly from Japan as well.

After the war however, and in light of the triple intervention (see below) of European powers, the U.S. offered friendly mediation and expressed to the Japanese government that “The sympathy of the United States Government and people is directed to Japan” (Kajima

1975: 143). Japan itself was deeply concerned about Russia taking advantage of Korean instability prior to the war and China's inability to assert itself in the peninsula. As S.C.M Paine describes, “The underlying causes of the First Sino- Japanese War concerned the changing Asian balance of power, the instability this created, and the underlying fear that Russia, not Japan, might become the beneficiary” (Paine 2019: 16).

*Russia, the continental league and neutralising Japan's victory-* The fruits of victory were however dampened by the tripartite intervention of Russia, Germany and France. This unique combination of continental European powers had been flirting with an anti-British understanding since 1894-95 and the first test of their diplomatic unity seemed to be regarding Japan in 1895. Japan was ‘advised’ to return the Shantung peninsula to China by a threat of a joint Russian-French-German naval demonstration in Korean waters. Japan subsequently complied with the advice, causing great domestic humiliation and furore. Incidentally, the orchestrator of the entire war and the diplomacy surrounding it (Mutsu Munemitsu) justified to himself Japan’s retrocession of the Shantung peninsula as an instance whereby a power that threatened the balance of power was pulled back. Thereby he also drew a comparison with Russia's retrocession of her territorial conquests of Turkish territory in the 1877 war (Nish 2002: 41). This indeed marks a rare instance whereby a coalition of continental states managed to undertake joint politico-military action to balance an insular power. In subsequent years, Russia gradually took over the responsibility of pushing back against Japanese power in Korea and thereby leading to the same security dilemma that marked Sino-Japanese competition in the region (Kim 2006). As Ian Nish explains,

“Japan was indeed scared both because of the size of the Russian military and its fierce reputation. She knew that it was difficult and risky for her to send a large army directly to Manchuria and devised the strategy of transporting the early expeditionary force by the shorter passage via Korea and through Korea to Manchuria. But her main worry in the long term was the completion of the Trans- Siberian and Chinese Eastern railways, which gave Russia a strategic advantage in the Age of Rail. They increased the threat that Russia posed to Japanese continental interests and seemed to set a deadline on any counteraction she contemplated” (Nish 2004: 64).

Russia and Japan attempted to negotiate and settle their disagreements peaceably from 1900- 1905. The outline of a future settlement was one in which Japan would recognise Russian freedom of action in Manchuria in exchange for Russia recognising Korea as a Japanese sphere of influence. Russia was also supposed to withdraw its troops from Manchuria in three tranches in an agreement signed with China in 1902, but this failed to occur. Moreover, in its negotiations with Japan, Russian emissaries kept adding new conditions to its support for a Japanese sphere in Korea, such as Russian approval for the stationing of troops. Overall, the Russian government was split on the issue – with the Foreign and Finance Ministers willing to reach an agreement with Japan early and the Tsar himself along with the Commander of the Pacific Fleet unwilling to let go of Korea as such a concession would only strengthen Japan in the Far East. The outcome of this split was a default policy of stalling negotiations – which infuriated Japan further because Russia was also simultaneously strengthening its presence in Manchuria as well as attempting a takeover of Korean territory south of Yalu under the guise of lumbering activity (Kim 2006; Nish 1985). Japan decided it could not wait until Russia completed the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway, an outcome that will allow Russia to rapidly transport troops from European Russia to the Far East. Meanwhile, Japan was also worried in the run-up to the war that there was a secret alliance between Russia and China and that the latter might feel obliged to join on the side of Russia (Nish 2004: 1-3). It is noteworthy that Japan had similar fears about a Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1930's – whereas in reality there was never a real Sino-Russian/Soviet alliance. Incidentally, the U.S. decision to enter the Korean was also part driven by perceptions of a Sino-Soviet alliance.

#### *Japan and continental-maritime threats from the Asian mainland*

The distinction that had been made regarding the maritime threat and the continental threat will be held on to by Japan with its primary foreign policy focus being aimed at the North East Asian continent. Reflective of this distinction is the note titled 'Reasons of the Proposal for Naval Expansion' prepared by Saitô Makoto (Chief of General Affairs; equivalent to

Vice-Minister of the navy) in 1902 emphasizing the reasons for focusing on the Russian navy as the primary threat. Takahashi Fumio lays out the reasoning,

“Saitō Makoto...pointed out that Japan, who ranked fourth (120,000 tons) with the U. S. ranking sixth (110,000 tons), would be placed seventh (140,000 tons), far below the U. S. (300,000 tons) in 1908. Saitō only stated that naval preparation should be built up to compete with the possible size of fleet Russia could dispatch to the Far East and that Japan should make efforts to improve its economic strength without waging wars for several years. Although he was concerned that the Imperial Japanese Navy would be surpassed by the U. S. if it remained idle, it might be nothing compared with threats from Russia” (Fumio 2004: 92).

Somewhat analogously in the 1930's, the need to balance the Soviet Union required Japan to improve relations with the U.S. As Akira Iriye writes,

“If anything, the need for some degree of understanding with the Western powers, in particular the United States, seemed to increase as the war in China bogged down. For one thing the military were becoming anxious about their state of preparedness toward the Soviet Union, and the battle of Nonlonhan (May 1939) seemed to prove the superiority of Soviet air power and mechanized ground forces. To cope with the crisis, Japan would have to terminate hostilities in China through political means, but that might require the good offices of Britain and the United States” (Iriye 1982: 23).

Furthermore, further indicative of the thesis that Japan was more alarmed by certain types of states/power, even Chinese naval build-up of the 1890s was a greater cause of alarm than the American counterpart in the same decade. By 1890, 50 battleships were already under construction in the U.S. with a dozen more in the pipeline taking the total number of ships to 144 from 81. China's navy in contrast had just begun to modernise and was a shadow of the American navy and yet it provoked Japanese strategic concerns and had re-enforced the need for a preventive war against China. For even a moderately capable Chinese navy was capable of dissociating Korea from Japan, a strategic interest much more significant than the U.S' takeover of Samoa or Hawaii or even the Philippines. As Schencking writes,



“On 5 July 1891, a visit by China’s Northern Fleet to Yokohama sent shock waves through Japan. This “courtesy call,” as Chinese naval officials described it, of China’s most visually impressive and militarily powerful new warships, including the massive German-built battleship *Chen Yüan* (7,400 tons displacement) resulted in a stream of stories in Tokyo newspapers detailing the Chinese naval development that had occurred since the end of the Sino-French war in 1885”. (Schencking, 2005: 56).

In other words, Japan had been socialised into realising that great powers threaten their immediate neighbours the most since their own security very often depends on neutralising threats closest to their territory. For instance, the only time a foreign power had attempted to invade and conquer Japan was when the neighbouring Mongol empire organized and launched an invading fleet in the 13th century – *after achieving continental hegemony*. And contrary to the expectations that naval capabilities do not threaten, Japan was alarmed by China’s naval capabilities.

Throughout subsequent years Japan would be humiliated and coerced on several issues by the U.S and yet Japan would not lose its focus when it came to questions of balancing – it would seek to balance continental powers. Japan’s forays into Korea, for instance, since the 1880s were motivated by Japan’s objective of maintaining a land buffer in Korea from which any other power, either China or Russia, could not plan an invasion of Japan. This pursuit clashed to some degree with American interests in the region, but the U.S eventually acquiesced and recognised Korea as rightly belonging to the Japanese sphere of influence – these interests being only of marginal interest to the U.S. The Japanese historian Asada Sadao in this context had argued that the U.S navy was a budgetary enemy first and a military enemy second (Sadao 1993). For instance, in the context of 1934-35 when the Japanese Army and Navy sought to assist and support each other’s case for higher budgets, Colonel Suzuki Teiichi happened to ask Admiral Suetsugu Nobumasa if the navy was seriously considering war with the U.S. The Admiral plainly replied, “Certainly, even that is acceptable if it will get us a budget” (Barnhart 1987: 39). In the period 1939-1941, naval officers presented their war plans and exercises to their Army counterparts as “war preparations without war determination”, often leading to suspicions that the navy ‘was

merely feigning intention to go to war to sustain its claim to a preponderance of national arms resources” (Frank 2020: 181-182).

### **Japan and the U.S.: From Partners to Rivals (1905-1945)**

*Japan as a potential hegemon in North East Asia* - Although the U.S. had supported Japan during the course of the Russo-Japanese war by various means (Fumio 2004; Parsons 1969), Japan’s spectacular victory over the Russian fleet had led to some modification in the U.S. position towards the two belligerents. The U.S. was primarily motivated in its support to Japan by its concerns regarding Russian domination over Manchuria and Northern China (Zabrieskie 1946). Subsequent to the clash in the Tsushima Straits, the U.S.’ concern over Japan threatening the same order entered into its calculations. In a somewhat repeat of the ‘advice’ of the European powers after the Sino-Japanese war of 1895, the U.S. advised the Japanese government to forsake its claim of indemnity from Russia in return for possession over the Sakhalin islands. Such an intervention by the U.S. revealed to Japan the implications of President Roosevelt’s policy of ‘balanced antagonism’ towards Japan and Russia, by which he sought to maintain American interests in the region through reliance on Russo-Japanese antagonisms (Fumio 2004; Beale 1956: 170, 270-274; Zabrieskie 1946: 101-130). The President was convinced, even by 1901, that Japan was “most menaced” by Russian expansionism and would find itself having “to contest with Russia the control of the destiny of Asia” (Neu 1966: 436). However, President Roosevelt’s negotiation in the lead up to the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth caused significant consternation in the Japanese government.

Tensions resurfaced in June 1907 when Japanese leaders were troubled by the meaning of President Roosevelt’s decision to send the U.S. navy of a globe-girdling exercise (Griswold 1938: 125; Iriye 1967: 108-110). The President was indeed concerned that recent agitations in California pertaining to popular demands for segregation in public schools as well as barring further immigration of Japanese workers would lead to a conflagration between Japan and the U.S. – with undesirable implications for the security of the Philippines. Although the U.S. had undertaken measures such as strengthening its navy as well as

fortifying the Philippines it cannot be counted as balancing since the rationale was purely defensive and not (not yet at least) aimed at reducing Japanese power. This is evidenced both by the Presidents interest in and attempts at improving relations with Japan at the time (Neu 1966) as well as his rebuffs of German offers of an alliance aimed at Japan in the far east (Hall 1929).

However, despite the above rebuff, Roosevelt was more interested in using good relations with Britain as leverage upon Japan. This confidence arose from his belief that “faced with the choice of friendship with Japan or the United States, it could only choose the latter” (Neu 1963: 443) – confidence that seems validated by post-war diplomacy.

Despite American bolstering of its defences, Presidential diplomacy of ‘balanced antagonism’ and the global cruise of the U.S. navy in 1907, Japan continued to prioritise the threat from Russia since the latter “has assigned more military force to the far east since the end of the Russo-Japanese war...and has been strenuously rebuilding her navy” (Fumio 2004: 102). The “Aims of Imperial National Defense”, an authoritative document approved by the emperor, considered Russia to be the primary hypothetical enemy, followed by the U.S. (Takeji 1973: 2-16).

### *Post War Japan grapples with its insular identity*

Tellingly, despite the focus on Russia (and the U.S. secondarily), Japanese thinking was already moving along the lines of appropriating more and more sovereignty and territory from China. It was concluded, it seems, that China was the key to balancing against Russia or any other hypothetical great power in the future. Influential figures such as Yamagata Aritomo and his student and future War Minister Colonel Tanaka Giichi were already arguing for continental expansion into China. Tanaka Giichi argued in 1906 that Japan “should break free from its insular position, become a continental state, and confidently extend its national power” (Giichi 1906). The financial costs of the war and its resultant debt crisis had the effect of making Japanese leaders even more sensitive to the thin economic base upon which Japanese great power status lay (Barnhart 1987: 23) – providing

an added incentive towards future aggrandisements in China. The above-mentioned policy line on continental expansion came to be associated with the Army, and as such, it came to be opposed by naval figures such as Captain Sato Tetsutaro who pointed out that an island country does not run the risk of being invaded by foreign powers and as such “an ocean state should not go too far into the continent” since a powerful navy is capable of defending trade routes (Tetsutaro 1912).

### *A challenging peace with the U.S.*

In terms of perception, Japan saw Russian growing power in the far east to be threatening to Japan – both immediately and in the long run. U.S. growing power, both in terms of a growing navy as well as territorial acquisitions in Hawaii and the Philippines, was not considered to be as threatening or even as easy to respond to. It also helped that U.S. and Britain saw Russian growing influence prior to 1905 in much the same way (LaFeber 1998: 381-82).

The U.S had already recognised Japanese spheres of influence in Korea, Manchuria and Mongolia as formalized in the Root Takahira agreement of 1908. American relative caution vis-à-vis Japan in the period 1905-1910 is reflected well in the following letter by Roosevelt,

“Our vital interest is to keep Japanese out of our country, and at the same time to preserve the good will of Japan. The vital interest of the Japanese... is in Manchuria and Korea. It is therefore peculiarly our interest not to take any steps as regards Manchuria which will give the Japanese cause to feel, with or without reason, that we are hostile to them, or a menace-in however slight a degree-to their interests” (Roosevelt to Taft, 1910).

Such caution extended into the next administration as well after an attempt by the new Taft administration to employ dollar diplomacy to put South Manchuria Railway under joint management to “smoke Japan out” of the region as well as issue a new multi-power loan to China that excludes Russia and Japan. A Russo-Japanese understanding regarding spheres of influence in the region however foiled such an initiative and it was eventually abandoned in 1913. American interests in Manchuria greatly suffered meanwhile as a result of the

Russo-Japanese Entente of 1907. During the time American admirals were deeply concerned about a Japanese surprise attack on the fleet (Zabriskie 1946: 134-165; Tang 1959: 1-44; Vevier 1955; Fumio 2004). President Roosevelt, however, also foresaw, that despite the then ongoing détente between Japan and Russia, the latter would seek to reverse the outcomes of the 1905 war and thereby force Japan into a new round of hostilities (Griswold 1938: 131-132).

The enhanced Japanese position following the Russo-Japanese war would however start to drastically suffer after the end of the Great War. The U.S. would force Britain to abandon its alliance with Japan and the two insular powers would then co-operate to impose naval arms limitation on Japan. In the period surveyed above, the U.S. enjoyed only a marginal naval superiority over Japan, had limited economic interests in Manchuria, needed the cooperation of the Japanese government in improving the domestic situation in California, could not rely upon Britain for a common front against Japan and had limited influence given the Russo-Japanese spheres of influence understanding of 1907. Consequent to the Great war, all of these limitations would begin to fade.

#### *Japan in the midst of American expansionism and Anglo-American rapprochement*

Greater interest and attention in power projection eastwards motivated the U.S to annex Hawaii in 1897. For years American and Japanese interests competed and clashed in the Pacific island. In 1893 for instance Japan had dispatched a warship to the island to prevent the overthrow of the ruling monarchy by white settlers who agitated for annexation by the U.S. (Morgan 2011: 57). Hence, we see in Hawaii during the 1880s and 1890s the same kind of sphere of influence competition that animated German-American politics over Samoa. Some members of the Japanese strategic elite in Japan were able to assess the significance of the *fait accompli* that the annexation was. But the Japanese government did not attempt to seriously contest the annexation treaty. As the naval officer and future bitter critic of the interwar naval limitation Kanji Kato wrote at the time,

“As I recollect there were hardly any people in our country at that time who valued Hawaii, the ‘Gibraltar’ of the Pacific.... At that time our naval strength comprised newly-constructed high-speed cruisers such as the Naniwa and the Takachiho, whereas America was weak in naval strength and possessed only steel-bound, wooden-hulled ships. If our people had had the concern they have today, if we had considered carefully the international outcome and if we had used the British appropriately then I positively believe it would not have been difficult to at least make Hawaii remain neutral” (Gow, 2004: 41).

The U.S. decision to annex Hawaii was justified, during its last stages, as a defensive measure to prevent Britain or Japan from possessing the same islands. Commenting on the implausibility of such feared scenario Kees Van Dijk writes, “Such anxieties, if they were sincere, had little to do with reality. London had no intention of annexing Hawaii. Japan lacked the military capacity to contemplate such a step and was much more concerned with its conflict with China over Korea and the threat Russia might pose to its own security” (Dijk 2015: 375). This marks another instance whereby the U.S. seems to be responding to non-existent threats as well as an instance whereby action taken by other great powers that are meant to deter the U.S. (The deployment of Naniwa to Hawaii in 1893 in the middle of an abortive coup) only end up enabling American actions. The U.S. also assertively brushed aside European and Japanese opposition to its moves in Hawaii and refused to compromise even minimally, as it did vis-à-vis Samoa. The American envoy to Hawaii in the early 1890s saw ‘Destiny and the vast future interests’ of the U.S. making annexation of the said territory inexorable in the near future (Dijk 2015: 367).

In 1905 Britain sought to revise the Anglo-Japanese naval treaty (partly under pressure from the U.S) in order to recognise the U.S as an unspoken ally of the treaty and hence the rule of naval dominance not applying in case of the American navy. The revision also allowed the British to withdraw 5 battleships from the region and re-locate them to home waters.

There was recognition by both the Japanese and the Americans that despite differences and some amount of competition it was unlikely that the two countries were going to engage in direct conflict, owing primarily to the good relationship both countries had with the British. At some level also there was a common understanding between the three insular powers.

This went against German assessment of the time which was thrilled at the idea of growing American-Japanese animosity since they expected that it would lead to a greater rift between the U.S and Britain, which Germany could use to draw the United States closer to itself (Mehnert 1996). Although rivals, all three powers recognized that they were each more threatened by the great continental territorial powers of Eurasia. The tendency of the three powers to hold numerous naval conferences during the whole stretch from about 1900 to 1931 demonstrated that these three powers were much more successful in controlling arms races among themselves and agreeing on certain spheres of influences than were the continental powers. Japan's primary threat seemed to come from the Asian mainland – either from distant European Powers with a military presence in the region (France and Germany) or Russia and later a resurgent China. Although war with the U.S was never inconceivable, Japanese viewed the matter defensively, rather than from a typical balance of power perspective.

Finally, as previously mentioned, the most significant inheritance of the Russo-Japanese war was the territory trap that the defence of Korea in turn entailed. Such a task would propel Japan towards periodic expansion in the coming next four decades push Japan over towards becoming a continental state from an insular one.

But it is worth noting that such a step was contested even prior to the decision in the 1890s and 1900s. There always remained a strong school of thought within the navy and big business which advocated a navy-first, army-second as well as a maritime trading empire over a continental territorial empire grand strategy for Japan. Incidentally, the founding father of the Japanese Navy – Yamamoto Gonbe attempted (unsuccessfully) to pass a bill in the diet that would have established a 'navy first, army second' doctrine for Japan. Incidentally, in line with this thinking, Yamamoto is reported to have stated before the onset of the Russo-Japanese War, "We can afford losing Korea. It suffices that the Empire should defend its own proper territory". This vision of a grand strategy was in turn based on a very minimalist conception of security interests. Defining Japan as an "Island empire", Yamamoto capture the sum of this thinking, "Before an enemy fleet comes close to out sea

coast, we surely intercept it, thereby secure safety of sea communication” (Tadokoro 2007: 299-305; Rikugunsho 1966: 1058).

The most articulate and compelling ideologue of this grand strategic cause, however, was Yamamoto’s protégé Sato Tetsutaro. A promising veteran of the 1895 war, Sato was posted to the prestigious first division of the Military Affairs Bureau of the Navy Minister. Consequently, he was sent in 1899 to Britain and the U.S. for almost two and a half years to study the naval and strategic history of the two great powers. His study over time turned into a series of lectures, which in turn led to a book titled “A History of Imperial Defense” - published three years after the Russo-Japanese war. In his works, he drew parallels between Britain, Japan and the U.S. in that only these three great powers are in a position to defend themselves primarily with navies. As such he chastised Japanese policy for forsaking such a favourable geographic condition. Anticipating the territory trap that Korea represented he pointed out that Britain became a great worldwide empire only after it lost its territory on the continent (Tetsutaro 1979: 86, 199, 203; Asada 1993).

#### *World War opportunities and Japan in the 1920s*

Japan benefited significantly from the Great War. American and European involvement in the affairs of Europe allowed Japan greater freedom in coercing China. By declaring war on Germany, Japan was also able to invade and occupy German colonial possessions in the Pacific such as the Shandong Peninsula, The Mariana, Caroline and Marshall Islands. This transfer of control was opposed by President Wilson during the Versailles conference – without much effect - as it threatened the U.S. Navy’s lines of communication and made the defence of Philippines even harder in terms of power projection (Morton 1959: 224; Kawamura 1997; Dickinson 2013).

Hence even during the World War, the U.S expressed its acceptance of Japanese spheres of influence but at the same time also warned against further encroachment of Chinese territory (Griswold 1938: 326-328). Taking advantage of the European war, the Japanese government issued the well-known twenty-one demands to the government of China. Its



provisions included joint control of mines in central China, an extension of commercial rights in Manchuria, non-transfer of control over coastal areas to third powers (except Japan) and most controversially of all, the appointment of Japanese advisors in key government positions. The last group of demands, known as group five, would have effectively turned China into a Japanese protectorate and much like Korea between 1905 and 1910 (Jensen 1975: 215-224; Dull 1950).

It took strong objections by the Wilson administration and threats of non-recognition by Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan for Japan to step back from the group five set of demands (Hata 1989). However, there were limits to American containment of Japan and within two years in November 1917, Robert Lansing (then secretary of state) and the Japanese Ambassador Ishii Kikujiro concluded a joint statement which admitted the territorial integrity of China (in principle) but also recognized Japanese special interests in China, that arose out of its geographical proximity. Meanwhile, the secret clause to the treaty attempted to put a freeze on territorial aggrandisement in China while allied powers were engaged in the war against Germany in Europe. American post-war policy would resemble the secret clause more than the main draft of the joint statement as it would attempt to roll back Japanese wartime advances. Along similar lines, the Lansing-Ishii agreement would be replaced by the Nine-Power Treaty established within the post-war Washington Conference system (Vinson 1958; Ishii 1936).

Similarly, Japan took advantage of the Russian revolution as well and thrust 70,000 of its troops in Siberia as part of an international intervention. Of all countries, Japan sent the highest number of troops and the Japanese government seemed the most unwilling to cease operations in that region (Morley 1957; Beasley 1987). Relevant to this study, whereas the American civil war failed to invite other great powers into landing on American territory, the Russian civil war had brought about incursions and invasions by a wide range of states – both great powers and smaller powers.

*Liberalism, Internationalism and Anglo-American hegemony*

“Recently Americans are vehemently attacking the Japanese people as militarists and aggressors. They used precisely this ruse to destroy Germany's national spirit and bring about the collapse of the monarchical polity of Germany and Austria. Now, Americans are using this same tactic against us in order to destroy our Empire's strength and essential character”.

- Lt. Gen. Ugaki Kazushige, 1919 (Ugaki 1968)

Freed from European troubles, the United States would begin to construct a rollback of Japanese power and influence in Asia. This consisted of pressuring Japan to evacuate Siberia and Northern Sakhalin, to return Shandong to China, to limit Japan's expansion in China through international consortiums. By 1923, the U.S. would reverse the Lansing-Ishii agreement that had acknowledged certain Japanese 'special interests' in China. The Washington Conference, in turn, would seek to free power politics in the Pacific Ocean through limits on naval capabilities and island fortifications. The naval ratio in the region would be fixed at 5:5:3 for the U.S., Britain and Japan respectively. These measures collectively represented a new shift in U.S. policy, from one of semi-appeasement to one of semi-containment or semi-balancing. However, despite the realisation that the U.S. was increasingly calling the shots in the post-war world, Japanese leaders decided to appease the U.S. and cooperate with it instead of balancing against it.

Meanwhile, the attempts of the Japanese navy to increase the number of battleships and battle-cruisers suffered from both economic weaknesses and the adverse geopolitical situation. The economy started declining from around 1919. The navy suffered from a scarcity of steel for its ships owing to America's own ship-building plans (Japanese steel relied heavily on American exports). Moreover, the switch from coal to gas in the World's ships also caused consternation in Japan since it lacked oil (Nish 2002: 32-26).

Japanese position in Asia was more or less secure in the pre-war years because of its alliance with Britain. Britain needed Japan to secure its Eastern possessions and also be able to relocate its ships from Asian to Atlantic waters. However, British dependence on America and the elimination of the Russian threat made Britain terminate its alliance with Japan.

Thus, the naval disarmament policies of the 1920s took place in the context of this sudden weakening of the Japanese position. Japan chose internationalism because it could not afford the animosity of the Anglo-American bloc and it was economically too weak to militarily challenge the U.S. (Asada 2006). Japan conceded again and again to American pressure and scrapped ships and set limits on itself for the sake of the status quo. To make things worse, the Earthquake in 1923 also caused significant damage to naval bases and ships in Japan. (Nish 2002: 49)

Furthermore, Japan remained dependent on the U.S financially. For instance, The Japanese admiral Kato emphasized the same,

“One has to admit frankly that, if one has no money, one cannot make war Even if we assume that our munitions are equal to those of America, we can no longer make war on the small amount of money that we could afford at the time of the war with Russia. If we consider where funds might be obtained, there is no other country apart from the U.S. which could supply a loan to Japan. If America is to be the enemy, the means of raising funds is restricted and Japan would have to find the military finance for herself We can only conclude that a war with America is impossible and must be avoided” (Taiheiyo senso eno michi 1962: 3-7)

The 1920s can also be seen as the triumph of the insular powers. The Great colonial continental empires had dissolved – Austro-Hungary, Ottoman Empire, and the Russian Empire. France and Germany were weakened. It is only the three insular powers who succeeded in maintaining their Empires. However, the insular power which came out relatively weakest from the war was Britain. It found itself in debt to America and a very war-weary public morale. Moreover, British weakness also spilt over into Japanese weakness vis-à-vis U.S. Since there were no continental allies to be found against the U.S. Japan found itself in a position with fewer and fewer cards.

Thus, by the time of the Washington Naval Conference of 1921, Japanese leaders and parties were almost unanimous in their conviction that Japan needed to curb military spending and maintain cordial relations with the U.S (Humphreys 1995). A Foreign Ministry

memorandum, reacting to the 'shock' of the American invitation to the Washington Conference of 1921 concluded, "we must opt for a liberal policy and turn the conference to our advantages to improve our Empire's international position" (Asada 2006: 215; Drea 2009: 188-200). In cabinet discussions on options available to Japan to counter the U.S. diplomatic offensive ahead of the conference, some key figures recommended resorting to the 'extreme step' and raising the issue of American annexations of Hawaii, Philippines, Panama as well as American policy towards Mexico (Asada 2006: 218-219).

### *Trouble in China*

The Prime Ministership of Shidehera was relatively liberal and sensitive to western demands (Ikei 1980; Asada 2006; Iriye 1965). Japan theoretically acknowledged the sovereignty of China and refrained from military escalation in times of crises with local Chinese populations. However, the financial crisis of 1927 and Shidehera's non-intervention policy toward turmoil in China in 1927 swept away his government and brought into power General Tanaka Giichi. Subsequently, Japan pursued a policy of separating Manchuria and Inner Mongolia from China proper and also resorted more often to military confrontation with Chinese forces. When the Chiang Kai Shek led Northern Expedition moved north to unify China under nationalist rule, the Japanese Government decided to intervene, thus leading to clashes between the opposing forces in the Shandong Peninsula (Morton 1980). Tanaka eventually resigned in 1929 after the Kwantung army had assassinated the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zhuolin, a fait accompli that Tanaka was not willing to accept despite several members of his cabinet and the Army accepting the same (Morton 1980: 129-136).

Incidentally, both Japan and the Soviet Union were uncomfortable with an ever stronger and unified China as such an entity would have the will and capability to demand an end to foreign colonisation of Chinese territories such as in Mongolia, Shandong Peninsula and Manchuria. Consequently, the culmination of the Northern Expedition saw clashes with both Japanese forces (in Shandong) and the Soviet Union (in Manchuria). The Northern expedition was a military campaign led by Chiang Kai Shek which sought to put an end to

the rule of various warlords and thereby re-unify China under Nationalist rule. The basic fundamental goals of the new Nanjing regime clashed with Japanese objectives in China and thus Japan increasingly began to view the new regime with alarm. This dynamic motivated Japan to consider preventive war against China in order to weaken China or forestall its unification. The Kwantung army officers that planned and executed the Mukden incident of 1931 argued that concessions to Chinese nationalism were a slippery slope towards the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Manchuria, Korea and Taiwan (Jordan 1976; Kwong 2017; Maiolo 2010).

Tanaka was succeeded by Former Finance Minister Osachi Hamaguchi. The focus of his administration was on reducing the fiscal debt and adopting conciliatory policies towards Western Powers, such as signing the 1930 London Naval Treaty, which regulated submarine warfare and limited naval shipbuilding. Osachi's liberal approach - which emphasised fiscal discipline, austerity and arms limitations turned out to be unpopular in general and was strongly opposed by the right-wing and militarists. He eventually suffered an assassination attempt in November 1930 and succumbed to failing health and injuries in August 1931 (Metzler 2006).

Japan in the 1920s operated from economic and diplomatic weakness and thus practised moderate economic reform and cuts to military spending at home and put a restraint on its imperial plans in the Asian mainland. The Washington naval treaty of 1922, the Four Powers Treaty and the Nine Power Treaty embedded Japanese foreign policy in a western led Asian order which Japan did not want to challenge (Crowley 1966).

### *Interwar contesting schools of Thought*

There were intense debates within the Japanese Government regarding the choices Japan could make. There were essentially two choices – Northern advance versus the Southern advance or Hokusin-ron versus Nanshin-ron. The former implied competition with the Soviet Union and China and Continental expansion along with a focus on land power. It also contained within it the idea that Mongolia and Siberia could be detached from the

Soviet Union and turned into protective defensive buffers for Japan (Humphreys 1995: 25). Nanshin-ron on the other hand implied greater friction with American interests (Along with British, French and Dutch) in the Pacific and a maritime expansion over South East Asia based on sea power. Signs of precedents of the debate goes back to even as far back as 1906 when Colonel Tanaka Giichi argued that Japan should “should break free from its insular position, become a continental state, and confidently extend its national power” (Hata 1989: 275). It was not uncommon for the Army at this point to point to the dangers of war with the U.S. to argue for the Northern advance instead of a southern one. For instance, Army spokesperson Major General Kusao Masatsune warned in 1910, “If Japan moved northward and northwestward beyond our present location, it would be aggression, but a war between Japan and the United States would be even more foolish” (Hata 1988: 275).

*Japan-U.S. relations as a function of the global balance of power*

It is worth noting that even during the Washington Conference in 1921 the three powers (Britain, U.S and Japan) agreed that they may have to co-operate in the future to contain the expansion of Soviet communism and Chinese nationalism (Hata 1989: 284). This points to the idea that the insular powers perceived a common interest vis-à-vis the continental states in North-East Asia in 1921, not very unlike their common interests in 1905. What changed the equation entirely by the late 1930s was the rise of German power and Japan’s continental expansion. The first would make the containment of Soviet power an undesirable policy and the second would place Japan itself in the role of a continental hegemon that needed to be balanced against. Japanese leaders argued against a southern advance on the basis that such a strategy necessitates conflict with the U.S but the same analysts could not foresee the possibility of conflict with the U.S as a result of Japan choosing the Northern advance as well. Japanese strategists may have failed to understand how Japanese encroachments in China, and away from U.S. territories, would earn American ire - Yet another instance of states underestimating American notions of the Balance of power and its hold over more concrete policymaking.

Other than the two schools of advance (Southern and Northern) there was a third school which was much less powerful and influential but still worth mentioning. The authors that constituted this school used to write for 'The Oriental Economist' and included Katayama Sen and Ishibashi Tanzan. They argued that Japan needed to see its continental and colonial possessions not as defensive perimeters that enhance Japan's security but strategic weaknesses or 'dangerous dry bush' that negatively affect Japan's security by tying Japan in dangerous conflicts. Japan ought to focus on industry, peaceful growth and trade. Its possessions in Korea, Manchuria and Taiwan needed to be abandoned and a more symmetrical economic relationship with China needed to be established (Hata 2008: 273; Matsuo 1974). It is discernible that if Japan had chosen this third path, American and Japanese interests would have coincided with greater possibilities of the two allying - as they did after 1945 and under similar circumstances and policy choices. Such a strategy also takes into account the dangers of 'territorial trap' that Korea eventually turned out to be. Furthermore, the 'island welfare' school of thought seemed somewhat validated when Japan found itself embroiled in a costly war with China that ended in a quagmire and also happened to result in military conflict with the Soviet Union in 1939. The error of fighting a continental war with China became increasingly evident to even a few militarists in the government. Ishiwara Kanji, for instance, by 1937 had correctly predicted that China "will be what Spain was for Napoleon" describing it as an "endless bog" (Barnhart 1981: 112). It is worth noting that the grand strategy that Japan had adopted post World War 2 very strikingly resembled the 'Island welfare' vision first conceptualised by the authors writing for 'The Oriental Economist'.

In sum, Japan consistently prioritised the Northern advance over the southern advance throughout the 1905-1945 period. This was a function of seeking to balance continental powers – and seeking to avoid conflict with the U.S. and Britain. Even when Japan decided to adopt the southern advance in 1940-41 it was as a result of American intervention in Japan's plans for a Northern advance (see below).

*Mutations in Taisho Democracy*

The relative constraints and self-restraint that Japan had imposed upon itself would be shaken in the late 1920s by three powerful shifts in international politics. The rise of Chinese nationalism and the Northern expedition launched by Chiang Kai-shek would threaten Japanese interests in Manchuria and Shandong, thereby leading to calls for greater intervention in China. Secondly, the global great depression threatened Japan's access to key resources by reducing its exports to the U.S. by half and to the world by one third. And finally, the impressive marshalling of economic resources by the Soviet Union through the five year plans also brought about anxieties similar to that of 1901-1905. As Copeland describes,

“Actions from 1932 to 1936 to establish compliant local governments in the northern Chinese provinces bordering Manchuria were a response to both the growing strength of Chiang's Nanjing government and increasing Soviet domination of the nominally independent state of Mongolia...It is nevertheless important to remember, especially given what happened in 1941, that Tokyo's primary obsession, as it had been since the 1890s, was with the rise of Russia” (Copeland 2015: 148).

### **Japan balances the Soviet Union: 1933-1945**

Japan's foray into the annexation of Manchuria can be said to have begun with Sino-Soviet war of 1929, which brought the Soviet military into Manchuria and aroused fears of a Soviet takeover of Manchuria (Patrikeef 2009: 81-96; Walker 2017). Subsequent to the Mukden incident and the Japanese takeover of Manchuria in 1931, the Soviets adopted an approach combining appeasement (commercial treaties, neutrality, plea for NAP) along with a more long-term gradual military build-up in the far east. As such, the 1937 Marco Polo Bridge incident came at an unfortunate time for Japan since it deflected from its arms race against the Soviet Union. The 1931 takeover of Manchuria by the Kwantung Army, without the approval of the government in Tokyo, complicated two objectives of the central government. Tokyo was anxious that such a step would provoke the Soviet Union into action. Secondly, the diversion of resources into the takeover and pacification of Manchuria came at the cost of the Military mobilization plan, the completion of which now had to be postponed till 1933.



Concerned primarily with the possibility of an international alliance aimed at the Soviet Union, Stalin decided on appeasing various actors by offering Non-Aggression Pacts (H.L. 1932; Kotkin 2017: 478-480). Offers were made to various Eastern European countries such as Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union was especially concerned about its vulnerable Far East and the possibilities of conflict with Japan while it remained weak. As such, from 1929 to 1933 it raised with various Japanese interlocutors the issue of signing a NAP over more than a dozen times. Similar concerns would also drive the Soviet state to profess its neutrality in the 1931 conflict and Japan's intervention into Manchuria (Moore 1941; Bridges 1980).<sup>4</sup> It would also readily recognise the new Manchuoko state and close down Chinese consulates in the Far East subsequently. To prevent any possibilities of conflict, the Soviet Union would also retrench its operations and interests from Manchuria, by offering to sell its stakes in the Manchurian or the Chinese Eastern Railway, for example, in 1933. Such profession of peaceful intent only went so far and until Japan started to discern and take into account the Soviet military build-up in the Far East and Siberia since 1932, following the first report of a border clash in the region (Moore 1941). The Soviet Union became deeply concerned by statements and remarks made by various Japanese officials which indicated the widespread consideration of the option of a preventive war against it.

For instance, the former military attaché to Moscow, Colonel Kasahara Yukio called for an early strike against the Soviet Union to prevent it from undermining Japan's interests in the Far East. He would subsequently write in the *Asahi Shimbun* on March 29 1932, "The Soviet Union is strengthening its military power very rapidly and in the future it is bound to embark on aggressive policies in the Far East.... Japan must prepare in order to win a future war with the Soviet Union Japan should aim for a quick victory at the end of which it should have advanced at least up to Lake Baikal" (Kovalio 1984: 327-328).

### *Japan Plans for War*

A meeting of key Army officers in June 1933 established the proposition that the Soviet Union was the key strategic threat to Japan, but participants disagreed among themselves

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<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, neutrality did not stop USSR from acquiescing into allowing Japan to transport its troops and war materials through the use of the Soviet-controlled CER, while simultaneously denying Chinese troops the same privilege out of fear of being seen as non-neutral (Goldman 2013: 36).

on whether to take a long term or short term approach. Out of concerns over Soviet preparation for war, the then Army Minister Araki Sadao approved negotiation of the Tangku Truce – which required the GMD to vacate Northern Hubei province and Japan to confine itself behind the great wall. Domestically, he also initiated changes in the long term mobilisation plan by replacing it with an emergency mobilisation plan that would prepare Japan for war with the Soviet Union by 1936 (Barnhart 1987: 28-35). The Imperial navy meanwhile moved further away from lobbying for the U.S. to be recognised as the primary threat. This is illustrated by the naval document titled “General Principles of National Policy,” which acknowledged (perhaps reluctantly) that all efforts ought to be made “to ensure Japan’s position on the continent” in order to “facilitate the reinforcement of defense against Russia and the economic development for both Japan and Manchuria”. The document did plead, however, for some preparedness in case the U.S. and Britain object to a possible southern expansion into south-east Asia (Lebra 1975: 56-61; Pelz 1974: 168-172). Meanwhile, the Army version of its own document explicitly called for improving relations with the U.S. as a prerequisite for embarking on a war against the Soviet Union (Lebra 1975: 61-62). The strategic chronological outline of both documents consisted of victory against Soviet Far Eastern forces, stable relations with China and southern move towards South East Asia and in that order. The U.S. could turn into a threat to Japan in the final stage and if it opposes any such move with some determination.

Meanwhile and much more ominously for China, the General Staff and the Kwantung Army concluded by 1934-35 that in any war with the Soviet Union it was key to secure north China as a secure southern flank. The Military Affairs bureau meanwhile emphasised the resources that could be possessed from some indirect form of control over the region – primarily coal and iron ore. Such conceptions would be soon spread to the navy as well as the Foreign Ministry – paving the way for the acceptability of conflict with China in 1937 despite the ongoing arms race with the Soviet Union. Yet again, the need to match Soviet power would result in Japan aggrandising itself at the cost of China (Barnhart 1987: 39; Crowley 1966: 210-222).

The two sides (Japan and the Soviet Union) also carried on negotiations to try to settle the Manchuria-Siberia and the Manchuria-Mongolia border amongst increasing reports of

border clashes. The most intense of such border conflicts occurred in the Amur region on June 30, 1937, when Japanese soldiers fired upon Soviet gunboats, leading to significant loss of life. The Soviets considered their position in the far east so weak, partly due to purges of high-level generals and officers and partly due to its preoccupation with the German threat in Europe, that it chose to continue negotiations despite the offence and even offered to withdraw forces from contested regions (Goldman 2013: 49-61). Even the signing of the anti-Comintern pact in Nov. 1936, aimed at the Soviet Union, by Japan and Germany, did not change the policy of Soviet appeasement of Japan – except for some effect on a fisheries agreement.

Soviet diplomacy however did not truly reflect the growing imbalance of military power in its favour in the Far East, a fact that was closely monitored by Japanese forces and with great consternation. Whereas Soviet military manpower in the far east was close to 100,000 in 1932 it jumped to 230,000 in 1934; leaving behind Japan which was at 144,000 in 1934 and 94,000 in 1932. The soviet figure stood almost double to that of Japan in 1937 – 370,000 for 200,000. The next year it would more than double and by 1939 it stood at 570,000 facing 270,000. When they went to war in the Nomonhan incident of 1939, Japan could spare only about one-third of its forces in the northern battle, while the rest of its troops were engaged in China.

The military imbalance in terms of aircraft and tanks was even starker. The Soviet Union deployed 500 Aircraft and 650 tanks whereas Japan deployed 130 aircraft and 100 tanks. These figures, however, have to be seen in the light of other factors such as geography (which favoured Japan) and engagements vis-à-vis other powers – the Soviet Union facing Germany and Japan fighting against Chinese forces (Goldman 2013). The Trans-Siberian railway, although double-tracked by 1937, was still very vulnerable to Japanese sabotage or takeover as it ran very close to the Manchurian border.

The Soviet air build-up seemed particularly ominous to Japan's leaders (Barnhart 1988: 43-45). It saw several airstrips being built in Eastern Primorie and middle range and long-range bombers such as the three-engine TB-3 and the TB-5 deployed in the region facing Japan (Kovalio 1984: 331-335). Anticipating more intense border troubles, the Soviet Union put pressure on the Mongolian People's Republic to sign a mutual assistance agreement with

the Soviet Union in 1936 and agree to invite Soviet troops, motorised units and fighter squadrons to be immediately despatched (Batbayar 1999: 10-14). Responding to Soviet measures, Japan announced the goal of resettling one million Japanese farming families in Manchuria in order to ‘nipponize’ Manchuria (Goldman 2013: 37-39). It is in this context that despite actions by the Chinese government, Japanese military leaders were somewhat averse to escalating the war in China in 1937-38 since it had occurred at a time when the focus was increasingly on the northern threat. As Copeland writes, “In 1936, civilian and military leaders, with the emperor’s support, came together to prepare for a major preventive war against the Soviet Union within five years” (Copeland 2015: 148).

*Marco Polo Bridge Incident and the Soviet-Japanese Far Eastern balance*

In 1937, war ensued between Japan and China after the Marco Polo bridge incident. The incident started as any other skirmish or exchange of gunfire between Chinese and Japanese troops – but what was different this time was the resolve of Chiang to escalate matters to the point of general war. This shift in policy was in turn brought about by a new understanding achieved with the CCP in 1936 – prodded by a strong faction called the National Salvation Authority within the GMD as well as Soviet pressure on Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (Sun 1993: 138-152).

When the war between Chinese forces led by Chiang Kai Shek and the Kwantung Army erupted it came as a great sigh of relief to the Soviet Union. The French Socialist Premier Leon Blum recounted a frank discussion with Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinoff in which the later,

“said that he and the Soviet Union were perfectly delighted that Japan had attacked China. He believed that Japan would be so weakened . . . that the Soviet Union was now completely assured of peace in the Far East for many years to come. Litvinov had added that he hoped that war between China and Japan would continue just as long as possible and would result in an attempt by the Japanese to swallow just as much of China as possible” (Bullitt to Hull 1937).

The Soviet Union, after all, played an important role in bringing nationalist and communist forces together on a common platform against Japan and would consequently furnish the

Chinese resistance with aircraft, credit and weapons. Just a few months after the beginning of the war in July 1937, the Soviet Union concluded a non-aggression pact with China. This new Soviet confidence vis-à-vis Japan was a product of the success of the two five year plans (the latter paying greater attention to the Far East and Mongolia), its elevated position in global politics as well as the Sino-Japanese war. This new assertiveness made the Soviet Union more willing to confront Japan, as it did in Changkufeng in 1938 and then in Nomonhan in 1939 - the latter being a decisive battle in which Japanese forces were overwhelmed and with up to 50,000 casualties (Clubb 1971: 315-320). Incidentally, Germany signed the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union even as the war was underway in the Mongolian-Manchurian border. Needless to say, Japanese leaders were infuriated by Germany's conduct. Japan would subsequently begin its own negotiations for a peace agreement with the Soviet Union – so as to focus on winning the war in China. Approaching a stalemate in the war with Chinese forces, Japan diverted divisions from Manchuoko (facing the Soviet Union) until the balance further tilted against their favour – 7 Japanese divisions facing 20 Soviet divisions (Goldman 2013: 90).

Japanese expanding war aims during the first stage of the Second Sino-Japanese war was driven more by Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro's intransigence, than by the Imperial Army - which was much more aware of the limits of Japanese power projection into China's interior regions (Hotta 2013: 30-36; Weinberg 1980: 176). A military skirmish with Soviet forces in June 1937 further persuaded the Japanese military of the need to avoid a conflagration with China (Bix 2000: 318-320).

Unable to conclude the war, nor willing to easily concede defeat, Japan became increasingly desperate and began to pin hopes on Chinese bankruptcy, followed by a surrender. However, Britain, U.S. and Soviet Union (all for balance of power reasons) began to assist the GMD government by providing loans (Rothwell 2001:141-143; Drea 2009: 212) as well as diplomatic and military support (Rothwell 2011). Such a conflict of interests drove Japan and Britain till the brink of war in 1939 during the Tientsin crisis (Sato 1980; Shai 1974; Watt 1989: 348-357), contributed to its brief war with the Soviet Union in 1939 and the Pacific war with the U.S. in 1941.

Japan's Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro was, in turn, convinced that the new belligerence on part of Chinese authorities emanated from perceptions of Japanese weakness, as a result of Japan's conciliatory policies towards China since 1933. The U.S disapproved of Japan's actions and highlighted them as contradicting the Nine power treaty of 1922, which required all states to respect the open door policy, as well as the Kellogg Briand pact. The consequent years saw increasing American assistance to China, military co-ordination between Britain-U.S.-Australia, increasing embargo and other economic offensives against Japan. The war between Japan and China had reached a stalemate by 1939 with the nationalist government retreating west till Chongqing protected by mountains and distance. Japan deployed 600,000 troops in the war but they were still not enough to 'pacify' Chinese civilians and guerrilla fighters in the occupied regions, 300 million Chinese under Japanese control in total. In order to better administer and police the occupied regions, Japan created a puppet administration under Wang Jingwei in 1940 (Yick 2014).

It is during this time that Japan made efforts to induce Britain and the U.S to mediate between China and Japan to bring about a negotiated settlement (Iriye 1982: 23-26; Gordon 2003). Incidentally, even as the Japanese General Staff was considering the requirements for Japan in the summer of 1936 in case it entered into a protracted war with its most likely adversary – The Soviet Union – it had concluded that it could not prepare for a two-front war. A Protracted war with the Soviet Union would require the continuing access to U.S. markets for exports of finished goods, imports of steel and alloy as well as machine tools and other sophisticated equipment for warfighting (Barnhart 1988: 45-46). In other words, Continental engagements itself reinforced the appeasement (and non-balancing) of the U.S. The documentary evidence also strongly testifies to the fact that Japanese leaders and across different services were well aware that a war with the U.S. would spell disaster for Japan and ought to be strongly avoided (Peattie 1977: 208-210).

### *Japan, American diplomacy and Pearl Harbor*

Pearl Harbor was one of two great surprise attacks of the Second World War, with each precipitating a major war between rival powers. If Japan had chosen to attack the U.S. core Pacific fleet both as a way to begin a war as well as reduce American capabilities ahead of the war, does it not count as balancing behaviour? Moreover, such an attack was preceded

by a classical military alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan aimed at the U.S. It is after all weaker balancing powers that generally initiate conflicts with the more powerful hegemonic power.

In this section, I argue that the attack on Hawaii, rather than indicating a choice to balance the U.S., represents Japan's conviction that the U.S. had closed all doors to peace and negotiation and thereby already decided upon a Pacific war. Japan and the U.S. had very differing strategic incentives in terms of seeking conflict with each other in 1941. Japan was already engaged in a protracted and wasteful war with China since 1937 – a war that was proving increasingly difficult to win, had cost Japan 600,000 casualties (Drea 1998: 30) and which also put Japan in a defensive position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union – its adversary of necessity and choice. As such, Japan sought to negotiate with the U.S. in order to persuade the latter to lift its embargo in return for withdrawal from Indo-China, assurance on non-expansion in both North (against Russia) and south as well as partial withdrawal from China under some peace agreement brokered by the U.S. Japan finally attacked the U.S. once it was convinced that the U.S. was not sincere in its negotiations anymore and that war was inevitable (Trachtenberg: 2006; Schuessler 2010; Copeland 2015).

Hence, far from an attack to balance a rising power, the Pearl Harbor attack was more an act of desperation by a much weaker power. This desperation was exacerbated by the fact the embargo placed on Japan had brought about an ever decreasing stock of resources essential for warfighting.

The Roosevelt administration knew that a stifling oil embargo would force Japan down the path of war – primarily by means of grabbing oil in the Dutch East Indies, which would, in turn, cause the U.S. to declare war on Japan. (Rhodes 2001: 192; Anderson 1975: 202-205; Feis 1950: 41). In fact, precisely because the U.S. was focused on the threat from Germany throughout 1940 it had then decided to not impose an oil embargo on Japan so as to avoid the threat of a two-front war (Utley 1985: 83-101; Anderson 1975: 204). The U.S. still went ahead with the same embargo, consisting of a financial freeze of Japanese assets in the U.S. and a ban on oil exports to Japan, in August 1941 in response to Japan's invasion of southern Indochina in July 1941. It was estimated that the embargo left Japan with approximately eighteen months of reserves - leading to a desperate race against time to either negotiate a

reversal of the sanctions or procure oil through force in South East Asia (Naval General Staff to the Japanese Emperor 1941). Furthermore, time was also of the essence since, “the longer they took to initiate war with the United States, the dimmer its prospects for success” (Record 2009). If the embargo was meant to force Japan into the negotiating table, then it could be argued that the embargo was meant only to contain and partially reverse Japanese expansionism in Asia without resorting to war. But somewhat surprisingly, the U.S. decided to not use the embargo as leverage for such an objective. By increasingly expanding its demands as well as stonewalling negotiations the U.S. failed to use the leverage to achieve deterrence – possibly intentionally.

Prince Konoye of Japan seemed desperate for a meeting with the U.S. President in American territory to negotiate a withdrawal from Indo-China and China but the U.S. rebuffed such an offer despite knowledge from Magic decrypts that revealed that Japan had decided to “pin our last hopes on an interview between the Premier and the President”. (Sagan 1989: 341). Even the U.S. Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles as well as the U.S. Ambassador to Japan Joseph Grew thought that U.S. demands of complete withdrawal from China were too rigid and unlikely to be accepted by Japan – with the latter blaming the stalemate on the “uncompromising attitude of our government” (Trachtenberg 2006: 90, 105). Hence, it is not surprising that Tokyo believed by November 1941 that the U.S. was itself not negotiating in good faith since the U.S. issued Hull’ statement of principles “knowing full well that they were unacceptable” (Sagan 1989: 349) and that the U.S. was itself preparing for war (Nobutka 1967: 85-108; Pearl Harbor Attack Hearings 1946, part 12: 127).

The British ambassador in Tokyo, Sir Robert Leslie Craigie, summed up his view of the American response to consistent Japanese overtures in the following way, “By pursuing a policy of stalling, the United States is arguing about every word and every phrase on the grounds that it is an essential preliminary to any kind of agreement. It seems that the United States does not comprehend the fact that by the nature of the Japanese and also on account of the domestic conditions in Japan, no delays can be countenanced” (Tansill 1975: 643).

Furthermore, Treasury Secretary Henry L. Stimson noted on his diary (25th of November 1941) fears expressed by President Roosevelt regarding a possible imminent attack on U.S. assets. Stimson recalled the President framing the main question as, “how we should



manoeuvre them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves” (Henry Stimson Diary 1941). Paul Schroeder (1958) in his book *Axis Alliance* argued that after the embargo the original goals – containment of Japan and a wedge between Germany and Japan – were achievable but were not achieved because the U.S. shifted course and focused on a third goal – the liberation of China. He argues that the U.S. had already deterred Japan from any further expansion in South East Asia but this was deemed insufficient as it shifted towards liberating China. This objective he attributes to America’s commitment to morality and principles over interest (Schroeder 1958: 76-85). Given that the U.S. had previously been somewhat accepting of Japanese presence in China (Borg 1947; Iriye 1965; Paine 2019: 146-147) and given the administrations primary focus on the European theatre, the thesis that the U.S. sacrificed containment of Japan for the elusive and difficult objective of liberating China does not seem to add up.

Trachtenberg and Schuessler somewhat convincingly argue that President Roosevelt and his close advisers were convinced that the U.S. needed to take part in the war against Germany in Europe and for balance of power reasons. A crisis with Japan eventually allowed them to take the U.S. into the great power war. As the then Vice President Harry Hopkins recalled a ‘not too tense’ meeting between the President and his top advisors upon hearing news of the Pearl Harbor attack, “All of us believed that in the last analysis the enemy was Hitler and that he could not be defeated without force of arms; that sooner or later we were bound to be in the war and that Japan had given us an opportunity” (Sherwood 1950: 431). If Japan did provide the opportunity to go to war with Germany, then American diplomacy also had a role to play in creating that opportunity.

In the debate between the new revisionists such as Marc Trachtenberg and John M. Schuessler (Trachtenberg 2006; Schuessler 2010) and traditional historians (Feis 1950; Langer and Gleason 1952 and 1953; Rauch: 1950) and IR scholars (Sagan 1989; Taliaferro 2013; Kupchan 1994; Snyder 1993), the first lot clearly has the upper hand. Their interpretation of events leaves out the fewest puzzles and has overall compelling explanatory powers. Is it, however, possible that the new revisionists have also overlooked some missing factor other than U.S. willingness to enter into conflict with Japan as a backdoor to Europe?

In the next section, I argue for a synthesis of the new revisionism with Dale C. Copeland's recent interpretation of the road to Pearl Harbor. Copeland's account benefits from allowing the Soviet-Japanese rivalry to take centre stage in explaining both the Second Sino-Japanese war and the origins of the Pacific war. Such a positioning puts the triangular relationship between U.S.-Japan-Soviet Union as the main focus of the causal chain rather than the U.S.-Germany-Japan triangular relationship. Additionally, both the Trachtenberg thesis as well as the Copeland thesis rely on variables that by their very nature the U.S. government at the time could not publicly advocate or even acknowledge. In the former case, President Roosevelt could not tell U.S. citizens that his objective is to bring about a conflict in the Pacific so that Americans would sanction a costly military intervention in Europe. In the latter case, and less controversially, the administration could not publicly admit that it was avoiding a compromise deal with Japan (that could earn peace) in order to help prevent a Japanese attack on the Soviet Far East.

*The U.S. deters and prevents a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union*

In the previous sections, we have established that the U.S. sought to enter the European war to preserve the Eurasian balance of power and deny Germany hegemony over territories, peoples and resources of Eurasia. The following State Department account of Secretary of State Cordell Hull's conversation with Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Admiral Nomura (May 11 1941) lays out in very explicit terms the linkage the administration drew between the global balance of power, U.S. interests and U.S.-Japan relations,

“Since Hitler had avowed his movement to be one for world control, the United States did not....propose to commit suicide as so many countries in continental Europe had done, by trusting Hitler and waiting until it was too late to resist; we proposed to resist when and where such resistance would be most effective, whether within our own boundaries, on the high seas, or in aid of such countries as Great Britain...He (Hull) inquired of the Ambassador whether the military groups in control of the Japanese Government could possibly expect the United States ‘to sit absolutely quiet while two or three nations before our very eyes organized naval and military forces and went out and conquered the balance of the earth, including the seven seas and all trade routes and the other four continents’” (Peace and War 1983: 115).

We have also established that Hitler was avoiding giving the U.S. a reason to declare war on Germany. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22 it seemed as if Germany might pull off a repeat of Paris 1940 and absorb Soviet territories and eliminate Russia as a great power. State Department memorandums argued that the war had provided Japan with an extremely fortuitous opportunity to neutralise the historical northern threat. What was clearly against core U.S. interests was the submission of the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany. As such and to the same degree it was against U.S. interests that Japan use the opportunity and attack the Soviet Union in the Far East – an event that could be determining factor in the Russo-German war.

As such, the German invasion of the Soviet Union had a direct and immediate impact on the then-ongoing negotiations between Japan and the U.S. regarding Indo-China, the China war and Japanese troops in North China. Before the invasion, the U.S. and Japan almost agreed on a draft in late May 1941. It would have significantly altered the meaning of the tripartite alliance – enabling Tokyo to not assist Germany in the event of a U.S.-Germany war. By clarifying that Article 3 of the alliance agreement will not apply in case of ‘self-defense’; and having already conveyed its acceptance of the U.S. description of the German threat as one of self-defence; Japan had essentially agreed to U.S. demands and opted itself out of its pact with Germany (Copeland 2015: 197)

American position towards a peace agreement with Japan became intransigent (the original puzzle) only after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. For instance, within a few days of the invasion, two detailed reports written by State Department subordinates of Secretary of State Cordell Hull outlined the likelihood of a Japanese move to the North - given Japanese sensitivity to the perennial Russian threat. This was considered to be a grave problem with the report recommending that the U.S., “immobilize Japan as regards an attack upon Siberia and as regards an attack against Singapore or the Dutch East Indies,” with the primary means of achieving the same being a freeze on Japanese assets and restrictions on exports of various categories of petroleum products to Japan (Copeland 2015: 203). This serves as the predominant rationale for the economic sanctions the U.S. had imposed on Japan during July 1941. As such, the sanctions worked when Japan was forced to shelve all plans of an autumn attack on the Soviet Union since it concluded that

given the sanctions it could not mobilise enough oil resources for such an undertaking (Barnhart 1987: 239-241)

A series of top-secret reports solicited by President Roosevelt and provided by the Planning and Intelligence gathering division of the Army had detailed how Japan was preparing for a war against the Soviet Union and yet was holding back until it became clearer that Germany had the upper hand or achieved decisive battle victories against the Soviet Union. These reports identified both the war in China as well as German success as the fundamental determinants regarding any Japanese move against the Soviet Union. An August 16 report pointed to a tripling of Japanese troops in Manchuria but concluded that an attack was not likely because Germany's operations had "gone awry".

Most significantly, an October 2 report estimated that if the Sino-Japanese war ended Japan it would free up 21 divisions for operations against the Soviet Union. Invoking 'cold reason' the report suggested,

"Our objective is the destruction of Nazism, and all-out aid to those powers actively engaged in resisting its aggressive drive for world domination. Russia is, as a matter of expedience, an ally in this cause. We must, among other things, do what we can with what we have at our disposal to aid Russia in her struggle with Germany. Any action on our part, therefore, which would liberate Japanese (pro-Axis) forces for action against Russia's rear in Siberia would be foolhardy" (Pearl Harbor Attack 13-14: 1342-1359).

Consequently, on October 10th, 15th and 16th, Roosevelt repeatedly voiced his concerns over a Japanese move northward in various correspondences. On October 16th, Henry Stimson would note on his diary after a meeting Roosevelt and other top officials that the President was convinced of the need to draw Japan into the war, preferably through 'delicate fencing' so as to "to be sure that Japan was put into the wrong and made the first bad move" (Copeland 2015: 235).

Continuing with this interdependency between the European theatre and U.S.-Japan negotiations, Copeland posits that the turnabout on September 3 1941, - when President Roosevelt made any agreement reached between U.S. and Japan contingent on approval by China, the Netherlands and Britain – was caused by reports coming from the European

theatre of a renewed German all-out offensive towards Leningrad and Moscow. The administration was aware of the temptations recent German successes offered to Japan. The President also re-introduced the requirement to adhere to 'vague' principles such as respect for territorial integrity, non-interference and commercial equity. These changes in terms of negotiation were itself a result of and can be explained by both the renewed German offensive as well as Foreign Minister Toyoda's note to U.S. Ambassador Joseph Grew. A note which ominously omitted any reference to the 'North' or 'larger Pacific area' in terms of Japanese assurance of peace. (Copeland 2015: 215; 218-219, 221).

Furthermore, the documentary evidence presented in the thesis also turns the Neo-revisionist China-centered argument on its head. The U.S. did not agree to a peace with Japan because it was concerned over the sovereignty of China. The U.S. was willing at several stages to sacrifice Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity to achieve a peace agreement. Ironically, far from seeking to achieve the withdrawal of Japanese troops from China, various key U.S. officials considered it desirable that Japan keep its troops in China and get even further embroiled.

Stanley Hornbeck, the Chief of the Far East Division in the State Department, for instance, was most hawkish on Japan and yet even back in April 1941 he sought to persuade Cordell Hull that since the conflict "had become part of a world conflict" it was not in the interest of the U.S. and Britain that the Japanese-Chinese hostilities cease, as such an eventuality would only leave Japan's military machine intact and employable in other theatres (Tsunoda 1994:51-52; Marshall 1995: 110).

As such, with the German-Soviet war and the need to aid the Soviet Union at all costs, it became even more imperative that Japanese forces remained bogged down in China. In other words, China was not the reason why the U.S. found a peace agreement with Japan unacceptable. It was merely the ruse for breaking negotiations.

Japan had decided that it needed to prepare for a war against the Soviet Union from 1933 onwards - with the objective of diminishing growing Soviet military power in the region. This objective had to be sidelined due to the Marco Polo Bridge incident and Chiang Kai-Shek's escalation of the conflict into total war. Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June

1941 had offered Japan a great opportunity to establish its goals in the region vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. As such, during negotiations with Japan, the U.S. attempted to draw an assurance from Japan that it shall not move North – i.e. attack the Soviet Union once the sanctions are lifted and exports of war-related products are resumed from the U.S. Despite growing tensions with the U.S., Japan had increased its troops' presence from 200,000 to 600,000 from June to September 1941. Even as the U.S. signalled a lack of interest in resolving disagreements and even as Japanese leaders grew increasingly worried about their dwindling resources, discussions in Tokyo revolved around whether Japan could take advantage of “any changes in the Northern situation” as it continued to prepare for a total war against the Soviet Union (Copeland 2015: 222, 226, 229). The immediate fate of the Soviet Union was the key determinant factor in both Tokyo and Washington.

In other words, any compromise deal that would merely deter Japan from moving into Southeast Asia or even evacuate Japanese troops from Northern Indochina, as well as large parts of China, would also happen to contribute to a Japanese invasion of the Soviet Union, thereby leaving U.S. interests negatively affected – since the survival of the Soviet Union was key to the Eurasian balance of power (Copeland 2015: 202-210).

The thesis then turns towards the crucial question of what had led President Roosevelt and Cordell Hull to change their minds from being somewhat favourable towards a modus vivendi with Japan on the 25th of November – one that was strongly supported both by Japan as well as the Chiefs of the U.S. Army and Navy - towards the decision “to kick the whole thing over” on the 26th of November. China-centred arguments seek to explain this by way of referring to strong protests lodged by Chiang-Kai-Shek on the night of the 25th of November. But we have seen how this is not a plausible argument and besides, there is enough evidence that establishes that this was not a great concern to President Roosevelt.

What Copeland argues is that news from the European theatre soured the President's attitude towards an agreement with Japan. Even an agreement that included some form of Japanese assurance towards not attacking the Soviet Union. Copeland is very convincing in describing the mood of the President on the morning of the 26th of November. After having read reports the previous night which stated that the German army had won significant battles and moved within 31 miles of Moscow, the President spoke despairingly to his wife

Eleanor Roosevelt over the phone, “Everything is terrible. The Russian situation is awful. Moscow is falling” (Copeland 2015: 243). It was in this context, and right after the above-mentioned telephone call, that Secretary of State Cordell Hull would meet with the President and the two “made their fateful decision to toss out the compromise and slap the ten demands on Japan that made war inevitable” (Copeland 2015: 243).

The U.S. stalled and obstructed successful negotiation with Japan not because of China or only because it wanted a backdoor to war. There was a more positive objective. The dilemma was that any successful negotiation would leave Japan in a position to threaten the Soviet Far East and thereby help Germany achieve Eurasian hegemony – from Calais to Moscow. In the process, the administration sought to extract guarantees from Japan that it would not use the peace (and all its accrued benefits) to launch an attack on the Soviet Union.

#### *Copeland and Trachtenberg: Competing Explanations*

Although Copeland rejects the Backdoor thesis as a convincing explanation for the Pacific War, his thesis still does not refute all the evidence or logic Trachtenberg presents towards pointing out the strategic benefits that key U.S. leaders and officials perceived in having Japan attack either key U.S. interests in the Pacific or the U.S. itself. It is indeed hard to imagine that such a realisation had ended up playing no role in determining U.S. policy vis-à-vis Japan. What can be argued that it is an insufficient explanation since it does not take into account the Soviet factor. Thus, it is possible that U.S. policy was determined by both by the backdoor imperative as well as the Soviet Far Eastern security imperative. Both scholars are still somewhat unique in arguing that the U.S. did not see the prospect of war with Japan unfavourably in 1941.

There are two further problems with the Copeland thesis. One problem is that the U.S. indeed achieved the assurance that it sought – no attack on the Soviet Union. However, this assurance was received by late August 1941 when on 28th August Ambassador Nomura presented Roosevelt two documents that spoke of Japan seeking to take no military action “as long as the Soviet Union remains faithful to the Soviet-Japanese neutrality treaty and does not menace Japan or Manchuoko...In a word, the Japanese Government has no

intention of using, without provocation, military force against any neighboring nation” (Copeland 2015: 214). If the U.S. was sincere in its negotiations, as Copeland claims, why would it not respond symmetrically to such an assurance by Japan?

The continued U.S. intransigence may possibly be explained by U.S. concerns that Japan would be free to move North after a peace agreement – and regardless of verbal assurances towards the U.S. However, The U.S. would also have been free to re-impose restrictions on exports to Japan and any such agreement would have also included barring Japan from taking over Southeast resources. As such, it is not clear how Japan would be in a position to defy its own assurances to the U.S. and opt for war against the Soviet Union – especially considering that the U.S. would have also been far better prepared to meet the Japanese threat by February 1942 (when such an attack could be countenanced by Japan on the Soviet Union). In other words, deterring an attack on the Soviet Union may not be a sufficient condition for breaking negotiations.

However, if the U.S. had already known that any assurance by Japan was only likely to be tactical – to be withdrawn at will later – then it becomes that much harder to describe negotiations with Japan as sincere. What were these negotiations for if they had already made Japan yield on the most substantive issues and without any U.S. reciprocity? Trachtenberg’s more parsimonious thesis does not run into the same problem.

A further problem with the Copeland thesis is that on the one hand he ably demonstrates that the U.S. administration was keenly aware of the disadvantages of a Sino-Japanese peace to U.S. interests and yet he also argues that the U.S. was sincere in its negotiations with Japan when it had assured the latter of its intention to help Japan secure an acceptable peace vis-à-vis China and also help it secure resources. Incidentally, since the two arguments are contradictory it will be useful to enquire as to which of the two remains valid. It is far more likely that the U.S. was aware of the dangers of peace and hence was somewhat insincere in assuring Japan of the same. For instance, while describing Japanese thinking in late October and early November Copeland narrates the contents of Plan B (or the *modus vivendi*) for negotiations with the U.S. This second-best option (for Japan) entailed a return to the pre-July status quo with Japan leaving Indo-China and the U.S. resuming its oil exports to Japan. Speaking of this plan Copeland writes, “It was this proposal that would



tempt Roosevelt and Hull briefly to the bargaining table again in November” (Copeland 2015: 229). Given the obvious and known dire consequences of such a temporary deal, it is somewhat difficult to believe that such a proposal could in fact ‘tempt’ Roosevelt and Hull. The primary evidence provided by Copeland for this is Roosevelt’s meeting with Secretary of War Henry Stimson in which the latter notes the President as saying that he was “trying to think of something which would give us further time” (Copeland 2015: 231). This is in turn interpreted as leaning towards the *Modus Vivendi*. But the same statement or sentiment could also be interpreted to mean a new method of dangling a carrot for a certain time until it is withdrawn once again – as it was on the 26th of November.

And finally, Copeland’s central critique of the Trachtenberg thesis is that contrary to its expectation, the U.S. indeed “actively contemplated making a deal with Japan three times over six months” and “If one wants to provoke an adversary into attacking to get into a war elsewhere, one does not expend significant energy finding a way to satisfy its demands” (Copeland 2015: 232). This is a weak attack since Copeland’s own account repeatedly deals with the puzzle of the U.S. *not* expending any energy in satisfying Japan’s demands, while Japan, on the other hand, had revised all the significant disagreements to appease U.S. demands – including withdrawal from China, abandoning the Axis pact, non-stationing of troops in Northern China and even assuring to not attack the Soviet Union if the latter adheres to the non-aggression pact of April 1941. Copeland’s documentary evidence speaks for itself, but it does not suggest what the author in turn suggests.

Copeland argues that the U.S. was sincere in its negotiations and President Roosevelt had only two demands from Japan – “to delink itself from Germany, and remain peaceful everywhere in the Pacific and, most important, in the north vis-à-vis Russia” (Copeland 2015: 232). Whereas the first was achievable and achieved, the second seems unachievable and not worth much - given the authors own invocation of the commitment problem (Powell 2006), “Getting the Japanese to agree to not moving additional forces into Manchuria might help bind Tokyo to a regional peace. A severe form of the commitment problem nevertheless hung over any deal. In the end, Tokyo might decide to build up in Manchuria secretly or just attack Russia with what it had already deployed there” (Copeland 2015: 233). If such an assurance was not worth much in the first place – since it can always be

violated at will later - then why did the U.S. administration “expend significant energy” in trying to draw out such an assurance from Japan?

Despite these new puzzles generated by the thesis, Copeland’s argument still has enormous value owing to the central place it allots to the Soviet-German war in both Japanese and American diplomacy in the run-up to the Pacific war.

### *The Soviet factor in the Pacific War*

At this point, we also need to address as to what explains the overlooking of the Soviet factor in negotiations between Japan and the U.S. by historians and IR scholars. One factor that could explain this oversight could be the Roosevelt administration’s use of caution in not making its alliance commitment to the Soviet Union very explicit – either publicly or even in exchanges with Japanese interlocutors. Whereas the U.S. public could reluctantly consent to an alliance with a fellow liberal English speaking liberal democracy such as Britain, the same could not be expected vis-à-vis communist Russia.

Secondly, since Japan eventually fought the war against the U.S. and not the Soviet Union, it was easy to overlook and remain non-cognisant of the fact that Japan perceived the Soviet Union to be the primary threat; or the power that needed to be balanced. On the other hand, Japanese disagreement over the Open door, China and French Indochina are more well-known – since these are also agendas that are amenable to be spoken about publicly. American security commitment to aiding the Soviet Union by all means necessary (Herring 1973; Heinrichs 1988: 139-140) was, however, a more complicated and more controversial facet of American diplomacy both because of isolationist sentiment during the World War and because of anti-communism during the cold war. Perhaps it is only appropriate that this facet gets better highlighted in the Post-Cold war world.

Another advantage of the synthesis is that it changes the terminology of the title thesis – ‘backdoor to war’. Given the importance of preventing a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union and the same contributing to failed bilateral negotiations, U.S. policy towards Japan was as much a front door to war as it was a back one. The choice available to Roosevelt was not simply one between war (in both Europe and Pacific) and Peace (in either Pacific or both Europe and Pacific). Peace in the Pacific between the U.S. and Japan could have caused

the war in Europe to have taken a very different course – one that would have negatively affected U.S. core interests.

Regardless, despite their differences, both explanations agree on the larger subject of Japan's motivation and policy before December 7 1941. The disagreements are regarding U.S. policy, not Japan's. Both explanations agree that Japan was primarily focused on the Asian mainland and sought peace with the U.S. for its own sake as well as given its involvement in Asia already. Japan did not seek to balance the U.S., while the U.S. was directly intent on war with Japan (Trachtenberg 2006) or it considered the consequences of peace too dangerous for the European balance of power and hence was willing to risk war (Copeland 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Did Japan not balance against the U.S because it was threatened less by the maritimity of American power? Japan did feel less threatened overall by the U.S. than it did by a growing China or a resurgent Russia. But it is doubtful if the reason is because of maritimity as such. The U.S was as capable of landing troops in Japan after decisive battles. As prominent Japanese military theorist and an admiral in the Japanese Navy, Sato Tetsutaro noted, "Japan is a long and narrow archipelago with many cities abutting on coastal areas. Therefore, clearly it does not take an enemy many days to reach its targets after a landing without invading deep into the country" (Fumio: 2004:86). Furthermore, nor could Japan conceive of a military victory against the U.S. The Siberian intervention demonstrated, on the other hand, that given Russian internal weakness, Japan could attempt to separate Siberia from the rest of Russia to both create a buffer as well as balance Russian power (Stolberg 2005:48). When it came to the U.S. however such a prospect seemed impossible. As Admiral Yamamoto wrote in a letter to Ryoichi Sasakawa prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor,

“Should hostilities once break out between Japan and the United States, it is not enough that we take Guam and the Philippines, nor even Hawaii and San Francisco. To make victory certain, we would have to march into Washington and dictate the terms of peace in the White House. I wonder if our politicians, among whom armchair arguments about war are being

glibly bandied about in the name of state politics, have confidence as to the final outcome and are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices” (Prange 1981: 11).

Whereas the Japanese navy would consistently seek to draw the government’s attention to the danger posed by the U.S. Navy, it would strongly argue against an alliance with Germany in order to appease the U.S. and avoid a disastrous war during the run-up to December 1941. Admiral Nagano, the Navy Chief of staff, understood that even if Japan met with initial success in a conflict, the U.S. would choose a prolonged war owing to “her impregnable position, her superior industrial power, and her abundant resources” and that Japan did not have the means “to make [the Americans] give up their will to fight”. Meanwhile, around the same time, a memo circulating in the Navy Ministry argued that war with the U.S. was unwinnable because Japan lacked the capacity to occupy the U.S. capital or any of its territory or even blockade its long coastlines, “while the United States could do all of these things to Japan” (Paine 2019: 144). The only hope lay in the U.S. getting bogged down in a war with Germany (Copeland 2015: 223).

Moreover, Japan was much more concerned with minimalistic increases in Russian sea power than with American naval construction plans in the 1890s and 1900s - which were much more impressive than Russia’s (Fumio 2004; Asada 2013). Japan just happened to think that the problems with the U.S. were less intractable. The strategic dilemmas that both Japan and a predominant Asian power would experience in the future were seen as more rigid and unsolvable – as evidenced by the security dilemma that intensified between Japan and the Russia/Soviet Union in the 1890s and the 1930s. Contrary to Levy and Thompson, Japan did feel threatened by naval power - but by the naval power of only continental states (Russia and China).

Japan could be concerned with American foreign policy direction at times but American Power itself was not the direct concern since Japan could itself do very little about growing American power and had little reason to fear or anticipate American offensive actions against Japan. The direction of American power may be hostile towards Japan at a given point of time, but it could also change dramatically and suddenly to favour the Japanese position. The U.S assisted Japan both financially and diplomatically against Russia in 1905; territorial disagreements and arms races were settled and prevented amicably in comparison

to similar problems with Russia. There were tacit agreements regarding the containment of Soviet power in East Asia till as late as 1933.

Russia was not alone in attempting to set limits on Japanese power as it did before 1895 – with regard to Korea. The U.S. also set limits on Japanese power on various occasions, but most illustratively during the Washington naval conference of 1921 and the London Naval Treaty of 1930. The latter imposed a ratio of 10:10:6 for American, British and Japanese heavy cruisers and was strongly opposed by the Navy General Staff, the Supreme War Council, opposition parties, the Privy Council and the popular press (Takehiko 1963: 78). Although much resented, such an imposition did not lead to any concrete Japanese adverse military reaction to American power – unlike the case with Russia/Soviet Union. If naval limits are more bearable than limits on continental land expansion, then such preferences also further consolidate the advantages of American insularity.

American power seemed more like an abstract long term threat, negotiable and only pertaining mostly to secondary interests. Russian and Chinese power on the other hand seemed more immediate, proximate and non-negotiable. The difference lay in geography and American insularity.

The spectacular success of the Battle of Tsushima straits against Russia stands in great contrast to the strategic failure of Pearl Harbor. In the former, Japan managed to win a war by winning, early on, a key naval battle that crippled Russia's naval power. Instead of broadening and continuing the war, Russia chose to negotiate a somewhat humiliating peace with a much weaker Japan – crucially, owing to its more predominant interest in Europe. Moreover, the war itself ignited the spark for a domestic uprising against the warring government of the day. Japanese planners at their most optimist hoped for a somewhat similar series of events to play out through its desperate attack on Pearl Harbor (Wetzler 1998: 34-38).

Given the disparity in power, Japan could have hoped to balance the U.S. through external balancing. Rising powers, after all, generally cause strong coalitions to form against them. As such, we have two puzzles in this case. Why did Japan balance a much weaker Soviet Union over the U.S. throughout this period (1865-1941)? And why could Japan not find

alliances against the U.S.? the former we have addressed throughout this chapter. The answer to the second question again lies in American insularity. Japan could not find allies against the U.S. for the same reason that Japan chose to balance the Soviet Union. Similar to Japan, other states in the period were also concerned by much weaker neighbouring powers than they were by American power. Hence, America's geography has tended to have a cascading effect in terms of external balancing choices available to other great powers.

Crucially, it was Britain, that was seen as the most valued partner in terms of any possible hope of checking U.S. power in the Pacific. Japan, for instance, sought to persuade Britain to not withdraw its battleships from the Far East as the combined alliance needed to have a naval advantage over any third power – mostly a reference to the U.S. Reflecting a strain of thinking in the Japanese military, future War Minister and a key personality behind various significant decisions in the interwar years, General Ugaki Kazushige wrote in December 1918,

“Yet there remains the possibility of an Anglo-American confrontation, and in such a situation the possession or lack of friendly relations with Japan, as one of the great powers in Asia, will be of great significance to both nations from the standpoint of the balance of power, so that it is not inconceivable that Britain will consider the continuation of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, or the possibility of further approaches to Japan from this standpoint” (Ikei 1980: 200).

It is worth noting that even as he analysed declining British power and the possibility of an Anglo-American conflict, Ugaki's primary concern for the post-war situation was the reconsolidation of Russian power once it had managed to overcome its then-ongoing civil strife.

In other words, Japan's hope of seeing some semblance of balance form against the U.S. was overbearingly dependent on the direction of British foreign policy in the interwar years. Similar to the hopes of Hitler and fears of some in the U.S. Navy, Ugaki had also anticipated an Anglo-American contest for world supremacy. If world politics is a function of conflicts arising from power transition, then all trends point toward an Anglo-American war in the future. The answer to Japan's non-balancing of the U.S. then lies, partly, in British decision to not balance against the U.S. (see Chapter 2).

The previous section had already shown that the alliance Japan formed with Germany was weak, mired in mutual mistrust, largely defunct and eventually counter-productive. Despite their common interest in deterring U.S. entry into the war either in Europe or in Asia, Japan was willing to appease the U.S. by diluting the tripartite agreement out of existence in 1941. Japan, after all, knew that it had little to gain from such an alliance. The U.S. was keener on an American-German war than it was on attacking Japan. If Japan had any common interest with Germany it was in avoiding a war with the U.S. Speaking to the Imperial Conference in September 1940 Prime Minister Kono laid out the rationale in reaching out to the Axis Powers, “Germany and Italy want to prevent the United States from participating in the ongoing war. Our country wants to avert a crisis with the United States. The three countries share the common interest” (Yoshie 1975: 475).

America on the other hand could form alliances against Japan far more easily – China, Russia, Germany. External balancing seemed an even less plausible option than internal balancing. In event of war with the U.S., neither side could come to each other’s aid. Germany did not have the navy to challenge the U.S. Navy in the Atlantic and would have to wait for American forces to land on Europe or North Africa anyway. The alliance was eventually counter-productive because association with Nazi Germany led to even greater anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S. and even allowed the Roosevelt administration to eventually link Pearl Harbor to Germany. As S.C.M. Paine describes the Japanese decision to join the Tripartite agreement with Germany and Italy, “Again, the Japanese mistook an accelerant for a flame retardant” (Paine 2019: 147-148).

The alliance could have had a greater impact on the Soviet Union but even here the two sides failed to achieve any significant cooperation – with each side seeking to free ride from the other’s conflicts with the Soviet Union. Germany reached the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact with the Soviet Union even as Marshall Zhukov’s forces took on the Kwantung Army in Nomonhan in August 1939. Japan paid back in kind when it reached a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union even as Germany was preparing for total war against the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941. Japanese non-willingness to come to the aid of Germany by attacking the Far East immediately and making such an attack contingent on the certainty of the

German victory over Russia indicates alliance buck-passing motivation (Paine 2019: 152).

It should be considered less puzzling that Japan decided to be a firm ally of the U.S. for the extent of the cold war and despite its overbearing presence in Japan and economic rivalry from the 1970s. Similarly, dashing hopes and predictions by Chinese and some American scholars that Japan would find itself clashing with the U.S. in the Post-Cold War world, it chose to renew its alliance with as much vigour, if not more, in 1996 and has continued to remain a strong U.S. ally ever since – despite the disappearance of the Soviet Union, China's rise and its economic interdependence with the same.

Both cases can be explained by the broader fact that Japan's grand strategy and its reference object in terms of balancing and balance of power remained continental threats from Asia rather than the U.S. If before 1945 Japan sought to balance the continental powers through continental expansion, colonisation and wars (which in turn required militarism, military rule and clashing against the international order), after 1945 Japan chose to balance the continental powers in alliance with the U.S. (while remaining a democracy with strong controls on militarism, a free trading country and one of the strongest supporters of the post-war liberal international order). Japanese polity and society may have fundamentally changed after 1945 – but its conception of the balance of power in Asia and the sense of continental threats to Japan remains fundamentally the same.

As China's rise becomes ever more evident and its external behaviour impinges increasingly on Japanese territories and interests, Japan is likely to further intensify its balancing of the rising power rather than ally with it to balance the U.S. or even hedge. Japanese and Chinese interests presently clash in the East China Sea and the South China Sea and likely to become a dynamic in the Indian Ocean as well. Japan's membership in Quad further testifies to Japan's now greater need to find allies in its grand struggle to balance Chinese power.

Whereas in 1939 Japan found itself without any meaningful alliances and facing a combination of three great powers along with China itself, in 2020 Japan finds itself in partnership with the U.S., India and Australia - balancing against an isolated China. Balance



of Power had always continued to operate throughout, it has only become increasingly visible and discernible.

## **Chapter Five: The Soviet Union and U.S.**

The Soviet-American power competition or what is known as the cold war, has acquired the reputation of being realism's home ground. The occurrence of conflict and competition among till recent allies lent itself naturally to a realist explanation and the arms race, security treaties and nuclear deterrence constituted events, processes and concepts that had a natural fit with realist theories and outlook. Waltz (1979) in his seminal work extolled both nuclear weapons and bipolarity for causing the post-war peace and the absence of great-power wars that had already occurred several times during the first half of the century. However, this happy relationship between realism and the cold war has come under some strain in recent years. there are primarily three sources for – Firstly, the continuation of the long peace after the cold war and bipolarity makes bipolarity a less convincing explanation for the long peace. Secondly, it has become increasingly clear that the cold war cannot so easily be characterized as bipolar in nature – given American predominance and Soviet weaknesses. Thirdly, given that the U.S. was the strongest unit in the system, it counts as a puzzle for balance of power theory that other powers in the system chose to balance the Soviet Union instead of the U.S. Finally, I seek to add two more sources of strain in the relationship by arguing that, - a) contrary to Balance of Power expectation, it was the stronger state that was keener on balancing the power of the weaker state. b) contrary to balance of power expectations, the Soviet Union spent as many resources balancing other much weaker powers in the system (Germany and China primarily) than in countering American threats and power.

### **Aim**

As such this chapter discusses Soviet rationale and conduct and in doing so makes the following arguments –

1. The cold war arose from the U.S.' decision to balance (future) Soviet power.
2. There was a significant power asymmetry between the U.S. and Soviet Union, making any description of the cold war as bipolar problematic.

3. The Soviet Union was an unwilling participant in the power competition with the U.S., evidenced by its various peace offensives.
4. Fears of a resurgent Germany was arguably central to Soviet foreign policy during the cold war, making the Soviet Union more sensitive to increases in German power (and later Chinese power) than about increases in American power.

### **Background: Waltzian Balance of Power theory and the Cold War**

Waltz's Balance of Power theory emerged during the height of the cold war and sought to address the fundamental questions related to the cold war. The theory sought to explain the long peace that characterized the cold war, and it did so primarily through the concept of bipolarity and 'its stark simplicities and comforting symmetry' (Waltz 1993: 44; Gaddis 1986). According to Waltz, bipolarity created 'remarkable stability and predictability'. In this framework, both world wars were caused by uncertainties and unpredictability. The great war was seen as being caused by weaker allies being able to force their great power allies towards the path of war (chain ganging) – a feature of multipolarity (Clark 2013; Tuchman 1962; Snyder and Christensen 1990; Tierney 2011). This was further exacerbated by the fact that German leaders could not correctly assess whether the U.S. would intervene in both the wars - leading to the inference that such knowledge would have deterred Germany from embarking on attempts at European hegemony (Waltz 1979: 163-167). The Second World war occurred under the permissive conditions of appeasement, buck-passing under multipolarity.

Bipolarity enabled the long peace because of the reduced number of great powers or superpowers that remained after 1945. The power disparity between these two superpowers and their allies meant that the latter could not drag them into great power conflict. The reduced number also meant that mutual deterrence was stable since each power knew what they were up against in terms of the balance of power – since no third force could play any significant role in the contest.

In recent years, such a framework has come under serious criticism (Porter 2006; Copeland 2000; Lebow 1994). Furthermore, the continuation of the long peace into the 21st century has further raised questions. By the same token, the long peace of the 19th century (i.e.

preceding bipolarity and nuclear weapons) also calls into the question the apparent stability of a bipolar world. As Mearsheimer points out,

“There was no war between any European great powers from 1815 to 1853, and again from 1871 to 1914. Those lengthy periods of relative stability, which occurred in multipolar Europe, compare favourably with the ‘long peace’ of the Cold War. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether bipolarity or multipolarity is more prone to great power war by looking at modern European history” (Mearsheimer 2001: 79).

If bipolarity explains the long peace during the cold war, what explains the continuation of the long peace under unipolarity? Furthermore, the historical evidence for the bipolarity as the cause of stability thesis is thin. Pointing out the same shortcoming Copeland writes, “three examples of bipolarity prior to 1945-Sparta versus Athens, Carthage versus Rome, and France versus the Hapsburgs-each gave rise to devastating major wars” (Copeland 2000: 149). Commenting on Neo-realist explanations of the cold war and their assumption of bipolarity, Richard Ned Lebow writes, “None of the measures of bipolarity derived from these theories sustains a characterization of the international system as bipolar before the mid-1950s at the earliest” (Lebow 1994: 252). Somewhat more troubling for the theory, more recent scholarship suggests that the cold war was not even bipolar – since the U.S. maintained preponderance for most of the period (Porter 2006; Layne 2006, Campbell and Logevall 2009). Writing in 1993, even Waltz’s account at times noted the asymmetry of intentions and capabilities during the height of the cold war, “The United States in the early 1960s undertook the largest strategic and conventional peacetime military buildup the world had yet seen. We did so while Khrushchev tried at once to carry through a major reduction in conventional forces and to follow a strategy of minimum deterrence, even though the balance of strategic forces greatly favored the United States” (Waltz 1993:46).

It can be argued that the U.S. initiated the cold war to precisely avoid bipolarity or the emergence of a ‘peer rival’ or a fellow regional hegemon as Mearsheimer describes it. Waltz refers to the fact that the Soviets had more than the U.S. in terms of ‘ground forces’ during the cold war while lagging in other areas such as naval might, industrial production, technological innovation and defence spending. Even in the 1990s, China had a larger army

than the U.S. but claims of bipolarity prevailing in the system due to the same have been rare.

For much of the cold war, the Soviet economy stood at half or less of the U.S. economy (CIA office of Soviet analysis, 1984). As of 1987, Soviet productivity in manufacturing was only 24.8 % that of the U.S. (Kouwenhoven 1997; Noren 2003). For comparison, Japan stood at 76.4 % and West Germany at 70.2%. Despite America's newfound unipolarity in the late 1940s and its awareness of Soviet weaknesses, the U.S. shifted its perception of Soviet conduct in terms of threat assessment. As Yergin writes, "the growth of American power did not lead to a great sense of assuredness, but rather to an enlargement of the range of perceived threats that must urgently be confronted" (Yergin 1977: 196).

Even if Waltz's empirical description turns out to be incorrect we can still apply the logic of his balance of power theory to see if it fits the cold war. If we assume that the cold war was more unipolar than bipolar (at least till mid 1960s) then the theory would predict greater instability and war – as well as greater balancing against the U.S. by secondary powers as well as the Soviet Union. If the U.S. was the unipole (potential or actual) hegemon in the system, then the Soviet Union could be expected to be alarmed by such a situation and thereby make all attempts to balance such power. In his 1985 piece titled, 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of Power' Stephen Walt writes, "The greater a state's total resources (i.e., population, industrial and military capability, technological prowess, etc.), the greater a potential threat it can pose to others. Recognizing this, Walter Lippmann and George Kennan define the aim of American grand strategy to be preventing any single state from controlling the combines resources of industrial Eurasia, and they advocated U.S. intervention on whichever side was weaker when this prospect emerged' (Walt 1985: 9). Such a description does indeed explain American balancing of Soviet power as well as the alliance with a weaker China in 1972 neatly. But, what does make one of the fact that it was the U.S. itself which fit the description of a state with greater total resources? Do we find as much evidence of the Soviet Union balancing against the U.S. as we do of U.S. balancing against the Soviet Union?

Writing in 1993, Waltz argued that economic powers such as Japan and Germany were likely to choose to emerge as independent great powers due to a host of factors ranging from

economic competition to security concerns – “For a country to choose not to become a great power is a structural anomaly. For that reason, the choice is a difficult one to sustain,” (Waltz 1993: 66) he had written. Needless to say that such an eventuality failed to occur. Furthermore, a review of the choices of these great powers during the cold war could itself have explained such an ‘anomaly’. As Waltz himself points out in the same article, “Since the 1970s, Japan has at times expressed similar worries. The increase of Soviet Far Eastern Forces in the late 1970s led Japan to reexamine its view of the Soviet threat. It is made uneasy now by the near-doubling of China's military budget between 1988 and 1993”. What is important to note is that Waltz himself points out to the military build-up of powers much weaker than the U.S. as arousing of Japan’s fears. This begs the question of whether such threat perception itself is a structural anomaly given the disparity of power between the U.S. and China in 1993.

### **Russian Expansionism and the cold war**

“Geopoliticians traced the Cold War to imperial Russian strategic ambitions which in the nineteenth century led to the Crimean War, to Russian penetration of the Balkans and the Middle East and to Russian pressure on Britain's "lifeline" to India” (Schlesinger 1967: 23-24).

Russian expansionism, as the most logical outcome of its strategic predicament and ambitions, has significant explanatory power in terms of explaining the cold war. The U.S. after all had to be concerned about such expansionism in the wake of the end of the Second World War and along with it the neutralisation of Russia’s natural regional adversaries (and balancers) – Germany and Japan. Soviet mass industrialisation and a Red Army buoyed by victory over Germany formed an impressive combination in terms of hegemonic capabilities and potential. It was after all the rise of Soviet power that propelled Germany and Japan to adopt expansionist programs of their own, which in turn threatened American interests in Eurasia (defined in terms of the global balance of power). Summing up the balance of power in Europe in 1935 and foreshadowing the cold war, the then U.S. Ambassador to Soviet Union William C. Bullitt wrote,

“Unless the states of Europe stop fighting each other or the Soviet Union is defeated in war within the next fifteen years, it will be a juggernaut that will be able to sweep the continent”.

In a somewhat prescient remark, he wrote to Secretary of State Cordell Hull predicting that “In this decade the Soviet Union either will be the center of attack from Europe and the Far East or will develop rapidly into one of the greatest physical forces in the world” (Bullitt to Hull, August 21, 1935).

Leading U.S. officials also at times wondered if victory in the Second World War was too much of a good thing (Avey 2012: 181). During a National Security Council meeting (April 8, 1953) top officials of the Eisenhower administration contemplated whether rescuing Japan’s economy in the long run might require some form of restitution of its pre-war empire. During the discussion Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey suggested that the U.S. be ‘aggressive’ in securing for Germany and Japan a secure position in the world and that it seemed to him that “we had licked the two wrong nations in the last war”. The President added the nuance, “You don’t mean that; you mean we licked these two nations too thoroughly” (National Security Council, 1953).

In other words, it could be argued that the Second World War itself and American choices during the same created the conditions for the cold war, by removing from the geopolitical map Russia’s natural barriers to expansion – Germany and Japan. The Second World War was fought against Germany and Japan and in alliance with the Soviet Union. The cold war would be fought against the Soviet Union to preserve the autonomy and sovereignty of Germany and Japan. Secretary of Defense James Forrestal described the dilemma in 1947 “Without laying blame or responsibility upon anyone, the fact remains that we have destroyed the balance of power in the world. That balance of power has to be restored” (James Forrestal Testimony, 1947)

Russian expansionism, something that predates the cold war by hundreds of years, may have created the permissible conditions that caused the cold war. But, Russian expansionism cannot be interpreted as Soviet attempts at balancing American power any more than Russian pressure towards Bulgaria in the early 1900s can be seen as aimed at balancing American power.

George Kennan, for instance, described such expansionism as, "the product of tradition and environment and should be beyond the scope of moral judgment” (Kennan to Bohlen, 1945). Echoing the same sentiment, Molotov argued, “What does the ‘cold war’ mean? We were

simply on the offensive. They became angry at us, of course, but we had to consolidate what we conquered” (Zubok 2007: 49). There was nothing new about Soviet diplomacy in 1945, but a continuation of Russian ‘old diplomacy’ (Yergin 1977:12; Naimark 2019).

### **Early Cold War: From Allies to Rivals (1945-1964)**

#### *The Soviet-American Power gap*

The U.S had suffered 400,000 casualties in the Second World War, whereas the Soviet Union had lost close 27 million. The U.S had come out strongest from the world war and the largest creditor nation. American air force and navy were far superior to Soviet counterparts. Both powers had approximately 12 million standing troops by the end of the war. The war had ravaged the Soviet economy and all the achievements of the rapid industrialisation of the 1930s. Whereas U.S. citizens prospered in unprecedented growth after the war, Soviet citizens had to endure a famine that lasted till the late 1940’s – the grain harvest in 1947 totalling 39.6 million tons (approx. 40% of what yielded in 1940) (Ellman 2012). The technological gap, meanwhile, was calculated to be as large as 25 years during the early cold war period (Boretzky 1966). As Porter writes, “Thus an index of *effective* economic power, combining GNP with productivity and technological prowess, would show the U.S. economic power base in the 1950s and 1960s to have been several times greater than that of the Soviet Union” (Porter 2006:3).

Writing of the release of new archives in the 1990s, William Wohlforth notes the Soviet Union’s ‘tentative grasp’ on “superpower” status during the cold war, “In short, Moscow’s Potemkinism worked to mislead everyone, including scholars, about Soviet power and hence the overall balance of power. Thus the new evidence raises even greater questions about one of the central puzzles of the Cold War for balance-of-power theory – the imbalance of power between the main protagonists” (Wohlforth 1999: 49).

#### *U.S. Initiation of the Cold War*

The National Security Council (NSC) 20/4, indicating balancing motive, stated that the U.S. goal was nothing less than to, “reduce to power of the USSR to limits which no longer constitute a threat to the peace, national independence and stability of the world family of



nations” (NSC 1948). As Copeland describes U.S. objectives and thereby the cause of the cold war as well, “It was Truman's fear of Soviet growth in economic and potential power that led him to adopt hard-line policies. He recognized that should Moscow successfully consolidate its new larger realm, it could translate these gains into superior military power.” (Copeland 2000: 148).

Immediately after the conclusion of the war against Germany, the U.S. undertook a series of steps that indicate its approach to Soviet power in the aftermath of the war. These steps include the acquisition and build-up of air and naval bases around the Soviet Union as well as the restriction of Soviet access to the Mediterranean and the North Sea despite recognition of these rights as well as earlier agreements. For instance, even before the end of the war, the Joint Chiefs concluded a paper titled “Revision of Policy with Relations to Russia” which called for an end to Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union as it had overachieved its purpose and had led to a “new and serious situation” by way of creating a much stronger Soviet Union. It also recommended taking a firm stance against the Soviet Union in the future. Similar balancing reasoning has not been found in the available literature on Soviet decision making, whereas U.S. concerns about the future rise of Soviet power can be traced back to even August 1943 (Copeland 2000: 150-152).

As such when the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations disregarded peace overtures by the Soviet Union and proceeded to build up both conventional and nuclear strength it had led Khrushchev to abandon his goal of reducing military spending in order to focus on the civilian economy (Evangelista 1997). The Soviet Union instead increased military spending by about 30 % between 1960 – 1963 and cost itself a drastic cut in growth rates from 6.6 % to 2.2 % (Becker 1986: 175; Thornton 1966). The fear of the Soviet economy catching up to the U.S. and then overtaking it, so prominent in American press in the late 50s and early 60s, gave way to steady and increasing recognition of Soviet economic slowdown by 1964 onwards (Trachtenberg 2018). Khrushchev himself discerned the U.S. interest in continuing hostilities with the Soviet Union to stall Soviet economic growth. He argued that the U.S. was using the arms race to destroy the Soviet economy and “by that means to obtain its goals even without war” (Evangelista 1997: 18). In an eager attempt to demonstrate “good intentions” to the U.S., Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin wrote President Eisenhower

a sixteen-page letter which highlighted troop withdrawal from East Germany (41,000) and Hungary (17,000). Urging similar steps on the western side he suggested that these steps “would be a big contribution to the beginning of the liquidation of the cold war” (Bulagnin to Eisenhower, 1958).

Soviet military weakness vis-à-vis the U.S. was as stark and made U.S. decision-makers understand that the Soviet Union was very unlikely to attempt any form of military expansionism in the foreseeable future (Porter 2006: 3-25; Leffler 1994: 6,163, 216-218). Even the widely accepted at the time conventional superiority of the Soviet Union in Europe was later found to be less concrete and based on questionable assessment methods (Karber & Combs 1998; Duffield 1995).

Geographically speaking, the balance of power between the two seemed to be on an even keel only because the theatre of action initially was Eurocentric. It is in Europe that the Soviet Union had managed to achieve most parity vis-à-vis the U.S. Its innumerable divisions did pose a threat to the rest of Europe, but even this relative advantage vis-à-vis the U.S was based on very ambiguous factors. The gains of even a hypothetical successful sprint to the Atlantic were doubtful. The Soviet Union was very keenly aware of the high cost of urban warfare (as the battle for Berlin had demonstrated), it was relatively easy to keep its Eastern European allies of the Warsaw pact with the sphere of Soviet alliance, but it could not be trusted to serve as a reliable Soviet ally during any such major war.

Even according to American estimates, most Soviet divisions in Eastern Europe were preoccupied with missions related to the occupation of its satellite countries and supporting weak communist regimes and parties (Evangelista 1982). Furthermore, even as the Soviet Union competed with wealthier rivals (including Europe and Japan), its Eastern European satellites contributed very little in terms of power aggregation and grew to be a severe liability to its economic health (Bunce 1985). Moreover, even if Soviet forces could reach the Atlantic, the war would no means be expected to be completed. The Soviets knew that the U.S would resort to massive air strikes (conventional and possibly nuclear) in preparation for a repeat of D-Day landings (Leffler 2005).

If the balance in Europe was comparably one of parity then the situation was very different in all other geographical spaces. In East Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, South and North America there wasn't much competition between the two. In other words, the U.S contested immediate Soviet sphere of influence whereas the American sphere of influence within the same period had expanded many folds and remained for all significant purposes, virtually uncontested.

U.S military planners and statesmen were very aware of this imbalance of power. There was almost unanimous agreement in the estimation that whereas the Soviet Union was keen on extending its sphere of influence it would not resort to brazen military options, the Soviet Union did not want war, 'The Soviet Union had no long range strategic air-force, meager air defenses, no atomic bomb' (Leffler and Painter 2002: 4). Especially during the 1950s, the Soviet Union knew that the U.S could destroy retaliatory capabilities of in a first strike, whereas the vice-versa was impossible (Johnson 1997: 101). Moreover, American estimation of Soviet thresholds for acceptable costs was based on Soviet casualties during the Second World War. This was a maximalist estimation since it required the U.S to acquire capabilities over and above the soviet threshold of acceptable cost. Despite, the conventional account, which explains the cold war as U.S. reaction to almost unmitigated Soviet expansion, U.S. officials in July 1946 concluded that the Soviet Union was unlikely to "embark on adventurist foreign policies which . . . might involve the USSR in a conflict or a critical armament race with the great western powers" (JIS 85/26, 1946).

Furthermore, contrary to various accounts which sees Soviet imposition of its own system in Eastern Europe as one main causes of the cold war, President Truman and American grand strategy, in general, was accepting of such an imposition (Avey 2012: 167-172; Mark 1979; Trachtenberg 2008). In May 1945, President Truman noted that "I knew what I wanted - and that I intended to get it - peace for the world for at least 90 years. That Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, et al[.] made no difference to U.S. interests only so far as World Peace is concerned" (Truman notes, 1945). Thus, the U.S. decided to confront or balance the Soviet Union purely out of balance of power considerations rather than due to Soviet policy or actions or because of its own ideological reasons such as its open-door policy (Avey 2012; Layne 2006). American

policy towards the Soviet Union hardened by 1947 for a variety of reasons, possibly the most important being the growing realisation of Europe's real weakness – manifested in coal and food shortages and worsened by an unusually harsh winter in 1946-47 (Steil 2018; Avey 2012; Hitchcock 1998).

A Joint Intelligence report in 1948 expressed its confidence in the Soviet Union responding moderately to American moves, “The soviets could not win because of their inability to carry the war to U.S territory. After the occupation of Europe, the USSR would be forced to assume the defensive and await attacks by U.S forces which should succeed primarily because of the ability to out produce the USSR in materials of war” (Leffler 2002: 24).

Proponents of Waltzian BOP theory, as well as cold war traditionalists, could argue that Stalin's assent and support to the North Korean invasion of South Korea could be considered to be the decision that had revolutionised the cold war – or gave it its most explicit military dimension. U.S. policymakers undertook a series of measures, both policy-wise and at the level of strategic doctrine, as a consequence. The U.S. quadrupled its defence budget, found it necessary to rearm Germany and form NATO, enhance opposition to communist movements, decided to protect Taiwan from mainland China as well as confront the People's Republic of China. The Korean war also seemed to confirm that the Soviet Union was keen on expanding communist, and thereby its own, influence as wide and far as it could; and at the cost of American influence and power.

However, a review of Soviet decision making indicates that the reasons for the decision are far more complex and have to do with Soviet fears regarding the new communist regime in China (Weathersby 2002; Zhihua 2012; Borisov & Korislov 1975; Nakajima 1979). Stalin was interested in Maoist China burning all its bridges with the U.S. and concretising its allegiance to Soviet foreign policy. Stalin shifted gears abruptly from rejecting any North Korean adventure to supporting it after the 1950 treaty with China which forced the Soviet Union to surrender Soviet privileges and influence in North-East China. Soviet conduct during the war (Weathersby 1993: 31, 51-52; Cumings 1992: 631-642) and its goading of Chinese communists to enter the war while persuading the latter of the Soviet need to avoid seeming provocative to the U.S. – fits more neatly with this thesis rather than the idea of

Soviet expansionism at U.S. expense. The Soviet Union was acting to prevent a rival power in Asia from allying with the U.S. out of fear and anxiety (Zhukov and Zabrodin 1945).

It was the confidence that the Soviet Union was much weaker and that Stalin was essentially a cautious realist (Copeland 2000: 166-167; Mastny 2002: 19) and a moderating force, that propelled the U.S. to constantly expand its sphere of influence. Scholars such as Craig Campbell (2009), Gareth Porter (2006) and Robert H. Johnson (1997) have been able to demonstrate that it was the imbalance of power between the two that enabled and encouraged the U.S. to define its national interests in the broadest possible manner, paradoxically exaggerate levels of threat and narrow the range of processes and outcomes that it could tolerate. This mix of preponderance, contrived paranoia and over-reaction would constantly repeat itself in various forms and manifest in controversies such as the 'missile gap', 'bomber gap' and the 'domino theory' (Brugiono 2010; Karber and Combs 1998).

These accounts somewhat indirectly challenge the post cold war IR debates. As Porter writes,

“These debates on the advantages and disadvantages of unipolarity and of policies that exploit it have assumed that there has never before been anything in the modern state system even remotely similar to the present global structure of power... The reinterpretation of the period between the Korean and Vietnam wars offered in this study suggests, however, that the dominance of U.S. power over that period was roughly equivalent to the unipolarity of the post-Cold War period. In the earlier period, U.S. power could not be balanced by that of the Soviet Union and China. By 1964, U.S. officials had begun to view the Soviet Union less as a Cold War rival for power than as a potentially useful adjunct to U.S. efforts to impose a settlement in Vietnam at some future date. Several major states today arguably occupy analogous political roles in relation to the issue of unilateral U.S. use of military force” (Porter 2006: 272).

Porter furthermore interestingly argues that the lesson of the first unipolar era was that other states in the new environment (post-1991) would be unwilling to challenge American power, just as the Soviet Union and PRC were unwilling during the cold war. But hostility and resistance is more likely to emanate from much weaker actors that had little to lose and

everything to gain from challenging US power (Such as South Vietnamese Guerrilla's). Moreover, these minor non-state actors also do not make decisions based on systemic power balance considerations, unlike major states.

### *Soviet concerns pertaining to Germany*

Russia's primary security concern since the 1890s has been a rising Germany. The experience of two world wars demonstrated that if there was any country that posed and could pose an existential threat to Russia/SU it was Germany. Much of Soviet policy and modes of behaviour during the cold war was thus animated by this proposition. Noted West German historian Waldemen Besson noted that it has often been underestimated, "what it must have meant psychologically when seven years after the end of the war German soldiers once again appeared on European soil and this time on the side of the powerful adversary, the United States" (Besson 1970: 125). During the last few months of the Second World War, Stalin, after all, had predicted that without sufficient checks and controls, Germany would undergo a complete revival in 15 to 20 years (Zubok & Pleshakov 1996: 47).

In response to the Marshall plan, zonal fusion and currency reform in West Germany – the Soviet Union decided to impose a blockade on West Berlin in 1948 to force the west to roll back efforts at building a strong centrally administered and prosperous Germany that could rearm in just a few years (Harrington 1984, Steil 2018; Eisenberg 1998). How high the stakes were for the Soviet Union could be gauged from what Molotov told the foreign ministers of the Warsaw pact a day before imposing the blockade, "if we were to lose in Germany, we would have lost the last war" (Mastny 1996: 48). A statement released by eastern European foreign ministers and under Soviet guidance judged that what needs to be addressed is German militarisation and control over heavy industry "with a view...to preventing the re-establishment of Germany's war potential" (Copeland 2000: 180). Incidentally, and symptomatic of the continental power dilemma, Soviet actions had the effect of strengthening counter alliances rather than forcing rivals to make concessions (Shulman 1963: 18-22). Stalin eventually assured the west of his intention to lift the blockade in exchange for the west shelving plans for the establishment of a West German state. A proposal for a Soviet-American nonaggression pact was also added into the mix for good measure (Stalin to Kingsbury Smith, 1949).

Somewhat similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis (see below), the Soviet Union did not step onto a war footing during the Berlin crisis – in contrast to the U.S., which in an act of nuclear signalling, deployed nuclear-capable U.S. bombers to bases in Britain (Evangelista 1982: 132-133). Stalin often made it a point also to emphasise that Soviet alliances with east European states were defensive and aimed only at Germany, most notably to the British ambassador David Kelly (Kirk to Secretary of State, 1949). In April 1957 for instance, Soviet leaders were alarmed by statements made by chancellor Adenauer and his foreign minister indicating that Germany intended to acquire nuclear weapons (Quenoy 2003: 336).

In Marc Trachtenberg's view, it was the West German Bundestag's resolution in 1958 to support the nuclear arming of Germany that underlay the Berlin crisis of the same year (Trachtenberg 1999: 200). Surveying declassified Russian, British and American documents, Hope M. Harrington discovers that "Soviet fear of West German acquisition of nuclear weapons was an important influence on Soviet Deutschlandpolitik (policy on Germany) connected with the crisis" (Harrington 1993: 6). The Documents also reveal the significant influence Mao's tirades against Khrushchev had on his Berlin policy, mostly by nudging him to take a more aggressive or assertive stance.

The Soviet Union also regularly denounced and discouraged any movement towards the establishment of a European Defence Community or even a Franco-German rapprochement – out of its concerns pertaining to German power (Rey 2010: 25,28). In a conversation with Richard Nixon in February 1970, French President Georges Pompidou recommended that the U.S. not overlook Soviet 'fear' of Germany. He noted that it may seem somewhat incredulous, given contemporary German society, but it needs to be recalled that "25 years ago the German armies were in the Caucasus, on the Volga and before Leningrad. It took the U.S. the USSR and many others to defeat the Germans". He thereby explained that in conversations with the French, the Soviets sought to "find means to ensure this neutralization" (Nixon and Pompidou, 1970).

Khrushchev would not have disagreed on the Soviet Union's cold war anxieties regarding West Germany. In a conversation with an Italian delegation in August 1961, he asked, "At the moment, the Federal Republic has no chance to implement an aggressive policy against you, that is against Italy, France and England, mostly because it fears us. Can you guarantee

that Adenauer will not die or that he will not get out of his mind? In a word, that West Germany will not turn against the USSR? Can you rule out this possibility?" (Fanfani's visit to Moscow, 1961). During the rest of the conversation, Khrushchev attempted to persuade the Italians that West European attempts at enmeshing Germany into western institutions are failing and Germany has already emerged as stronger than any European combination. The Soviet Union would, however, "not allow the bear [Germany] to cling to you and crush you in its embrace: these "friendly embraces" will become increasingly tight".

The Berlin Blockade of 1948, the Berlin crisis of 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis were situations that evolved mostly from Soviet concerns pertaining to an independent, rising and potentially nuclear West Germany. American attempts at restoring some semblance of German economic and military power were resented and opposed by both the Soviet Union and France, albeit in different ways. Hence, Soviet military confrontations with American power in these crises was not a function of American power per se but of fears pertaining to German power and aimed at changing American policy towards the same. Soviet military opposition to Khrushchev's troop cuts referred primarily to German remilitarisation and memories of the Nazi invasion of 1941 and only secondarily to U.S. 'intentions' (Evangelista 1997: 10-11). Copeland describes Soviet intentions behind the Berlin blockade,

"The primary factor leading to the Berlin crisis was the London Conferences of January-March 1948, in which the United States, Britain, and France agreed to unite the German occupation zones and to hand political control over to an independent western German government. This act left the Soviets facing a rising West Germany tied to the western bloc, a daunting prospect for a nation that had just lost so many lives fighting Germany. Berlin was both a means and an end for Moscow. As a means, the Soviets saw pressure on Berlin, particularly the blockade, as a way to convince the west to reverse the London agreements." (Copeland 2000: 179).

The Soviet Union took desperate steps aimed at preventing the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from collapsing - primarily because any such eventuality would result in German reunification. In early August, Khrushchev told Warsaw Pact officials that without



eastern bloc help, the GDR would not survive. Then “the [West German army] . . . would come closer to our Soviet border’.” (Copeland, 2000: 185).

The Soviet Union continued to define its core security interests in regional terms – prioritising the continued pacification of Germany even over undermining American power in Europe. This dynamic is often obscured by the fact that it was the U.S that took upon itself the primary responsibility for the security of these powers. This responsibility reinforced and required the U.S to oppose Soviet thrusts and policies in East Asia, the Mediterranean and the Middle East on behalf of its allies. If the Soviet Union had succeeded in forcing the U.S to withdraw to ‘Fortress America’ it is doubtful that it would be more secure as a consequence. Such a withdrawal would almost automatically lead to and imply the re-militarisation of Germany and Japan.

#### *The 1953 Peace Offensive*

Stalin’s death (5 March 1953) produced an opportunity to his successors to re-assess the global balance of power and Soviet interests within the same. At his funeral, all three speakers – Lavrentiy Beira, Vyacheslav Molotov and Georgy Malenkov - spoke of Peaceful Coexistence favourably. Subsequently, James G. Richter writes, “By the end of May the Soviet Union would renounce territorial claims on Turkey, re-establish diplomatic ties with Yugoslavia and Israel and, most importantly, pushed the Chinese and North Koreans to soften their negotiating positions over the Korean conflict, opening the way to an armistice in July” (Richter 1993: 673). Rather than responding to the imbalance of power by balancing the U.S. and escalating the cold war, the Soviet Union chose to repair relations with the U.S. and pursue cooperation. Speaking to a delegation of East German Communist leaders, Soviet leader Malenkov declared, “Profoundly mistaken are those who think that Germany can exist for a long time under conditions of dismemberment in the form of two independent states. To stick to the position of the existence of a dismembered Germany means to keep to the course for a new war”. He then goes on to frame the problem and persuade his interlocutors to ready for ideological decamping, “Consequently, it is necessary to choose: either the course for the accelerated building of socialism in the GDR, for the independent existence of two Germanies, and that means the course for a third World War, or the abandonment of the accelerated building of socialism in the GDR and the course of the

unification of Germany in the form of a bourgeois-democratic state on condition of its transformation into a peaceful and democratic country” (Georgii M. Malenkov Speech, 1953). Incidentally, this was not that marked a shift in Soviet policy as Stalin too had a similar set of preferences (Naimark 2019: 161-165).

Rather than responding positively to such symbolic and somewhat substantive peace overtures from the Soviet Union, the U.S. decided to disregard and treat the same as a tactical move to weaken the trans-Atlantic alliance as well as movement towards the establishment of the European Defence Community (EDC). Eisenhower in private noted the significance of the Soviet Peace offensive in 1953. But in public he chose to be dismissive toward it. Such a choice fits well with the thesis that the U.S. was interested in balancing Soviet power regardless of actions, behaviour and policies (Brady 2010: 19-57); somewhat similar to President Bush’s response to Gorbachev’s revolution in foreign policy from 1987-1989 (Wohlforth 1996: 263).

#### *The Berlin Ultimatum: 1958-61*

The Soviet ultimatum to the west (November 27 1958), threatening the handover of the power to control transit access points to the GDR, after all directly alluded to the German threat. The note accused that the western powers “have included Western Germany in the North Atlantic bloc, which was set up behind the Soviet Union's back, and, as is clear to everyone, against the Soviet Union, and are now arming Western Germany with atomic and rocket weapons” (Embree 1963: 27). Declassified conversations between Smirnov and Ulbricht of East Germany also reveal their preoccupation with the status of the German standing army and how diplomatic cooperation among members of the Warsaw pact could delay the arming of the Bundeswehr by 2-3 years, leading to a “serious victory for our general cause” (Harrington 1993: 17; Porter 2006: 14-16).

The U.S. responded to the ultimatum by refusing to compromise, except for the recourse to a legalistic deescalating device – the admission that the U.S. could deal with East German staff in rail ports by considering them as agents of the Soviet Union; something that was protested against by Adenauer and Brandt vehemently as the ‘Agency theory’ because they feared it would allow de facto recognition of the GDR (Smyser 1999: 141; Trachtenberg

1999: 274-277). Britain meanwhile, under Macmillan seemed keen on compromising with the Soviet Union and achieving a solution to the German problem. Britain was more ready to recognise and deal with the GDR as an established fact as well as more ready to admit that western rights in Berlin rested on 'flimsy grounds'.

Similar to Churchill in the early 1950s, Macmillan saw in the situation an opportunity for Britain to play the role of an international arbiter and settle continental issues along with the Soviet Union and the U.S. Macmillan was also very keen to avoid war with nuclear-capable Soviet Union (SU had conducted successful ICBM tests and satellite launches of Sputnik just the previous year) over such a small issue as the status of the authority of those stamping passports. Such a stance led to visceral public exchanges with Adenauer, with the latter accusing the former of seeking to sell out Germany to promote British interests (Smyser 1999).

Subsequently, during the Geneva meeting (of the four powers sitting around a round table and a rectangular table placed two inches away and hosting the two German states) the West attempted to conciliate the Soviet Union by making concessions such as placing a ceiling on western troops and disbanding radio stations which targeted East German audiences. The ultimatum stretched from 6 months to a year, in part due to leaks to the American press of Western contingency planning which demonstrated western resolve to break through barriers placed at access points. Such a risky escalation might have also convinced Khrushchev to not turn over power over the access points to Ulbricht. During the crisis, Khrushchev even told Dobrynin that war with the United States was 'inadmissible' (Dobrynin 1995: 51).

Khrushchev would eventually back down in the face of Western resolve. This sobriety would be further enhanced when East German leader Ulbricht demanded contingency aid in case West Germany imposed sanctions on the GDR as a result of the crisis. This sensitised Khrushchev to the economic risks that may emanate from a confrontation, on top of the strategic and military risks that already existed (Smyser 1999: 146; Copeland 2000: 183). American resolve, despite its actual military weakness in West Berlin itself, emanated from its awareness of the scale of the imbalance of power that existed. In March, Secretary of State told his successor, "there is not one chance in 1000 the Soviets will push it to the point

of war”; and with similar confidence, he had just a few months earlier expressed his belief that the Soviet Union was unlikely to come to the aid of China even if its airbases were to be bombed by the U.S. (Porter 2006: 15).

The Soviet primary objective in 1958 and 1961 seemed to be the same as its objective in 1948, if not for much of the early cold war. What the Soviet Union sought was a resolution of the German problem and recognition from the West and more importantly from FRG that the post-war settlement was final and that the GDR needed to be recognized (Badalassi 2019) . F. Stephen Larrabee notes while emphasising the same, “Indeed the continuity of Soviet objectives in Europe after 1955 is striking. For the next 15 years, the main goal of the USSR's policy vis-à-vis West Germany remained constant: to obtain Bonn's acceptance of the postwar borders and the permanent division of Germany” (Larrabee 1993: 206). Secondly, the Soviet Union sought to also prevent and contain the rearming of Germany –especially nuclear arming. This, combined with a fear of a West Germany sinking into nationalist convulsions and seeking to change the status quo by force, probably convinced Soviet leadership that the best outcome would be the ‘neutralisation’ of a unified Germany – similar to Austria during the cold war. Such a Germany would be democratic, capitalist but not free to form alliances with rival power blocs. The West, led by the U.S., always disagreed with such a solution and insisted that such a Germany ought to be free to make strategic foreign policy choices and ally with the west. There is enough circumstantial evidence, however, to also suggest that the Soviet Union could have bluffed in its offer of neutralisation to weaken NATO or drive a wedge between Germany or the U.S.

The U.S. and the Soviet Union maintained frank and open discussions regarding the German problem throughout the cold war in different periods. During the MLF crisis period, for instance, Soviet and State Department officials (Georgi Kornienko and Ronald Spiers respectively) discussed the problem of Germany seeking nuclear access or control in May 1963. Spiers tried to convince Kornienko that he was “badly mistaken” if he thought Germany would accept the “status quo indefinitely” and that MLF was only meant to forestall the more undesirable alternatives (to both superpowers) of “German national nuclear program or a combined Franco-German program”. Despite failing to agree with his counterpart, the Soviet diplomat acknowledged the point. Also worthy of note is that when

the U.S. diplomat pointed out that MLF had a more positive aspect by way of defending the west from Soviet nuclear forces, Kornienko brushed the point aside as a “subordinate question” – indicating greater Soviet sensitivity towards German nuclearisation over the issue of U.S.-Soviet strategic balance (Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1963).

### *The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)*

Khrushchev had three primary motivations in deciding to place Soviet soldiers and missiles in Cuba in October 1962. Firstly, he wanted to address the strategic imbalance that existed at the time. Secondly, he sought to create a mirror image of West Berlin in America’s backyard and thereby hope to facilitate some resolution of the much longer and more crucial West Berlin crisis and possibly the German problem itself. Thirdly, Khrushchev was also motivated to help and protect his distant ally Fidel Castro from a U.S. invasion. There were additional reasons as well, chief among which being the ‘ideological’ struggle with Maoist China for leadership in the socialist world.

The Soviet objective was to place nuclear warheads in Cuba secretly and serve the U.S. a *fait accompli*. Dale Copeland places the primary onus of causing the crisis on the U.S. since,

“Khrushchev's move, while provocative, was technically a buildup of forces within the larger Soviet sphere. It was not only allowed by international law, but it was equivalent to the U.S. deployment of intermediate-range missiles in Turkey in 1961-62. We do not talk about the "Turkish missile crisis" of March 1962 because the Soviets, exposed in late 1961 as inferior in strategic nuclear power and lacking any viable means to prevent the U.S. deployment, chose to do nothing” (Copeland 2000: 186).

The secrecy of the plan was however compromised when American U2 spy planes detected the missiles on October 14 1962. Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership were deeply disturbed by the deployment of the Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey at the beginning of 1961. This was primarily so because these missiles were by their very nature only useful for a first strike – by virtue of being immobile and slow to launch. This was well known on the U.S. side as well. As Benjamin Schwarz writes, “Senator Albert Gore Sr., an ally of the administration, told Secretary of State Dean Rusk that they were a ‘provocation’ in a closed session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 1961 (more than a year and

a half before the missile crisis), adding, ‘I wonder what our attitude would be’ if the Soviets deployed nuclear-armed missiles to Cuba. Senator Claiborne Pell raised an identical argument in a memo passed on to Kennedy in May 1961” (Schwarz 2013). The Soviet leadership was not irrational to fear these missiles and a first strike, evidenced by the fact that the Kennedy administration considered such an option during the Berlin crisis of 1961 (Sagan 1987; Ellsberg 2006; Kaplan 2001). Such a deployment moreover came at a time when the U.S. held an unambiguous preponderance in terms of nuclear weapons – in number of warheads, bombers (ten times greater than the Soviet Union), bases, sea-based capabilities – as well as a recently launched impressive conventional military build-up.

It is worth noting that Khrushchev had applied a kind of strategic reasoning that was very similar to that of Dale Copeland. The Soviet premier calculated that the U.S. would end up accepting the *fait accompli* just in the same way that the Soviet Union accepted the installation of the Jupiter missiles in 1961 – through mere protestation and denunciation. As Khrushchev would write in his memoir “The Americans had surrounded our country with military bases and threatened us with nuclear weapons, and now they would learn just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you; we'd be doing nothing more than giving them a little of their own medicine” (Khrushchev 1970: 492). Speaking of the crisis in 1987, Fyodor Burlatsky (a first hand witness in this case) commented, "I'm not sure Khrushchev thought out the aims. From my point of view, it was more an emotional than rational decision. He talked a lot about United States bases around the Soviet Union” (Blight & Welch 1989: 235).

The Soviet Union finally agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba in exchange for a no-invasion pledge as well as a promise to remove Jupiter missiles from Turkey. Somewhat crucially, the American pledge was secret and thus led to the appearance of an unqualified American victory in the test of nerves between the two powers.

Rather than being indicative of power symmetry or balance, the crisis only further reinforced the prior imbalance of power that had existed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Both geographical factors and the imbalance of power that existed meant that in any test of nerves it was the Soviet Union that would have to play ‘chicken’. Despite both sides having nuclear weapons, conventional power as well as geographical factors meant that the

stronger or more advantaged side could ‘win’ a certain geopolitical contest. As Trachtenberg writes,

“The situation in the Caribbean was the mirror image of the situation around Berlin. The Americans had conventional predominance, but (given that the missiles had already been put in) the United States was the power that was threatening to alter an existing situation. If the nuclear threat had perfectly symmetrical effects, American power should have been as stalemated around Cuba as Soviet power was around Berlin. But the fact that this was not the case shows that fears and anxieties were not perfectly in balance: the balance of resolve favored the United States” (Trachtenberg 1985: 143).

According to a 1981 study by the Pentagon, the Soviet capability to retaliate against a U.S. first strike was extremely doubtful, “By standards of strategic force survivability and effectiveness that became commonplace a few years later the Soviet strategic situation in 1962 might have been judged little short of desperate” (Steinbrunner 1981: 475). Soviet leaders were also much more concerned about the possibility of being attacked in a nuclear strike first, as most illustriously demonstrated by the war scare that occurred during NATO exercises Able Archer.

Furthermore, American insularity widened the military gap in terms of power projection. Whereas the Soviet Union could not theoretically rely on ‘neutral’ Mexico to host Soviet bombers after a nuclear attack over Washington and New York (Khrushchev 1999), Britain’s Royal Air Force prepared 40 nuclear Vulcan Bombers to be on 15-minute stand by during the height of the crisis (Woolven 2012). American confidence was also bolstered since 1961 when the Discoverer satellites launched by the U.S. to take thousands of photographs over Soviet territory revealed that the “missile gap” that Kennedy railed against during his Presidential campaign flowed in the other direction, “The Soviets had no more than eight intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Their bombers sat on open runways. Their air-defense batteries virtually worthless” (Kaplan 2001).

The entire crisis was marked, and in turn resolved, by significant asymmetries. Firstly, the U.S. could put missiles in Turkey without a fracas whereas the Soviet Union could not do the same in Cuba without risking nuclear war. Second being that whereas the U.S. could put pressure on the Soviet Union to withdraw from Cuba, the Soviet Union could not do the

same to the U.S in West Berlin despite having conventional predominance in that region. Thirdly, the U.S. had the option to influence Soviet decision making by imposing a blockade around Cuba; the Soviet Union could not physically impose a blockade against U.S. weapons and troops in Europe. Fourthly, The U.S. more seriously considered going to war over the missiles in Cuba than did the Soviet Union; revealed by the asymmetry in war preparedness in both countries (Trachtenberg 1985: 157). This indicates that the Soviet Union was not willing to even mobilise for deterrence purposes as it prioritised risk-avoidance. This calculation emanated in part from Soviet strategic sensitivities to American preemptive postures and fears of a 'bolt from the blue' (Trachtenberg 1985: 159). U.S. conventional power played some role (difficult to ascertain to what degree) and nuclear weapons seemed to cancel each other out.

One factor that was always present in the crisis and hence taken for granted was geography. Cuba represented Khrushchev's lack of sufficient sensitivity to the differences in geopolitical positions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The U.S., since almost a hundred years, insisted on an unequal Monroe doctrine whereby the U.S. was free to wander in Europe/Eurasia and form alliances whereas European powers were barred from doing the same in the Western hemisphere. In some sense, the U.S. entered the world wars and the cold war so that power remains divided in Eurasia – so that no unified power could wander or form alliances or place troops/weapons in the Western hemisphere. By placing troops in Cuba, the Soviet Union managed to touch off a sensitive issue for U.S. grand strategy. The U.S. has almost never wilfully tolerated rival great power presence in the continent. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, is already surrounded by great powers. Secondly, the U.S. owing to its geography had the effective means to cut off Soviet forces from those in Cuba. Owing to overall power superiority, the U.S. could also force the Soviet Union to capitulate. The Soviet Union had numerous rivals in the cold war, the U.S. could focus only on the Soviet Union. The U.S. came out of the crisis triumphant with self-confidence whereas Khrushchev was blamed in the Soviet Union for adventurism and risking the existence of the Soviet Union. Very revealingly, Dmitry Polyansky's presentation to the CPSU Central Committee Plenum denounced Khrushchev's adventurism from a classical geopolitical point of view,



“Cde. Khrushchev stated that Stalin was not able to penetrate Latin America, but he succeeded. However, first of all the policy of “penetration” is not our policy. And secondly, only an adventurer could insist that in the current situation our state could provide real military assistance to the countries of that continent. It is many thousands of kilometers from us, and oceans separate us. How would we transport our troops there, and how would we ship supplies? Missiles will not work in such a case — they would only burn a country we want to help — that’s all... Having no other way out, we were forced to accept all the demands and conditions dictated by the US, including humiliating inspections of our ships by the Americans. The missiles, as well as most of our troops, were withdrawn from Cuba after the US demand” (Polyansky Report, 1964).

The crisis also led to asymmetric conclusions, with the U.S. regaining confidence and reversing the post-Sputnik pessimism. It led to some form of *détente* between the powers with the Soviet Union abandoning its policy of intimidation towards West Berlin as well as cooperating with the U.S. on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, much to China’s chagrin. In fact, American post-crisis confidence itself became an important factor in adopting a more bellicose attitude towards China, with the hope that a similar showdown could bring China in line (Kochavi 2000).

### **The Brezhnev Offensive: 1964-1983**

Soviet policy under Brezhnev is seen as more belligerent (Hyland 1981: 540; Gates 1996: 38) and makes intuitive sense since it came at a time when the U.S. was experiencing post-Vietnam fatigue. However, an analysis of Soviet conduct during the time reveals that Soviets continued to behave moderately, with caution, seeking *détente* and improvement of relations with the U.S. and the West in general. This also makes more sense when one considers the military competition with China in the Far East as well as in the third world (Friedman 2015). Brezhnev was unwilling to risk nuclear brinkmanship in 1967 (Ginor 2000) and 1973. In the thick of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1973, when the U.S. launched itself into a nuclear alert mode to deter Soviet counter-responses, Brezhnev demurred that he “won’t fight for the Arabs...the people will not understand. And above all we don’t have any intention of being dragged into world war because of them” (Haslam 2011: 276).

The Soviet Union, under Brezhnev, also discouraged communist parties in Europe (especially Italy and Portugal) from making any attempts at seizing power since it could lead to U.S. hostilities and compromise détente (CIA Research Study 1976). He did not make any countermove when the U.S. overthrew Soviet leaning regimes in Indonesia and Chile. On Poland, Brezhnev preferred the non-use of force over facing western sanctions and diminished linkages. Such economic and technological linkages were essential for “the strengthening of the Soviet Union” (Session of the CPSU CC Politburo, 1981). The foreign policy constraints the Soviet Union faced in this regard in 1981 ties well with the description of American objective vis-à-vis the Soviet Union as laid out by Henry Kissinger in a conversation with French President Georges Pompidou, “to paralyze the Soviet Union...enmesh them” (Kissinger-Pompidou 1973).

In two aspects, however, Soviet conduct seemed somewhat expansionist – regardless of whether they were aimed at balancing American power. First was the Soviet military and naval build-up. The second was the increased Soviet support to third world movements. But even here conventional wisdom misleads. Soviet military spending grew at only 2.5 % during the Brezhnev era, a little less than its overall GDP growth (2.7%) (Noren 2003: 33).

#### *War Scares and Soviet Insecurity*

Even as western scholars and the press were beginning to settle down for bipolar parity and even U.S. decline (Kennedy 1987; Rosecrance 1979; Keohane 1984), the Soviets were gripped by a permeating war scare since 1981 which would reach its most acute form in 1983. This fear and insecurity was fed by American disillusionment with detente and the largest peacetime build-up of the military in the nation’s history. Sharp rhetoric by President Raegan describing the Soviet Union as an ‘evil empire’ along with new strategic innovations such as Air-Land battle and the doctrine of ‘full spectrum operations’ further fed the said insecurity. The U.S. also carried out PSYOPS that involved provocative air and naval probes near Soviet territory. The maritime component of these exercises demonstrated to both sides that the U.S. Navy could escape Soviet ocean surveillance systems, tactical warning systems as well as penetrate air defence systems. The use of allies and their bases in countries such as Iceland, Norway, Britain and Japan greatly facilitated this exercise (Schweizer 1994: 8-

13). Describing one PSYOP plus intelligence gathering operation in 1981 Fred Kaplan writes,

“Navy combat planes simulated a bombing run over a military site twenty miles inside Soviet territory. The Ships and the planes maintained radio silence, jammed Soviet radar, and transmitted false signals; as a result, they avoided detection, even by a new Soviet early-warning satellite orbiting directly overhead. An internal NSA history noted ‘These actions were calculated to induce paranoia, and they did’” (Kaplan 2020: 158).

President Raegan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in March 1983 which threatened to upend Mutual Assured Destruction. Summing up the psychological effect of these actions Benjamin Schweizer writes, “Moscow did not know what the US *would* do. Even so, it had learned a disturbing lesson about what Washington *could* do in a wartime situation or other crisis” (Schweizer 1997). In response to the deployment of Soviet SS-20 (RT-21M Pioneer) IRBM’s in Eastern Europe, the U.S. sought to deploy the Pershing -2 IRBM’s in West Germany. This represented a threat of a new order to the Soviet Union because these new missiles were capable of neutralizing Soviet command-and-control bunkers and missile silos as well as make possible “a super sudden first strike” since the flight time was likely to be only four to six minutes (Kaplan 2020).

The shooting down of a civilian Korean Airlines Boeing 747 that had strayed into Soviet territory in September 1983 further sharpened the tense atmosphere between the two powers. Soviet internal estimates themselves drew a pessimistic picture – concluding that the “correlation of forces” was turning sharply against the Soviet Union (Lee 1995; Asparturian 1990). During the same time, Yuri Andropov had sent a ‘paranoid cable’ to KGB officers “warning of the growing threat of a nuclear apocalypse” (Kalugin 1994: 302). As early as 1980 and even during the Carter administration, Andropov was convinced by statements made by President Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Pentagon officials that the U.S. sought nuclear superiority and considered a nuclear first strike justifiable (Wolf 1997: 326). Carter’s spending on silo-busting MX missiles also did not help soothe Soviet fears.

It is in this context that the nuclear war scare of 1983 makes sense. NATO’s realistic and elaborate military exercises in December 1983 had the effect of convincing the Soviet

leadership that the exercises were a cover for and a prelude to a real war involving a nuclear first strike on the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The imbalance of power had so shifted in the early 1980s that Fred Kaplan notes, “if the big war came, the United States would win” (Kaplan 2020: 157).

Balance of Threat theory posits that states balance against offensive capabilities, “All else being equal, states with large offensive capabilities are more likely to provoke an alliance than those who are either militarily weak or capable only of defending...Tirpitz's ‘risk strategy’ back- fired for precisely this reason. England viewed the German battle fleet as a potent offensive threat, and redoubled its own naval efforts while reinforcing its ties with France and Russia” (Walt 1985: 11). The early 1980s saw the U.S. deploy a range of offensive capabilities and doctrines aimed at the Soviet Union. And yet by 1985-86, the Soviet Union was ready to end the cold war and trust the U.S. in helping manage Soviet decline. By 1990 the Soviet Union would agree to a united Germany remaining under NATO and even convey to the U.S. side that they saw its role in the management of European security as necessary and desirable (Malta Meeting Transcript 1989).

The episode and the period of insecurity also reveal that despite such acute fears of a nuclear first strike from the U.S. (an existential threat but not a territorial one) the Soviet leadership remained concerned primarily about the implications of German power during the end of the cold war. Nuclear weapons have the capability to devastate a nation but it still is a qualitatively different from territorial threats, the latter being more pertinent to balance of power thinking and behaviour. Despite the U.S. having thousands of deployable nuclear missiles, the Soviet Union was still much more sensitive to Germany acquiring nuclear weapons or even having a say in nuclear affairs within a multilateral setup such as MLF. In a series of talks in September-November 1966, the U.S. eventually assured the Soviet Union that there would be no transfer of nuclear weapons “whatsoever” to West Germany – ruling out MLFs or any other framework that would discretely provide the same access to nuclear weapons. The same agreement allowed for U.S. nuclear deployments in Germany however.

## **Soviet Trust in the U.S. during the end of the Cold war: 1985-1990**

States balance against potential hegemon because the power disparity itself enables and tempts the hegemonic state to threaten the core interests of the balancing state. As such, Soviet retrenchment in the late 1980s ought to have made the Soviet Union even more wary and fearful of the existing hegemon. In fact, such anticipation itself should have acted to strongly discourage any such Soviet retrenchment. What instead transpired was both Soviet peaceful retrenchment as well as increasing trust toward the U.S. If the Soviet Union could have afforded such trust during such clear power asymmetry, then why did it participate in the cold war in the first place? As William Wohlforth had observed, “What is striking about the whole story is how many unprecedented signals and gestures were needed to reduce American uncertainty about Soviet intentions (and how few such signals the Americans had to send to reduce Gorbachev’s uncertainty concerning their intentions)” (Wohlforth 1996: 263). The widespread consensus amongst analysts and scholars in mid to late 1980s was that given its great power status and history, the Soviet Union was unlikely to undergo a peaceful decline. Paul Kennedy summed up this view in 1987, “there is nothing in the character or the tradition of the Russian state to suggest that it could ever accept imperial decline gracefully” (Kennedy 1987: 514). Influential figures such as Patrick Moynihan and Zbigniew Brzezinski also thought that Soviet decline would lead to foreign policy aggressions (Moynihan 1979). One view, even as late as 1990, held that “Decaying superpowers do not go quietly into the night” (Malia 1990: 297).

Andrew Bennett attempts to clarify the puzzle by critically evaluating existing explanations for the same. He discredits the realist explanation offered by Wohlforth and Brooks because conditions of economic decline and a bloated military budget had existed in the 1970s as well (Bennett 2003). Furthermore, if nuclear weapons facilitated Soviet trust then what explains the U.S. lack of trust towards the Soviet Union? Bennett also explains how theories pertaining to the balance of power in international relations had convinced the Soviet Union that a ‘declining or retrenching’ state earns more allies and lesser opposition (Bennett 2003: 179). Similarly, ‘costly signalling’ of peaceful intentions (Kydd 2000) explains U.S. gradual belief in Soviet intentions and not Soviet trust in the U.S. in the first place – since the U.S. undertook no such measures. Costly signalling included lopsided or unilateral Soviet

concessions in the form of the INF treaty and the December 1988 Conventional Force Reductions, along with withdrawal from Afghanistan as well as non-use of force in Eastern Europe further elicited U.S. trust.

*Soviet Trust in the context of the international history of Balance of power*

A broader review of European (including Soviet) perceptions of and reaction to U.S. power makes the above less of a puzzle. What the debate – whether it was balance of power, domestic politics, decline, ideas, personal interactions – misses is that the kind of trust being analysed is not unique to the Soviet Union. As previous chapters have shown, Britain after 1865, Germany in 1918-19 and again after 1945, Japan after 1945 (all former adversaries of some kind) exhibited and acted on the basis of trust in the U.S. and to a degree that is not common or even discernible in great power politics in general. Even during and throughout the cold war, the Soviet Union demonstrated significant trust. The Peace Offensive in 1953 was similar to Gorbachev's own radical foreign policy in various ways as it involved retrenchment, diplomatic concessions as well as unilateral arms reductions. Scholars and historians who examine the episode are almost unanimous in their opinion that the U.S. missed an opportunity to address the division of Europe or even roll back the cold war by not responding adequately to the offensive.

Khrushchev's détente and cooperation against China with the U.S. as well as Brezhnev's proposal for an alliance aimed against China are yet additional pointers to the element of trust that the Soviets either placed or wanted to place in the U.S. William L. O'Neil, for instance, describes Eisenhower's attitude towards the Soviet Union at the time as 'baffling' and Bennett Kovrig argues, "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the West missed a rare opportunity in the spring and summer of 1953 to renegotiate the division of Europe" (O'Neil 1986: 208; Kovrig 1991: 53). Caroline Kennedy-Pipe argues that the Soviet Union "moved rapidly to try to secure some form of détente with the western powers partly in the hope of preventing the incorporation of West Germany into the military alliance" (Pipe 1995: 172-173). This thesis implies that fear of German rearmament took precedence over the need to balance global American power (if the latter effort was indeed undertaken or possible). Despite the language of a global superpower contest and bipolarity and a clash of ideologies the geopolitical worldview of the Soviet Union was still very regional and

Eurasian – with concerns over the rise of Germany, China and Japan. During Talks with Gorbachev in June 1990 for instance, Margaret Thatcher tried to convince Gorbachev that “it was in the Soviet Union’s own interests that a unified Germany should be part of NATO, because otherwise there would be no justification for the presence of US forces in Europe...the crucial condition for European peace and stability”. She was surprised to find that the General Secretary did not disagree (Thatcher 1993: 802).

The U.S. delegation led by President Bush was in for a similar surprise during the Malta summit with the Soviets on December 2-3 1989. President Bush went into the Summit expecting that the Soviets would call for U.S. withdrawal from Europe. Condoleeza Rice was surprised to hear the Soviet delegation express their desire for the U.S. to continue to be engaged in Europe (Sebestyen 2009: 403). But similar statements by Gorbachev can be traced back to January 1989, if not earlier, as the Strasbourg speech of June 1989 indicate, “In the meantime, it is precisely on the basis of the outmoded stereotypes that the Soviet Union continues — although less than in the past — to be suspected of hegemonistic designs and of the intention to decouple the United States from Europe” (Gorbachev Address 1989).

Despite the series of crisis that was propelled by the rise of West Germany in the 1950s (1958-1962) Nikita Khrushchev consistently sought to improve relations with the U.S., if only to reduce military spending and focus on the Soviet civilian economy (Taubman 2003). Such an initiative, though not as radical, could be considered as a puzzle once viewed from within the framework of hegemonic war theory or balance of power theory. As Taubman writes,

By 1958 ...he (Khrushchev) had opened the USSR up to Western influence despite the risks for his regime; he had just jettisoned the Stalinist notion that another world war was inevitable; he had made deep unilateral cuts in Soviet armed forces and moved towards western positions on disarmament; he had pulled Soviet troops out of Austria and Finland; he had encouraged reform in Eastern Europe; he had pleased for a four-power summit or at least an informal invitation to the United States (Taubman 2003: 399).

U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson’s cable to Washington in March 1959, on the other hand, highlighted the intransigent nature of U.S. responses to such overtures,

“We have refused these overtures, or made their acceptance subject to conditions he as a communist considers impossible. We are in the process of rearming Germany and strengthening our bases surrounding Soviet territory. Our proposals for settling the German problem would in his opinion end in dissolution of the communist bloc and threaten the regime in the Soviet Union itself” (Thompson to Secretary of State 1959).

In May 1955, the Soviet Union proposed multilateral conventional and nuclear arms reductions and based on a previous Anglo-French memorandum meant for the UN Disarmament Subcommittee. The plan would have entailed the disproportionate reduction of the number of Soviet soldiers from 5 million to 1 – 1.5 – a number originally suggested by western powers. In exchange, the U.S. would agree to the destruction of stocks of nuclear weapons while the Soviet Union was to follow suit on this aspect as well. Despite such significant concessions, the U.S. withdrew its support to these negotiations - thereby ending the matter (Evangelista 1997; Noel-Baker 1958).

Soviet trust in the U.S., thus, rather than being a function of particular problems in the Soviet economy or Gorbachev’s personality and new thinking, could be part of a larger explanation. American insularity could explain this trust. Soviet retrenchment and the end of the cold war also owes something to the changed Soviet perception of the nature of the West German state/society and its power. This was both a result of increasing cooperative contacts between Bonn and Moscow as well as the ‘taming’ of German power within NATO as well as the European Economic Community (Mueller 2011).

### *Soviet trust in Germany*

while the central puzzle is one of the long peace between the U.S. and Soviet Union it is worth remembering that in both world wars the two sides were allies and against a common enemy – Germany. In this regard, FRG’s signing of the 1963 Non Proliferation Treaty, the treaties with Poland and Soviet Union in 1970 (involving renunciation of force and inviolability of borders), the West German recognition of the GDR all contributed to the building of trust towards Germany on the Soviet side. Economic cooperation as well as cooperation on a wide variety of issues further facilitated this trust-building (Loth 2001: 106). By 1978, while castigating the U.S. for not agreeing to conventional arms reduction in central Europe, Brezhnev approvingly quoted German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt as



saying, “there is much more mutual trust in Europe today than at any time in the past decade” (Brezhnev attacks, NYT 1978). It is also interesting to note, the above West German concessions and overtures were supported and encouraged by the U.S., with an eye on reassuring the Soviet Union as well as containing Germany. In some sense, Soviet trust in the U.S. had boiled over to Soviet trust in Germany – since a Germany allied to the U.S. was likely to act in a much more restrained manner than otherwise.

## **Conclusion**

Balancing consists of a power taking the initiative to take steps (internal and external) to reduce the power gap between itself and the targeted power in order to secure its territorial integrity and sovereignty. A power gap did exist, and a significant one, between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, favouring the U.S. However, by all metric the direction of balancing flowed from the U.S. towards the Soviet Union rather than the other way around. The U.S. balanced Soviet power, with the latter having to respond to such balancing. There is enough evidence that indicates that the U.S. considered Soviet power to be a problem in itself and not just its policy or actions or regime. In Balance of Power theory (especially defensive realism), the hegemonic power, satisfied with the power gap and intent on preventing counter-balancing coalitions, is likely to be on the strategic defensive. It is likely to be the power more intent on buying time in order to focus on building its capabilities and preventing balancing behaviour. However, as we have seen in this chapter it was the Soviet Union that exhibited such diplomatic traits rather than the U.S. The Soviet Union was much keener to end the arms race as well as settle the German problem in order to freeze the status quo.

Balancing also involves identifying the primary threat to a state’s territorial survival (from war and annexation). The U.S. clearly identified the Soviet Union as the closest approximation to a threat to American security interests but it is not clear if the Soviet Union made the same identification. Firstly, the Soviet Union had objections to American policies and not power – evidenced by its objections to restating German statehood and also the U.S. policy of containing the Soviet Union through encirclement. Secondly, the Soviet Union was as concerned, if not more, by German, Japanese and later Chinese power during the extent of the Cold War as it was by American power. Stalin’s primary concerns even in

1945, unlike that of the U.S., concerned regional threats such as Japan and Germany and their future re-emergence as great powers within a 15-20 year timeline. He had for instance told his advisers in August 1945 that Japan had to be kept vulnerable from all sides “and then she will keep quiet” (Holloway 1994: 124). To the degree that the Soviet Union had regional concerns and threats to that degree, we can infer that it prioritised continental threats and threats to its territorial sovereignty. After all, the Soviet Union/Russia in its recent history had experienced territorial invasion only from Germany and Japan to a lesser degree – while the U.S. served as its ally against both powers.

This is not to say that the cold war was not real or that U.S. weapons and deployments did not concern the Soviet Union. The two powers did compete for alliance, proxies and satellites in the third world. Soviet and American forces came face to face in various situations – Air war over Korea, the Cuban Missile crisis, the Checkpoint Charlie affair in Berlin and so on. But the key difference between such crises and the diplomacy between Germany and Soviet Union prior to June 1941 June, for instance, is that neither side seriously considered an invasion of the territory of the other side during the planning stages of the crises. In other words, these crises (including the arms race), was to a degree more non-spatial than competition between the Soviet Union and Japan in Manchuria in the 1930s or between Germany and the Soviet Union in Europe. During both competitions (Soviet Union-Germany and the Soviet Union – Japan) the actors eyed large chunks of the other side’s territory as a way to enhance their own security – either as buffer, or to enhance one’s own resource base. In contrast, there was no element of ‘lebensraum’ between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. For the U.S., containing the Soviet Union implied deterring Soviet aggression, weakening the Soviet empire through arms racing and influencing Soviet policy and strategy. For Germany and Japan, containing the Soviet Union implied war and annihilation. This difference cannot be explained without reference to political geography.

With the deterioration of relations with China, the Soviet Union conveyed more concern regarding the rise of Chinese power, despite all its backwardness, than it did about American power. The Soviet Union sought détente with the west so that it could strengthen its military and infrastructure presence in the far east, facing China. In numerous private conversations, Soviet leaders expressed their deep ‘neuralgic’ concerns regarding ‘yellow hordes’ from the

east overwhelming and sweeping through the Russian landmass. As well will later see in the case of France, historical memory plays a strong interspersing role in reinforcing balancing choices. French experience of three major wars with Germany within 80 years continued to guide its Germany policy throughout the cold war. Similarly, experience vis-à-vis Germany and the Mongol invasions reinforced Russian fears of these powers in the present. The U.S., owing to its geographical location never posed a territorial threat to any of these powers – Germany, the Soviet Union and Japan. This explains the lack of fear towards American power even in democratic Germany and Japan and their alliance with the U.S. during the cold war. By contrast, Soviet leaders and society have even less negative historical memory towards the U.S. – a reality that was bound to further facilitate the peaceful end of the cold war and Soviet trust in the U.S.

There is this idea that an imbalance of power can be somewhat peaceful, “A preponderant power, so the argument goes, is likely to feel secure because it is so powerful relative to its competitors; therefore, it will have little need to use force to improve its position in the balance of power” (Mearsheimer 2001: 81). This thesis implies that the cold war was peaceful because the Soviet Union never came close to parity vis-à-vis the U.S. The second implication is that if the Soviet Union were to come close then the U.S. would have been tempted to or actually would have waged a preventive war to recreate the power gap, in its favour. But is it not also possible that the U.S. could adopt an alternative approach – offshore balancing? Faced with a dangerously rising Soviet Union, could the U.S. not resort to pre cold war strategies? Could it not allow for a German buildup similar to British political and military aid to Japan prior to the Russo-Japanese war. If the second approach were more likely than an extremely costly preventive war – the outcome of which could not be guaranteed in any case - then the long peace of the cold war is *not* explained by preponderance per se but the geographic features of the contest between the two powers – any invasion by either side being close to inconceivable or extremely undesirable (costly). But wasn't the German invasion also immensely costly? It was relatively easier for Germany to manage such an invasion than it would be for the U.S. and more crucially – the costs of standing by and tolerating increasing Soviet accumulation of power posed both a more certain and more direct threat to German territorial integrity. In some sense, after all, the cold war also has more in common with the great game between Britain and Russia for

most of the 19th century than preventive wars between Russia and Germany or between France and Germany. If the long peace of the cold war is a puzzle then so is the great game, (an intense geopolitical competition that spanned from the Mediterranean to India and even Northeast China) which did not lead to war between the two primary participants. How could Russia attack and invade Britain when the British fleet was far stronger than the Russian fleet? How could Britain launch a Napoleonic invasion of Russia aimed at eliminating the latter as a great power when the strength of its army paled in comparison to Russian army? Britain and the U.S. shared a similar long peace for most of the 19th century after all – where strategic and territorial conflicts were managed without resorting to war (except for 1812-1814).

Structural realists also point to an additional variable to explain the long peace – that weaker powers could not attack stronger powers because of the certainty of losing such a war. Furthermore, whereas wars between weaker powers were possible, owing to rough balances, they could still be restrained by the larger powers if the latter deemed such an event to be unfavourable to the overall status of the international order or the global balance.

This opens up various further questions than addresses the puzzle. How could these assumptions explain Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor or even China's bellicosity vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in 1969? Secondly, why did the larger powers so consistently veto bellicosity from their weaker allies? How is it that in most cases, the calculation of the larger powers leaned towards status quo/caution rather than adventurism or a willingness to risk conflict to redress the balance of power?

American insularity could again explain the puzzle. What is also unique about the cold war, if not the most unique feature, is that weaker powers (Japan, Germany, France, UK) chose to subsume their own national security strategies under and within the U.S. led security system. Nation-states, especially proud Westphalia nation-states, generally have been extremely reluctant to surrender their own national security tasks to another power (especially a hegemon). But these same states were willing to do the same vis-à-vis the U.S. and accept significant curbs on their autonomy for the sake of deferring security tasks to the U.S. In that sense, American hegemony (an invited hegemony) both caused the European

peace among European powers as well as brokered a somewhat stable cold peace between Europe and the Soviet Union.

What one notices about Soviet behaviour is the importance it attached to its former strategic threats - Germany and Japan. The Bipolar cold war framework blinds us to this aspect of Soviet foreign policy. American preponderance and expressed hostility also drives us toward the idea that the Soviet Union would focus all its politico-security choices towards containing the American threat. But while obviously concerned and anxious by this threat, the Soviet Union seemed equally concerned by the statuses of its previous enemies. This prioritisation, for whatever reasons, already weakens Soviet power by means of limiting its diplomatic choices and thereby its influence in the region. It also helps make Japan a ready ally of the U.S. throughout the cold war – and despite the two being primary enemies during the World War. In many ways, the Soviet Union continued to fight the Second world war; while the U.S. made ready allies of its former enemies. The varying geographical positions between the two goes a long way in explaining this asymmetry. Angela Stent, a renowned Russia expert, points out that the Soviets strongly criticised Mitterrand's idea of a common European defence because,

“Not only did Moscow fear the specter of a strong European defense; it was also concerned that growing Franco-German military cooperation might hasten the departure of American troops from Europe. And, however much the Soviets favour a weakened NATO, they prefer some American presence in Western Europe to none at all, especially if the alternative is a powerful Franco-German military alliance” (Stent 1989: 19).

In other words, contrary to classical realist thinking, a U.S. departure from Europe was unlikely to diffuse tensions in Europe – if anything it was likely to only exacerbate the same.

Contrary to the diagnosis of prominent realists at the time, who saw the U.S.-Soviet military presence in each other's close proximity in Europe as the most fundamental source of tensions, it may be the case that such a dyad was the most stable and peaceful option. In that sense, the primary question may not be, "what kept the cold war cold?" but "why is an America-Soviet competition in Europe (cold war) more peaceful than a German-Soviet one?". This distinction is brought out by Trachtenberg for instance, "The more important question is how a stable peace came to the world of the great powers during the cold war

period. If the NATO system played a key role in stabilizing international politics, and if the cold war in turn played a fundamental role in bringing that system into being, then maybe the cold war was an essential part of the process whereby the peace took shape. In other words, the cold war may not have been the problem, but rather an important part of the solution" (Trachtenberg 1999: 455).

It is also somewhat easy to understand why the Soviets would have been more concerned by a Franco-German military bloc. Such a bloc, if fully formed and built, was unlikely to have on itself the constraints that came with the transatlantic partnership. It was also more likely to turn Germany into a militarised society – akin to Wilhelmine Germany. It is in the Soviet interest to have a German army constrained and manoeuvred by the U.S. than have a German army that had to rely on self-help and its associated instincts.

Soviet retention of its forces in central and eastern Europe itself, after all, was aimed at acquiring security from a future resurgent Germany – not the U.S. Such balancing concerns vis-à-vis Germany did cost the Soviet Union. It spawned a European coalition under NATO aimed at the Soviet Union. It also cost significantly in terms of economic assistance its satellite countries in turn needed. Far from being a source of economic strength the soviet empire in Europe turned out to be a source of weakness. Soviet balancing of Germany during the cold war came with a heavy price.

## **Chapter Six: People's Republic of China and the U.S.**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, despite the power disparity between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, European states had decided to balance against the Soviet Union instead of the U.S. Such a choice in itself problematises Waltzian Balance of Power as well as Wohlforth's Power Preponderance theories. Even if European choices were sought to be explained in terms of anomalies such as the division of Germany or European integration, China presents a case whereby a newly emerging great power found itself free and capable of making balancing choices. Did balance of power considerations play a role in determining China's alliance choices? If so, how did it find itself allied both to the Soviet Union and later to the U.S. during the span of the cold war? What role did ideology play in such choices?

So far in previous chapters, a very strong pattern has been discerned. A great power would rather choose to balance its neighbouring/contiguous weaker great power than balance against the strongest state in the system. France balancing Germany instead of U.S or Russia or Britain. Germany chooses to balance Russia over Britain or the U.S. Japan chooses to balance Russia instead of the U.S and Britain chooses to balance Germany instead of the U.S.

The same pattern would expect China to ally with the U.S in order to balance against Soviet Power regardless of ideology just as the Soviet Union allied with the U.S against Nazi Germany regardless of ideological factors. Very surprisingly, however, after coming to power Mao chose to sign the treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union (Feb. 1950), in effect signalling a traditional alliance with the Soviet Union that is explicitly aimed at Japan and associated powers. Previous half-hearted and feeble attempts at forming alliances against American power consisted of Britain and France co-operating in Mexico during the American civil war. A second attempt was the Zimmerman telegram sent by Germany to Mexico seeking joint action in case of an American entry into the first world war. A third attempt was the axis pact between Germany and Japan in 1939-41 in the run-up to the second world war. All three attempts seem to have appearances of an effective balancing coalition at first glance but upon deeper investigation, they all fall apart as convincing candidates due to a variety of factors. In the case of the Zimmerman telegram,

the desperate last-minute overture was unreciprocated, thereby ending the matter. In the case of the Axis Pact, none of the parties benefited in the slightest bit from the alliance since they distrusted each other strongly and failed to achieve co-operation even regarding the Soviet Union, leaving aside the U.S. If anything, the alliance only helped further American interests since it allowed it to enter the European war through the Japanese back door by invoking the axis alliance.

Of all attempts, the Sino-Soviet alliance counts as the strongest candidate. It entailed a mutual commitment to shared goals, it enabled Chinese soldiers to battle American troops in Korea under Soviet air cover and the alliance itself caused significant consternation to the U.S itself. The Korean war itself was at the time seen as a consequence, in some form, of the recently forged alliance.

### **Aim**

This chapter, however, somewhat provocatively argues that the Sino-Soviet alliance from the very start was a sham alliance necessitated by Soviet hegemony over China and elongated by Mao's non-frontal strategy towards the Soviet-American détente. As such, the question 'when did the Sino-Soviet split occur' itself distracts from an arguably more equally important question – Was the Sino-Soviet alliance real? Surveying more recently released archives, David Wolff discovers that “Communist unity's brightest moments concealed suspicious maneuvering and mutual discontent” and that the sudden turn in 1958-59 “grew roots in leadership memories of earlier grievances” (Wolff 2000: 2, 1). This begs the question – did such historical memories suddenly revive in 1958 or were they always present in some hidden form? Was there a motive for either party to repress such memories and suppress their manifestation?

Discourses on the early cold war triangular relationship have suffered from the problem of the lack of a 'covering law' (Hempel 1942). The literature on the subject hence seems ad hoc, at times isolated from each other and lacking in overall coherence. For instance, accounts of the relationship move easily from prioritizing ideology to geopolitics to personal relations to racial/civilizational animosity to inter-block competition and then to reducing it to a simple matter of fluctuating bilateral relations.



Chen Jian for instance covers the entire period of flux but the work remains primarily Sino-centric (Jian 2001). Lorenz M. Luthi, Jeremy Friedman and Thomas Christensen focus on the Sino-Soviet alliance and split, while leaving out the U.S from the equation (Luthi 2008; Friedman 2015; Christensen 2011). Qiang Zhai focuses on the triangular relationship between U.S, China and Great Britain (Zhai 1994). Evelyn Goh and Nancy Tucker amongst several others enumerate on the Sino American Relationship (Goh 2005, Tucker 1983, 2012). Dieter Heinzig, Sergei Goncharov and others focus only on the early Sino-Soviet relationship (Heinzig 2015; Goncharov 1995). Meanwhile, Sergey Radchenko is rare amongst scholars of the subject to attempt a 'realist' account of the Sino-Soviet split but his work only covers the period 1962-1967. One of the few works that explicitly looks at the relationship between the three is 'Economic Cold War: America's embargo against China and the Sino- Soviet Alliance during the Cold War: 1949-1963' by Shu Zhang, but as the title suggest the emphasis is not really on the triangularity of the relationship and moreover it attempts to study the overall relationship through the much narrower prism of economic blockades (Zhang 2001). Another work that comes close to presenting a holistic interpretation of triangular politics between the three powers is Gareth Porter's 'Imbalance of Power' (Porter 2006). But even Porter's analysis is limited to attempting to understand the permissible conditions (i.e. Imbalance of power in America's favour vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and China) that led the U.S into the Vietnam War.

In other words, we still do not have a comprehensive account of U.S.-Sino-Soviet strategic powerplay during the crucial period of 1949-1972 that comprehensively accounts for all the alliance shifts. More importantly for this study, an understanding of the triangular relationship from a balance of power perspective is even more acutely missing.

### **Background: Making sense of China in the Cold War**

Accounts of the Cold war behaviour of the Soviet Union and the United States are not as incoherent, contradictory as the accounts of the behaviour of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The controversy is regarding Chinese behaviour, not American or Soviet. These accounts vary from emphasising domestic politics almost exclusively to ignoring it completely, from focusing on ideology to real politick, from Chinese pragmatism to a revolutionary foreign policy, from a focus on personality to a focus on economic

disagreements between China and the Soviet Union. The subsequent section shall provide a brief summary of the almost parallel discourses that exist on Chinese behaviour (Ideology and Power). The next section states the primary puzzles and paradoxes that need to be explained in any account of the triangular relationship for it to be coherent and complete.

### *Ideology and Behavior*

The ideological narrative perceives that Mao's China did not behave like a normal state (Jian 2001; Luthi 2008; Zagoria 1962). More than power politics it was driven by the imperatives of revolution. This explains China's alliance with the Soviet Union against the U.S in 1949-50. The alliance was followed immediately by the Korean War – which gave the impression of a combined communist monolith taking joint action against U.S. and 'western' interests. The confrontation and tensions over Taiwan seemed like it could only be explained ideologically – as communism being prevented from spreading itself to Chinese offshore islands, which were for the moment held by Chinese nationalists protected by American power. Similarly, Chinese support for communist guerrillas and political parties across south East Asia was interpreted as a revolutionary struggle against American backed capitalist governments and regimes.

Ideology seeks to explain the formation of the Sino—Soviet alliance and its eventual breakdown starting since the late 1950s. The first ideological shot fired by Mao was his response to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinism in 1956. Mao saw himself as being more deserving of being recognised as the leader of the international socialist bloc than Khrushchev and did not agree entirely with the latter's critique of Stalin. As such, in this account, Mao willfully decided to defer to the Soviet Union's leadership owing to his ideological high regard for Stalin – thereby forming the basis of strong relations from 1949 till 1953. Subsequently, his ideological contempt for Khrushchev, in turn, had led him to challenge the Soviet Union itself for the leadership of the bloc. Stephen Walt argues that ideologies may be a common bind amongst countries but if the ideology by its very nature requires for it to have one 'leader' or head then naturally competition may erupt among fellow ideological states (Walt 1987; Tashjean 1983). Secondly, the Soviet leadership empathically disapproved of Mao's Great Leap Forward program, which they argued would only bring about famine and ruin in the second most powerful socialist country. The third

aspect of the ideological debate was regarding disagreements in their respective stances over issues of international relations. It may be argued such differences over the right assessment of foreign policy trends and the prescribed policy that flows from it are usually not ideological but merely differences regarding the preferred strategies. After all, even the U.S.A and Great Britain had major differences between the two in their Far East and Near Eastern policy during the same time (Baxter 2009), without the disagreements leading to strong acrimonious feelings or a split in the relation. However, foreign policy disagreements among communist ideological states are more than just about the right means to be employed towards the commonly desired ends. A concession or admission of error in such a domain is and can be interpreted as proof of ideological fallibility. This, however, was a factor more important on the Chinese side than on the Soviet side. Mao created a cult of personality which ascribed the trait of infallibility upon him, an expectation that the great leader can never be wrong (Leese 2010). Furthermore, border conflicts and incidents were explained by Mao to fellow communist party members as the natural outcome of the drift towards revisionism in the Soviet Union. Luthi on the other hand however argues that disagreements on strategic issues emerged both out Mao's need to mobilise the masses and also genuine differences over the assessment and evaluation of strategic contexts (Luthi 2008).

In summary, there are three main ideological points of contention, which in combination were responsible for causing the split between the two hitherto communist allies. The first is regarding the leadership of the bloc. The second is regarding economic disagreements pertaining to strategies of development and the third contention is regarding assessments of the global balance of power (peaceful co-existence versus radical national liberation). Other issues worthy of mention such as 'cult of personality', the status of Stalin, the uprisings in Hungary and Poland can be either subsumed under the foregoing three causes or tangentially are related to them.

### *Power and Behaviour*

Even ideological accounts of the Sino-Soviet split acknowledge the role of power to some extent despite seeing ideology as the primary variable. Tucker and Cohen also emphasise power but the narrative remains primarily about domestic level variables to a large degree

(Cohen 1997). Overall, there are very few scholars who try to attempt a structural level power-based account of the Sino-Soviet relationship which depends as little as possible on ideological or domestic variables. Sergey Radchenko, for instance, emphasises that the conflict was primarily a conflict between two nation-states, instead of two communist states and not very unlike conflicts between Germany and Russia. As he writes, “Mao had an image of a hostile, dangerous Soviet Union, China’s number one enemy, not so much as an ideological threat, but as a threat to China’s national security and Mao’s personal wellbeing” (Radchenko 2009: 69). Despite the refreshing realism of the narrative, Radchenko does not seem to be able to completely do away with ideological factors and hence to a large degree the work has been characterized as being as eclectic an account of the split as most other interpretations (Radchenko 2019).

Any discourse that attempts to explain the triangular relationship would have to begin with Waltzian Balance of Power theory. The February alliance of 1950 between China and the Soviet Union would seem to be a pre-ordained event and yet another confirmation of the theory. It was only natural that the two weaker powers should come together against a much stronger hegemon. The Soviet Union had entered an almost global contest against the U.S over spheres of influence and control over central Europe and the People’s Republic of China had just emerged victorious from a civil war in which the hegemon had supported and aided the opposite side and also seemingly re-arming China’s most dangerous rival in the region – Japan. The two powers sought to co-operate and collectively balance against American power from Europe to Asia with a clear division of labour between them based on geography. Western hopes of motivating China to remain independent of Soviet influence came to nought with the outbreak of the Korean War. Chinese troops came to the assistance of its Korean allies and joined the battle against the American hegemon. China furthermore sought and was later entitled to the Soviet nuclear umbrella and extensive Soviet aid in the national development of China (including help in nuclear matters). Balance of power theorists disregard ideology primarily because they do not need it to explain the alliance and also they are sceptical of the claim that the internal nature of a state determines its foreign policy behaviour. Even if China were a capitalist state it could have possibly still allied with the Soviet Union in the face of a common threat, much like Anglo-Soviet alliance in the face a resurgent Germany. Incidentally, writing in 1964 and just when the split was

becoming ever more evident, Kenneth Waltz argued that the imperatives of balance of power and bipolarity meant that the Soviet Union (despite ideological and policy conflicts) would not let China be neutralised by the U.S. (Waltz 1964: 889).

The theory is coherent and parsimonious and yet it suffers from the obvious flaw in this case in that it does not try to and cannot explain the origins of the Sino-soviet split at a time when the U.S was growing even stronger by the day. During talks with Kissinger in June of 1972, the primary concerns of Chinese decision-makers seemed to be about possible reductions in American defence budgets and the qualitative edge in nuclear weapons and technology that the U.S had over the Soviet Union (Burr 2000).

In both cases, China worried about the possibility of the Soviet Union catching up to American power rather than the gap between the two powers increasing in America's favour. The tacit alliance between the U.S and China against the Soviets continued till during the end of the Cold War, making Balance of Power theory impotent in explaining much of the cold war history of the triangular relationship. Moreover, Soviet co-operation with the U.S to contain Chinese power in the 1960s also repudiate Waltzian theory since it counts as an instance whereby the two stronger powers collude/co-operate at the cost of the weaker power.

Other variants of Balance of Power from the Realist paradigm face similar explanatory problems in explaining the entire range of the triangular relationship. For instance, Wohlforth's Preponderance theory (Kaufman et al 2007; Fiammenghi 2011; Campbell 2009) would expect balancing against the hegemon to be unlikely to the degree that the hegemon is significantly more powerful than other states in the system and intensify as its power starts to decline and other states begin to catch up. But the alliance between China and the Soviet Union occurred when the hegemon was at its strongest and the split intensified when American power started to relatively decline in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Levy-Thompson thesis also does not explain the complications of the triangular relationship. The most significant balancing behaviour was demonstrated by China against the Soviet Union at a time precisely when the Soviet Union focused heavily on its maritime

power. Moreover, even the deployment of significant American military land forces in Vietnam against a Chinese ally did not prevent the further deterioration of the split. In fact, it can be argued that it was historical Russian attempts at expanding its sea power into the Pacific that brought it into conflict with both Japan and China in the 19th and 20th century (Bassin 1999; Papastratigakis 2011; Elleman & Kotkin 2010). As we shall see in a later section, it was Soviet attempts at enhancing its naval capabilities through the means of requesting access to the Chinese coast that had led to worsening relations between China and the Soviet Union.

It can be argued that it is because realist theories/explanations have been generally unable to explain the triangular relationship in its entirety that ideological and other unit-level explanations have generally gained greater currency in the wider literature on the subject.

### **China as U.S' 'Lost Chance': 1945-1950**

The 'lost chance' refers to the thesis that between the end of the world war to the Chinese civil war and finally up until the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty of February 1950, the U.S had a chance to politically establish better relations with the People's Republic of China and thus avert the aforementioned alliance, if not have a quasi-alliance of its own with a Communist China. Things that the U.S could have done differently range from abandoning support to the nationalists under Chiang Kai Shek to toning down domestic anti-communist rhetoric and resisting the influence of the China Lobby on Foreign policy. If the U.S could have earlier allied with Japan in opposition to Russian expansionism in China and then with China to oppose Japanese expansionism it stood to reason that the U.S could again ally with China, regardless of ideology to contain Soviet power in Asia. Even the U.S decision to use the Atomic Bomb on Japan, for instance, seems intricately linked to triangular diplomacy since one of the objectives was the deterrence of Soviet hegemony over the Northern parts of China, Mongolia and Korea. It was estimated that this kind of control and influence could in turn allow the Soviet Union to organize China as its ally. This view, for instance, is clearly illustrated when in a May 15 meeting the Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal Stimson noted, "it may be necessary to have it out with Russia on her relations to Manchuria . . . and various other parts of North China . . . Over any such tangled

wave of problems the S-1 secret [the A-bomb] would be dominant” (Copeland 2001: 155-161).

Relatively recent archival evidence demonstrates that any chance of retaining china was very flimsy at best and occurred only during 1947 with Marshall’s visit to China and meeting with Mao (Westad 1997). At this point, Stalin was negotiating with Chiang and hoping to work out a solution (Westad 1997; Heinzig 2005). Hence Stalin appeased the Guamingdong (GMD) by going to the extent of even displacing/evicting communists from Manchuria in September 1945 (by October of the same year however USSR seemed to encourage the CCP presence and penetration of North-East China in response to the American September landing in the eastern harbours of China followed by assistance to GMD troops in terms of troop movements). Stalin, in general, also put pressure on Mao not to start confrontations with GMD and also agree to great power mediation. Stalin in doing so was motivated by the objective of reaping the rewards of what was promised to USSR at Yalta and also signed into the Sino-Soviet treaty of 14 August 1945. For instance, by November of 1945, Stalin moved closer to GMD again, to maintain the peace. As a consequence, the Soviet Union handed over cities within 30 miles of the Changchun railroad to the GMD and also expelled and forbade CCP activities around the same area (Jun 1998: 57-59). Consequently, Mao seemed almost welcoming of American probing of friendly relations up until the Marshall mission, if not latter (Sheng 1993). This, combined with the failure of Stalin in reaching a negotiated solution with GMD created the conditions for the continuation of the civil war. At this point, the Soviet Union not only evacuated Manchuria but also helped CCP entrench themselves in the power vacuum that resulted from Soviet withdrawal. Stalin was generous in assisting Mao because he expected America to support GMD whole-heartedly. There may have been long term grand strategic common interests between the U.S and China at that time and maybe a GMD victory would have resulted in exactly such an alliance but Mao chose the Soviet alliance because it seemed to be the only thing on offer from 45 to 49.

Mao was not uncomfortable cooperating with the U.S. when it served his interests. He had made several bold overtures to the Dixie mission in 1944 proposing a joint amphibious landing on the Japanese held Shandong Peninsula. He also proposed and sought an explicit

alliance with the U.S. and an invitation to the United States to meet with President Roosevelt. These overtures were however sabotaged by Ambassador Patrick J. Hurley along with sections of the U.S military. There are equally strong counter-arguments suggesting that such overtures were insincere and were aimed at driving a wedge between the U.S and GMD (Sheng 1997).

During the civil war, both Mao and CCP resented Stalin's China policy as it had rested on Soviet national interests – and thereby based on support to the GMD. The CCP Politburo's dismay in 1946 with Stalin's interest in partnering with Chiang Kai-shek and undermining the CCP was expressed in clear balance of power terms,

“From the very beginning, China had depended on checks and balances between several states to maintain its independence, that is, using barbarians to deal with barbarians. If China were exclusively controlled by one state, then it would have disintegrated a long time ago” (CCP CC telegram 1946).

Such a sentiment was indeed more than compatible with the idea that even a communist China could have good relations with the U.S. and the west.

#### *The 1945 Friendship Treaty and the road to the Unification of China*

But this now brings us to the question as to what was the nature of the negotiations between Stalin and GMD in 1945 (Wang 1997). The negotiations were regarding Soviet interests within China – Lushun and Dalian ports on the Shandong peninsula, Chinese Eastern Railways in Manchuria (renamed as CCR in 1945), independence of Outer Mongolia, Soviet aid to rebels in Xinxiang and the CCP in Manchuria. The city of Dalian, for instance, was turned into an intimidating Soviet military base since late 1945 and housed close to 100,000 soviet troops along with tanks, aircrafts and other equipment. The CCP and Soviets had conflicts of their own in the region regarding socialist organisation in ‘the former colonial city’ (Hess 2017; Paddock 1977).

After gruelling negotiations, the treaty of friendship between USSR and the GMD government of China was signed on 14th August 1945, whereby China agreed to recognize the independence of Outer Mongolia, Soviet political and economic interests in China (The CCR and the ports were to be leased to the Soviet Union for up to 30 years) and the USSR,



in turn, agreed to cease aid to rebels and support a United Front government in China with the GMD heading the same.

In a rare admission of error in 1948, Stalin admitted that he had been under-estimating the CCP and its strategy in China (Jun 1998: 62-63). Since around early 1947, the CCP had not been heeding Soviet advice and they had been right all along. It is worth noting that the U.S. made similar errors in assessing the balance of power between GMD and CCP. The U.S had assessed early on that GMD would eventually unify China instead of the CCP (Harding and Ming 1989: 3-14; Clubb 1957: 378). This explains the fact that of the two parties, GMD had better relations with both USSR and U.S more consistently than did the CCP. The CCP featured only peripherally in Stalin's calculation in 1945 and only as a means towards influencing Chiang's decisions. Hence the USSR's behaviour ebbed and flowed from instructing/advising the CCP to give up armed struggle in order to support Chiang to reluctantly assisting CCP as a consequence of American support to GMD to finally accepting possible CCP victory in the civil war and a greater willingness to improve relations with the CCP. As Heinzig puts it, the road from the end of the world war to the alliance in 1950 had been an 'arduous' path marked by misunderstanding, conflicting interests and mutual mistrust (Heinzig 2015).

Both during the Second World War and the consequent Chinese civil war Stalin's policy seemed to be guided exclusively by his sense of Soviet national interests. Stalin was disregarding of the relevance and strength of the communist party in China, while at the same also suspecting prominent members of the Communist party of having pro-American sentiments (Radchenko 2009: 5-7). Mao was very much aware of this and resented Stalin's conduct during this period (Jian 1992: 9). As such, Stalin could not have been too pleased with the prospect of having to see a unified China under CCP control – given his perception of Mao's own nationalism (similar to his own Russian nationalism) as well as his fears pertaining to a Sino-American understanding. It is in this context that in 1948 Stalin had 'advised' the CCP, somewhat inexplicably, to not cross the Yangtze river in pursuit of nationalist forces. What he had in mind was the division of China so that the Soviet Union could continue to benefit strategically by playing off different power centres within China against each other. Mao spoke out against such 'advice' even as early as March 1949, "Some

friends abroad half believe and half disbelieve in our victory. [They are] urging us to stop here and make the Yangtze River a border with Chiang, to create ‘a Northern and a Southern dynasty’” (Goncharov 1995: 306).

Most illustrative of the nature of relations between the nationalist forces, Soviet Union and Chinese communists were the response and fallout of the Wannan incident in early 1941 (Heinzig 2003: 49-54; Jun 1998: 48). The nationalists had assaulted the new Fourth Army headquarters in Anhui and arrested its commanders. Stalin advised Mao to not retaliate and exercise restraint. Stalin was clearly prioritizing Soviet security interests by both aiding Chiang’s forces vis-à-vis Japan and also turning a blind eye to nationalist attacks on Communist forces within China. This incident greatly incensed Mao and propelled him to directly challenge the directions of Stalin and the Comintern. Subsequently, Mao launched the rectification program as a means towards asserting greater autonomy for himself vis-à-vis the Soviet Union (Jun 1998: 50-51; Teiwes 1988: 41-43). As Dieter Heinzig writes,

“From 1942 to 1944, Mao carried out a ‘rectification movement’ in Yenan with the help of security Chief Kang to force all party members to be loyal to him personally and to his ‘Sino-Communist’ line. The campaign was clearly designed above all – in Soviet jargon – to eliminate all Wang Ming’s ‘internationally’ oriented supporters, which Mao dismissed as the ‘Moscow group’. Party members who remained in the Soviet Union were labeled ‘dogmatists’ and at times also ‘right-wing opportunists’” (Heinzig 2003: 25-26; Yang 2020: 81-85)

Moscow objected to the program and it was subsequently called off the next year in order to not further alleviate the Soviet Union. Understanding the rectification program is crucial since it can be considered as a test case prototype of Mao’s politics during the Great Leap Forward, the anti-rightists campaign and the Cultural Revolution. Conflicting security interests propelled Mao to launch an internal campaign which aimed to enhance his own power within the party at the cost of Soviet influence. Ideology was ably used to facilitate the purging. In other words, power considerations dictated the use of ideology and not the other way around. Consistent with strategic interests, Mao decided to appease and placate the Soviet leadership again in 1945 when Soviet forces had entered the Asian theatre and the war against Japan. The rectification program also explains why Stalin did not trust Mao

before the negotiations in 1950 and why Mao had to go to great lengths during the same time to convince Stalin that he would remain subservient to Soviet leadership and avoid Asian Titoism. Incidentally, in September 1941 Soviet representatives would ask Mao how the CCP planned to help the Soviet Union in case Japan attacked its far eastern territory. Mao evaded the question and broke off the discussion accusing the soviet interlocutor of “lacking dialectical thinking” (Heinzig 2003: 52).

Discussions on America’s lost chance refers to the belief among certain diplomats, government officials that the U.S could have come to some understanding with Mao’s China despite the communist nature of the government because strategic interests of both nations coincided (Bernstein 2014). It could be argued that at some level, U.S. and China had complementary interests even during the time of Yuan Shai Kai in 1906-07 when U.S. sought to finance a Chinese rail line to balance “Russo-Japanese domination of Manchuria” (Woodhouse 2003: 18; Hunt 1983: 202-205). Roosevelt himself anticipated that the U.S in the future would have to arbitrate between the Soviet Union and China for instance and because of their differences in the Far East (Harding & Ming 1989: 80). Mao himself in 1944 conveyed to an American delegation that Chinese and American interests coincided and that the CCP was not dependent on Moscow (Esherick 1976: 307; Tucker 1983: 44).

While the case can be made that American support for the Nationalists post 1945 foreclosed the possibility of such co-operation (Goldstein 1989), it is also true that the Truman administration took several steps to withdraw support from the same and in turn take up a position of non-interference towards China during the later stages of the civil war (Beisner 2006, Ch 10 and 11). It is difficult to put all blame on the Taiwan issue as well since signals were sent indicating as late as 1950 that the U.S is open to allowing the unification of Taiwan on more or less communist terms. Even NSC 48/2 and 58/2 which were signed into existence by President Truman almost outrightly clarified the proposition that the U.S does not see indigenous Communist movements, outside the influence of Moscow, as threats to American security interests (Web to Lay 1950). Former Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Walter Bedell Smith expressed that “The United States does not fear communism if it is not controlled by Moscow and if it is not committed to aggression” (Gaddis 2005: 68). Meanwhile, NSC 10/5 outlined the rationale of covert operations as to “place the maximum

strain on the Soviet structure of power, including the relationships between the USSR, its satellites, and Communist China; and when and where appropriate . . . contribute to the retraction and reduction of Soviet power and influence to limits which no longer constitute a threat to U.S. security” (Avey 2012: 80). The U.S hoped to use Asian Titoism against the Soviet Union with China under Mao being equally interested in lessening its dependence on the Soviet Union. What then explains Mao’s choice to actually lean on one side towards the Soviet Union rather than towards the U.S or at the very least maintain equidistance? The answer could lay in Soviet Hegemony over China.

### *Nature and History of Soviet hegemony over China*

Analysis and discourses emphasizing Soviet hegemony over China used to be common but recent literature has by and large ignored this aspect or side-stepped it (Griffiths 1973, 1975 and 1971; Fitzgerald 1967, 1971; Low 1976). As a consequence, a causal variable that is capable of both explaining China’s lack of strategic options in 1949 and China’s deep-seated strategic fear/concerns over Soviet power is left unutilized. To better grasp the nature of Soviet hegemony over China, a brief foray into pre-world war history will be useful at this point.

Imperial Russia’s eastward thrust in the second half of the 19th Century consisted primarily of the Trans-Siberian Railway that reached Vladivostok and was primarily maritime in its goals. Its origins lay in Russia’s assessment of the fall out of the Crimean war with France and Britain (Bassin 1999). Russia had subsequently decided that in order to maintain greater naval leverage/options in case of another such war, Russia needed harbours in its eastern coast. Large amounts of Chinese territory was annexed by Russia in the late 1850s for the same purpose, to facilitate transport, communication to service the Pacific ports, which in turn incrementally necessitated Russian control over Mongolia and Manchuria. By 1898, work on South Manchurian Railway had begun as a consequence of initial greater understanding between Russia and China after the Chinese defeat at the hands of Japan in 1895. Russia used diplomacy to wrest Laishun and Dalian back from a victorious Japan in order to give it back to Chinese hands, only to subsequently annex those territories itself to be used as a Russian harbour and strengthen the Russian position in Korea (Papasstratigakis 2011; Lensen 1982; Paine 2009; Otte 2007). This was one (not the first) of several repeated

patterns whereby Russia took advantage of Chinese weakness vis-à-vis a third power (Japan, Britain) to ally with China, to then only use the alliance to seek unilateral advantages and Chinese territory for exclusive Russian national interests at China's cost (Otte 2007). This pattern for instance even led to the Sino-Russian war of 1929 and Russian hegemony over Manchuria, a fait accompli which by itself then tragically invited and necessitated further violations of Chinese sovereignty by other competing powers in order to catch up with growing Russian power in China (Maiolo 2010: 26-30).

Concessions were extracted by exploiting Chinese strategic and economic weakness, by offering loans and defensive alliances. Subsequently, at opportune moments such as the Boxer rebellion, Russia would renege on much of its promises of respecting Chinese sovereignty and move to either assume greater control over joint Sino Russian stock companies or moving troops within Chinese territories (Eskridge-Kosmach 2008). Mao was more than aware of this chequered history between the two (Gerson 2010:13-14) and could not help but notice that there were a lot of parallels between Stalin's demands in 1950 and previous Tsarist demands vis-à-vis China, as was made clear by Chinese propaganda material. Moreover, 'alliance' with China against Japan did not prevent Russia from committing acts of ethnic cleansing against Chinese citizens whenever Russia needed them to clear an area, such as those living near the Liaodong Peninsula in January 1898 (Paine 2009: 20). And even more ironically, Russia threatened China with violence when it demanded that the peninsula be handed over to Russia for the sake of Chinese security from Japan. In other words, Russia as an ally seemed as threatening and overbearing, if not more, than the enemy that Russia promised to protect China from. Mao himself, for instance, had already foolishly played into Soviet hands by agreeing to the Soviet occupation and annexation of Outer Mongolia in the past and in 1950 he was intent on not allowing further encroachment, be it in Manchuria, Xinjiang or Tibet (Elleman 1994; Garver 1998).

Outright defiance of the Soviet Union and political attempts at displacing the Soviets from Manchuria would have been a very difficult and costly proposition, similar to what China attempted to do in 1929. The last such attempt resulting in the Sino-Soviet war of 1929 in which the Chinese/Manchurian army was routed within 48 hours (Walker 2017; Patrikeef 2009). The panic that ensued propelled the Chinese foreign Minister at the C.T. Wang to

very ominously appeal to Japan to counter the Soviet invasion of Manchuria. As S.C.M Paine writes,

“Thus, within two years of the Russo-Chinese alliance, Russia had taken the very territory from China that the alliance was supposed to protect. This Russian incursion into southern Manchuria, a far more densely populated area than the incursion into southern Manchuria, a far more densely populated area than the region traversed by the Chinese Eastern Railway, caused a wave of Chinese resentment. It also led to the fall of Li Hongzhang from power” (Paine 2009: 22-24).

The often forgotten Sino-Soviet war of 1929 throws light on the counter-factual question regarding PRC’s policies towards the Soviet Union. In other words, if the primary interest of China in 1949-50 was in eliminating Soviet control/influence over Manchuria why did Mao not decide to do so by traditional means – by means of balancing or war? China’s experience in the 1929 conflict goes a long way in explaining why a frontal challenge to Soviet interests in Manchuria could not have seemed like a very attractive option. The negotiations between the two communist states in 1950 would further reveal that China avoided as much as it could a frontal challenge to Soviet hegemony in Manchuria.

The variable of Soviet hegemony also goes a long way in explaining why the Chinese communist leadership refrained from criticizing or ideologically challenging the Soviet Union before 1956 when Soviet forces and joint-stock companies still remained within China’s borders. Fears of complicating the wilful withdrawal of Soviet assets from China might have motivated Mao to feign acceptance of Soviet leadership of China.

Mao could not take Soviet concessions signed into a treaty for granted until China had regained physical control of the ports and the railways. The Soviet Union had, for instance, managed to play a double game in the 1920s when it posed (successfully) as an anti-imperialist power keen on returning Tsarist possessions and privileges to China – embodied in careful language in the 1924 Sino-Soviet Treaty - and yet worked ruthlessly to maintain and expand Russian power within China through deception, diplomacy and coercion (Elleman & Sharpe 1997).

*Forging the alliance - The Mao Stalin Summit, 1950*

The 'who lost china' debate assumes that there is something the U.S could have done differently that would have had an impact on China's alignment. The previous section on the Soviet hegemony factor helps us understand the context within which Mao found himself, a context where it became imperative to regain complete sovereignty by making the Soviet Union rescind its claims in Manchuria and the Shandong peninsula. China could not have achieved it through a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union as was attempted in 1928-29. Could China have attempted to achieve sovereignty by allying with the U.S in 1949?

This would have been equally problematic because it was discovered that the U.S may be efficient at deterring further Soviet encroachments like it did in Iran, Turkey, Greece but it was not as successful at reversing Soviet Political influence at regions which already had Soviet military presence such as Poland, East Germany and Eastern Europe generally. An alliance with the U.S with the intent of liberating Manchuria could have led to a permanent partition of China much like that of Germany and Korea. The strategic context hence allowed for just one option at the hands of Mao to liberate Manchuria – leveraging its position in the ongoing cold war to win Soviet acquiescence in the liberation of Manchuria. This also explains the general consensus that China's overtures to the U.S in 1949 were tactical – aimed at using the possibility of greater co-operation between the two as leverage vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the upcoming negotiations (Heinzig 2008: 158-165).

Needless to say, such a strategy came at great cost to Sino-American relations and also to China in terms of Taiwan and its casualties during the Korean war (see below). In other words, one could interpret China's behaviour as being ostensibly hostile to the U.S to convince the Soviet Union that Mao was not another Tito that could ally with the U.S. This was necessary to shake off Soviet hegemony since a frontal challenge was too risky and probably less likely to succeed. How important it was to the Soviet leadership that Mao did not turn out to be a Titoist can be gauged by the nature of the questions Mikoyan asked Mao in early 1950. Two examples of such questions are the following – How did Mao demonstrate to democratic leaders of China that some extra-territorial treaties were patriotic while others were imperialistic? And; Why did the CCP oppose the U.S. base in Qingdao while supporting the Soviet base in Lushin? (Shengfa 2009: 172). During the same talks

Mao, according to Mikoyan promised to “keep the secret on the issue of withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Liaodong” (Shengfa 2009: 174).

In this section, the nature of the discussions and negotiations that took place between the Soviet and PRC leadership would further bear out the hypothesis that Mao had embarked on a 'liberation through alliance' strategy and the Soviet Union, in turn, decided to sacrifice its interests within China in favour of appeasing China and shaping its alignment in the ongoing cold war. When Mao reached out to Stalin in mid-December 1949 to conclude a new treaty to replace the treaty with nationalist China of August 1945, Stalin managed to stall by arguing that such revisions would go against and undermine the Yalta agreements, which in turn would allow the U.S to violate its own end of the bargain (Weathersby 2002, Goncharov 1995).

When Mao reached Moscow in late December 1949 he was given the cold shoulder by Stalin and kept almost under house arrest for the first few weeks. This was done to test his commitment to the communist bloc and whether Mao was another Asian Tito. Mao was aware of Soviet apprehensions and hence calibrated his language/attitude/disposition to win over Soviet trust (Radchenko 2007). Mao accepted Soviet leadership within the alliance despite his strong independent streak and sought to reassure Stalin. However, when Mao had reached the limits of his patience on the first of January 1950 he made a subtle threat of returning to China much before the earlier arranged date and looking forward to negotiations with Britain, Burma, India among other countries and American recognition pending (Westad 1998:168; Shen and Xia 2015). This was a conscious deliberate move by Mao of playing the Anglo-American card as leverage and it worked immediately. Whereas previously Stalin stalled on signing a new treaty because of ‘Yalta’ now he approached Mao with a renewed vigour even stating ‘To hell with it!’, he continued ‘once we have taken the position that the treaties must be changed, we must go all the way’ (Radchenko 2007: 367-378). Meanwhile, the U.S in its wedge strategy attempted to reach out to the PRC leadership through the Press club speech of Acheson on 12 January 1950. The speech was a combination of forewarning of soviet hegemony over China, with special reference to Manchuria and also inducements in terms of intentionally leaving out Taiwan and Korea from Washington’s foremost/primary defense perimeter. Meant as a warning to Mao, who



was in Moscow during the publishing of the speech, Acheson noted, “What is happening in China is that the Soviet Union is detaching the northern provinces [areas] of China from China and is attaching them to the Soviet Union. This process is complete in outer Mongolia. It is nearly complete in Manchuria, and I am sure that in inner Mongolia and in Sinkiang there are very happy reports coming from Soviet agents to Moscow” (Acheson Press club speech 1950).

Washington operated under the presumption that China could be persuaded to - at the very least – refrain from entering the Soviet orbit and remain somewhat equidistant between the two superpowers. A holistic account of the gruelling negotiations between the Chinese side and the Soviet side helps to demonstrate the fact that theoretically, China had an interest in improving relations with the west from the very beginning. Mao was aware from the very beginning that Stalin distrusted him and was apprehensive about the possibilities of Mao becoming another Tito. The historical record shows that the most effective means of earning Stalin’s trust was by taking Anti-American steps such as arresting American consular officials in Shenyang in 1948 (Jun 2010: 234-235; Shengfa 2009; Goncharov et al 1995). Very tellingly, at the same time as the arrest of consular officials a new propaganda ideological campaign was launched simultaneously emphasizing the choice as between Imperialism (U.S) and Socialism (Soviet Union) or between Bourgeoisies nationalism and Proletariat internationalism. Liu Shaoqi for instance published ‘on Internationalism and Nationalism’ on 1 November 1948 and as Niu Jun notes, “Through this article, Liu tried not only to unify the party’s thinking but also to tell the Soviet Union that the CCP Politburo believed that working out a formal alliance with Moscow was a matter of principle. The CCP also wanted to show in practice, through a close relationship with the Soviet military in the Northeast, that its leaders were doing their best to satisfy all Soviet requests” (Jun 1998: 63). It was also the first instance when studying the works of Mao became a requirement for all party cadres (Gittings 1968).

But Stalin remained largely unconvinced despite the PRC burning its bridges with the U.S. For the sake of mutual re-assurance, the Chinese delegation feigned deference to the Soviet leadership and the Soviets, in turn, took care to signal that they acknowledged and valued such deference. The Soviet delegation had prepared frantically in case the Chinese side

brought up Outer Mongolia, a vast under-populated region to which both sides laid claim and the Soviets occupied since 1921.

Fortunately for Stalin, the Chinese side seemed to accept Outer Mongolia as a fait accompli in return for Soviet promises of eventual withdrawal from the ports in the Shandong Peninsula and also the Manchurian east Chinese railways (North 1950; Bradsher 1972; Elleman 2009). Negotiations on the later point were heated since the Chinese side refused even the Soviet demand of allowing its troops to be ferried in the railways till the time of the eventual withdrawal. In essence, the negotiations were a bargain whereby Soviets gave away control over Manchuria and influence over Xinjiang for Outer Mongolia. The negotiation can also be seen as a revision of the 1945 treaty which stipulated joint control over CER and the two ports for at least 30 years. In that sense, the CCP wanted the new treaty to reflect the new balance of power between a now united China and the Soviet Union (Shengfa 2009). The last thing Stalin wanted was for China to be recruited into the American camp in the cold war. As Shengfa describes, “Stalin did not want to give up the overall special interests in China, on the other hand, Stalin was prepared to sacrifice some of the USSR’s local interests in the Manchurian railways to acquire an important political ally (Shengfa 2009: 174; Goncharov 1995: 248-49). Stalin was moreover worried about Chinese power per se regardless of the cold war. He therefore most probably thought that appeasement, good relations and leverage over China was the best means of coping with future Chinese Power (Ulam 1976; Zagoria 1983).

Despite significant diplomatic achievements made by Mao during the trip, the Chairman in the final analysis still failed to establish ‘equal’ relations between the two countries. The secret clause to the treaty allowed for special exclusive economic rights for the Soviets in Xinjiang and Manchuria. Mao thus had to swallow his pride and concede on these special ‘colonial’ like privileges (Elleman 2009; Heinzig 2008). According to the secret agreement, China was debarred from forming joint-stock companies with third power entities in regions Manchuria and Xinxiang. The Chinese leadership was somewhat keen on seeking the aid of non-communist countries and even capitalist countries in exploiting oil and nonferrous metals in Xinxiang and other regions (Heinzig 2008: 379). The secret clause forbade this possibility along with foreign competition. It was because these clauses in effect nullified

the 'equal rights' inherent in the treaty and re-established Russian hegemony over parts of China that the Chinese side requested that they be kept secret from both foreign diplomats (lest they exploit it) as well as domestic Chinese public opinion (Goncharov et al 1995; Jun 1998).

Incidentally, American interests coincided perfectly with the CCP's interests in Manchuria as the U.S. sought to reduce Soviet influence in Manchuria (Copeland 2000: 161-164; Wingrove 2002; Sheng 2011). Hinting at the causal relationship between China recovering its territory/sovereignty and the subsequent Sino-Soviet split, Bruce Elleman notes, "Many experts who have studied the Sino-Soviet split begin their discussion in 1956, with Khrushchev's opening of the de-Stalinization campaign. However, the conditions that made a schism likely clearly existed before 1956, and are linked with the post-war Soviet occupation of Port Arthur and Dalian, as well as Moscow's control over much of Manchuria's industrial base, including the railways" (Elleman 2009: 201).

Moreover, Authors such as Ming Yen Tsai even go the extent of arguing that by providing arms to China the Soviet Union intended to prevent China from building its own arms production (Tsai 2003: 25-27). This strengthens the thesis that Soviet aid and assistance could not be compared to traditional aid and assistance among allies such as France and Russia before World War 1; the Soviet Union continued to pursue hegemonic policies aimed at control despite the return of territories and disinvestment from joint-stock companies.

The CIA, for instance, estimated that it was in the interest of the U.S. to push China towards ever greater economic dependence on the Soviet Union. This was expected to make the CCP realise the limits of Soviet aid and the consequences of economic dependence on the Soviet Union (Elleman 2019). Such estimates seemed somewhat validated by mid to later 1950's as Mao had become more and more eager to wean China away from economic dependence on the Soviet Union.

Serger Radchenko argues that what further propelled China towards aligning with the Soviet Union in 1949-50 was the promise of security, aid and global legitimacy (Radchenko 2019). This argument is somewhat unconvincing however. Logically, it puts the cart in front of the horse, so to speak. A Chinese alignment with the U.S. could have better serviced the same

interests. Such an alignment would have taken care of the need for security – from the U.S. Chinese leaders, along with American officials, seemed to be aware that the U.S. was in a better position to aid China's growth and development in the post war world (Service Report 1944). In terms of global legitimacy, the alliance with the Soviet Union and its concomitant war in Korea cost China global legitimacy. If anything, China would reacquire global legitimacy (along with a seat at the UN) only after its alignment with the U.S.

### **The Sino-American Cold War: 1950-1964**

#### *The Korean War*

The image of China as a menacing fanatical power under the ideological spell of Soviet Russia took form with the Chinese decision to directly intervene in the Korean War. However, the China's decision to enter the conflict was in reality a very carefully considered decision and had to do with reasons of national security rather than ideology. China could not show lack of ideological enthusiasm towards the communist 'liberation' of South Korea in front of Stalin. Neither could it let any foreign power cross the Yalu river and permanently threaten China's Northeast (a historical route of invasion). By most accounts it seems that the PRC may not have even been informed or aware of the final decision to invade South Korea. Such a war was not in China's interest. The newly founded republic was going through a de-mobilisation period starting from January 1950 and intensifying through April and May (Yufan & Zhihai 1990). When Kim il-Sung informed Mao in April 1950 of him gaining permission from Stalin to attack South Korea, Mao worriedly warned him repeatedly about possible U.S. involvement (Di 1994: 149). The historical record of the war and decision making demonstrates that far from being driven by fanaticism, the Chinese leadership was mostly against direct intervention even after the Inchon landing. In fact, the more popular suggestion was one of creating a puppet regime in the North as a buffer state even if it meant sacrificing Pyongyang to the Americans. Lin Biao was opposed to the intervention, whereas others such as Zhao and Peng Dehuai were for it (Yufan & Zhihai 1990: 105). The other factor that one notices is the mutual suspicion and lack of trust that prevailed between the Soviet Union and China throughout the Korean War. Although both supported the invasion with some hesitation, their aims met with friction (Weathersby 2002: 106). The Soviet Union for instance initially was not very keen towards a direct Chinese

intervention because it did not want predominant Chinese influence over North Korea. moreover, North Korean suggestions (Kim Il Sung) that absent Soviet approval he may consult with Mao the decision to invade South Korea played a significant role in preparing Stalin towards the decision to approve of the invasion plan (Christensen 2011: 51). Moreover, the Soviet Union shifted the heavy burden and risks on to China in the common pursuit, creating much resentment amongst the Chinese. The Soviet Union went out of its way to avoid engaging the American forces. On June 26, Soviet ships that had sailed from Dairen were ordered “to return to their own defense zone immediately” and throughout the war Soviet naval vessels stayed clear of the war zone (Cummings 1992: 631-632).

China entered the war after much deliberation and hesitation after almost deciding to not intervene in order to avoid confrontation. It entered conflict solely for the sake of national interest and when things had gotten really desperate from the security point of view. Zhou for instance argued that China should not “stand idly by at the North Korean disaster”. Peng Dehuai argued, “the U.S occupation of Korea, separated from China by only a river, would threaten Northeast China...The U.S could find a pretext at any time to launch a war of aggression against China....No concession could stop it” (Huxing 2013: 282).

In early October Mao had written to Stalin that intervention would be risky and costly. It is suspected that he was being partially sincere in reporting that the leadership had been veering towards caution and also partially hoping that the Soviet Union would put in significant aid – mostly in the form of air cover for Chinese troops - in order to help the Chinese decision for war (Zhihua 1996/1997). Stalin’s response was revealing. He argued that it was in China’s own interest to intervene even without Soviet aid “the major reason for Chinese comrades sending troops to North Korea is to prevent Korea from becoming an anti-Chinese base of the U.S imperialists and Japanese rising militarists. China is the stakeholder” (Huxing 2013: 282).

In fact, for most of 1949 what both Mao and Stalin feared was a possible attack by South Korea on North, followed by a military stalemate, in turn, compelling Japanese intervention. Stalin even went to the extent of dismantling the Soviet naval base of Chongjin and the withdrawal of air force special liaison officers from Pyongyang and Kanggye in order to signal peaceful intent (Weathersby 2002: 6). Kathryn Weathersby goes to the extent of

arguing that the Soviet Union and North Korea jointly presented Mao with a *fait accompli* when the war began. If this is indeed the case, then Soviet diplomacy could be described as one of ‘bloodletting’ (Nakajima 1979; Gromyko 1989; Zhihai & Yufan 1990). As Weathersby writes of Stalin’s fear prior and during the Korean War, “apparently Stalin’s fear that the PRC would not long ally itself with the Soviet Union. A Russian scholar who has seen the relevant documents has recounted to me that Stalin calculated that even though the United States might not defend the ROK, once it lost South Korea it would not then allow itself to suffer the additional loss of Taiwan. The United States would move in to protect Chiang Kai-shek, thereby preventing a rapprochement between the US and the PRC” (Weathersby 1993: 3).

The war also allowed the Soviet Union to extend its basic rights in North-East China beyond 1952 and till 1955 (Zhihua & Danhui 2006: 185-86). During the war, the Soviet Union encouraged China and North Korea to take a tough position during peace negotiations and also conveyed to the Chinese side that, “Chinese comrades must understand that if the United States does not lose the war, China would never reoccupy Taiwan” (Archive of the President 2005).

There was a similar misunderstanding regarding Chinese behaviour regarding the Taiwan straits from 1950-58. The Chinese kept up its rhetoric of imminent military action against the offshore islands and Taiwan and created a very bellicose environment. But it is worth noting that Zhou En Lai explained to Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that “if we stop the struggle against U.S. aggression in Taiwan, it would mean that we have to accept the status quo” (Huxing 2013: 283). Despite all the bluster, the Chinese exercised great strategic restraint and a very limited calibrated policy that was aimed at political/diplomatic ends rather than outright military conquest (Sheng 2008).

Perceptions of China as an ideologically driven power continued into the Kennedy administration despite several other members of the administration getting more and more persuaded by Chinese actions that they were capable of demonstrating restraint and were more conservative than previously thought (especially after the diffusion of the 1962 straits crisis). Kennedy himself vacillated on the question and at one point of time had very revealingly pondered regarding the puzzle of China accepting the Laos settlement behind

closed doors, “since communism traditionally pushed outward whenever it could” (Kochavi 2002: 121). Incidentally, Souvanna Phouma (The Laotian ruler to whom the puzzle was directed) explained this puzzle by stating that China was interested only in securing a buffer zone in North Laos from SEATO and had no other aggressive designs on the country (Kennedy-Souvanna Phouma 1962).

The axioms that guided American policy toward the PRC before the Korea war dissolved very quickly with Chinese intervention in October 1950 in the Korean peninsula. For instance, in early December 1950 British Prime Minister Clement Attlee had suggested that conduct towards China based on the assumption that it is allied to the Soviet Imperialism would only have the consequence of deepening Chinese dependence on the Soviets. Acheson replied that he did not disagree with the analysis, but, “The Question is not whether this was a correct analysis but whether it was possible to act on it.” He further stated,

“Perhaps in ten of fifteen years we might see a change in the Chinese attitude but we do not have that time available... if in taking a chance on the long future of China we affect the security of the United States at once, this is a bad bargain.... All that the Prime Minister had said was correct if we had time but we can’t buy our way into this poker game; the cost of coming in is too high” (Harding 1989: 165).

### *The Sino-Soviet rift*

The rift began after the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Chinese territories. The Anti-Stalin speech by Khrushchev seems to have allowed Mao to present his concerns vis-à-vis Soviet power in a manner which did not bear the direct signs of inter-state conflict or tensions. Ideology and in its contestation during the dual crisis in Hungary and Poland allowed Mao to be able to influence Soviet overall policy (Shen and Xia 2009; Kuo 2001). In terms of bilateral relations, Khrushchev seemed to have gone a long way in trying to improve relations with China, through aid (military and civilian) and nuclear assistance and so on (Radchenko 2007: 369-370; Luthi 2009: 81-82). Khrushchev for instance believed that Stalin had negatively affected the Sino-Soviet alliance by asking for too much in return for aid (Tsai 2003). Khrushchev, in other words, thought that a more equitable relationship with fellow communist states, and most importantly with China would go a long way in

strengthening the alliances. However, Mao's concerns vis-à-vis future Soviet power and hegemony could not be so easily assuaged.

Chen Jian and Lorenz Luthi, among others, have pointed to the saliency of ideology in explaining the Sino-Soviet split. Both accounts posit Khrushchev's anti-Stalin speech followed by Mao's denunciation of it as the first cause of the rift. The theory asserts that once the ideological disagreement and debate had begun it over time and gradually spread over to politico-military matters. In other words, there is a straight line connecting the ideological debate of 1956 to the Sino-Soviet border war of 1969 (Luthi 2008:12). A detailed rebuttal of this argument is beyond the scope of this chapter but it is worth mentioning that relations between the two had greatly improved even till as late as 1957 and began to sour severely only in the second half of 1958. Khrushchev himself, for instance, had the following to say to outgoing Chinese Ambassador in 1962, "We live with good memories that existed between us before 1958... We had the most fraternal and the most intimate relations then." (Radchenko 2009: 25). The same was echoed by Mao as he recalled later, "The overturning of our relations with the Soviet Union occurred in 1958; that was because they wanted to control China militarily" (Jian 2001:75).

A key illustration of the nature of Chinese concern vis-à-vis the Soviet Union can be found in the air and naval co-operation controversy between the two powers in 1958. This incident concerns Soviet suggestions to Mao that the two powers co-operate on air and naval matters (joint submarine fleet, long wave radio transmissions), a strategically important step that would incidentally require China to compromise China's control of its territory on its eastern coast. This suggestion drove Mao furious and he accused his Soviet counterparts of attempting to re-establish Soviet hegemony over China (Jian 2001: 115-116). Apparently, the Soviets were completely taken aback by this accusation. According to William Taubman, Khrushchev "had not realized that any foreign presence in China was anathema to Mao", with Mao having to tell him, "we do not want anyone to use our land to achieve their purposes anymore" (Taubman 2003: 391). Interestingly it was not only the Soviets who were surprised by this outburst and attributed it to Chinese or Mao's eccentricity but students and scholars of the split seem to have been as perplexed by it as well.



Lorenz Luthi for instance terms the incident as a squabble and attributes it differing opinions on military strategy between the two (Luthi 2008: 91). Odd Arne Westad, on the other hand, attributes the quarrel as an instrument created and used by Mao in order to shore up support, especially from the military, for his Great Leap Forward initiatives (Westad 1998: 20-22). In this context, the timing becomes important for Westad's explanation since the proposals came in the immediate wake of the meeting of the Chinese military leadership in late May. But Shu Guang Zhang argues on the other hand that Mao started getting concerned about possible Soviet attempts at controlling China in March of that same year when Khrushchev replaced Nikolai Bulganin as the Soviet premier, in other words before the May meeting (Zhang 1998: 213). Niu Jun argues the episode only acquires significance because it came at a time when China was no longer content to remain within the 'father-son' dynamic of the relationship with the Soviet Union (Jun 2005:5). John Garver describes Mao's reaction as 'hyperbole' and even raises the question of the state of Mao's 'mental balance' at the time for rejecting a sensible Soviet proposal (Garver 2003: 209).

Somehow almost all important accounts mentioned so far do not seem to want to take Mao's own words of outburst at face value when he is actually stating his reasons for opposing the joint submarine and communications project. He states his reasons in an unusually frank manner and they are his concerns regarding renewed Soviet hegemony and control over China, bearing striking resemblance to past Czarist policies vis-à-vis Russia (Mao Zedong-Yudin 1958, Mao-Khrushchev 1958). Hence, what is puzzling is not China's alarm at such a proposal but the actual proposal itself and especially the language in which it had been made.

The Soviet Ambassador Yudin, for instance, stated that the proposal - which required the Chinese to compromise on its own national sovereignty - was being made because Chinese geography provided good natural harbours. The absence of such harbours on the Soviet side prevented it from taking full advantage of the new submarines (Jian 2001: 73-74). The similarity between the logic of this explanation and the logic behind the annexation of Chinese territories in the Far East in late nineteenth century could not have been missed by Mao - having managed to undo the same only three years prior. The nature of the proposals and their implications was gauged by a 1982 RAND report in terms similar to how Mao

interpreted the same, “In addition to their obvious intention to constrain Chinese behavior, these 1958 proposals testified, among other things, to the continued chagrin of Soviet military leaders at the setback to Soviet operations occasioned by the surrender of the Manchurian ports” (Gelman 1982: 7).

Such varied accounts of a relatively straightforward event count as a puzzle. The ideology based accounts of Jian, Luthi and Westad for instance hardly mention the complex and bitter history between Imperial Russia and China and the role of Russian/Soviet hegemony in Chinese domestic and foreign policy. This under-estimation of the significance of Sino-Russian history could explain why certain scholars would not take Mao at his word when he alleges the Soviet Union of trying to ‘control’ China and instead interpret such outbursts as emanating from either ideological or domestic considerations. And neither was the point missed by Khrushchev himself, as he would note in his memoir, “we touched on sensitive chords of a state whose territory had long been dominated by foreign conquerors” (Zubok 2001: 254). Scholars of diplomacy are much used to ideology being used as a cloak for power interests, but on this matter, most accounts seem to argue for the obverse; an instance whereby power is being used to cloak ideology.

The year 1958 also saw the beginning of greater American-Soviet détente or co-operation. Mao himself was not necessarily opposed to détente since he preached and practised it after the end of the Korean war and the Geneva talks can be considered as an illustration of the same. However, the Geneva and Warsaw talks between the U.S and Chinese delegates aimed at normalising relations were not very successful, whereas the Americans and the Soviets were making significant strides in improving relations between the two. A Chinese Foreign Ministry note (July 1955) outlined Chinese expectations from talks with the U.S.,

“Intensify pressure on the US; strive to resolve some issues so as to make preparations for higher-level Sino-American talks about relaxing and eliminating tension in the Taiwan area. This meeting should not impede but rather will aid the discussion of the Taiwan issue at the four-power Geneva summit” (Plan for the Sino-US Ambassadorial Talks 1955).

Mao did not welcome better relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union as it automatically meant lesser dependence of USSR upon China and greater possibilities of great power co-operation at China’s expense.

1958 seemed to be a key year because it both witnessed the intensification of Mao's concerns vis-à-vis Soviet hegemony over China and also a re-evaluation of American strategic orientation from being offensive to defensive.

As Qiang Zhai writes while discussing the conclusions Mao expounded during several key meetings in September 1958,

“Mao pointed out that American policy toward China and the Soviet union was mainly defensive, not offensive. The United States was primarily interested in dominating the Third World, ... Thus, the offensive military threat to China posed by the U.S.-Taiwan security treaty... was no longer as serious or as immediate as had previously been thought. The Treaty was basically defensive and constrictive, designed to restrain rather than unleash Chiang. The Chinese leader also reiterated Beijing's willingness to resolve the dispute with the United States through negotiations” (Zhai 1994: 188; Di 1994).

Incidentally, the recognition of American 'defensiveness' also facilitated Mao's new 'intermediate zone' doctrinal line - which postulated that the U.S. was more interested in controlling the intermediate zone in the name of fighting communism. Such deliberations allowed him to support various third world countries in their 'liberation wars' against the U.S., thereby allowing China to not confront the U.S. directly, while also prodding the Soviet Union into withdrawing from détente as well.

Is it possible that the re-evaluation of the U.S. that had taken place in September of 1958 may have something to do with the antecedent threatening Soviet military proposals or even increasing Soviet-American detente? After all, Mao had always considered America's 'two China' policy to be a hostile conspiracy against China. The Second Taiwan strait crisis, if anything re-enforced the 'two China' theory and yet that did not come in the way of Mao re-evaluating America's policy as defensive. Hence, it is quite possible that the cognisance of the Soviet threat created incentives for Mao to re-evaluate the threat from the U.S. This is crucial because the re-evaluation sheds light on China's subsequent belligerence towards the U.S. internationally and also in the run-up to the Vietnam war.

*President Kennedy's Wedge strategy*

The Kennedy administration of the early '60s and even the Eisenhower administration to some extent in its late years seemed very inclined to the thesis that it was China that was the most severe threat to global and regional stability rather than the Soviet Union. At a Press Conference, President Kennedy articulated this view while describing tensions with China as, “potentially a more dangerous situation than any we faced since the end of the second world war, because the Russians pursued in most cases their ambitions with some caution” (United States Assessment 1963). The Russians were seen as calculating, rational and comparable to the moderate Mensheviks. Whereas the Chinese, on the other hand, were seen as erratic, fanatical and representing the Bolsheviks (Di 1994: 154; Kochavi 2000:53). To the degree that the U.S was moving toward a containment of China strategy - with tacit cooperation with the Soviet Union - to that degree balance of power theory is somewhat undermined. It is in this context that the American administration had approached the Soviets broaching the possibility of a joint operation aimed at neutralizing budding Chinese installations (Burr & Richelson 2001; Chang 1988).

Once Kennedy officials such as Dean Rusk and Walt Rostow were convinced of the irreversibility of the Sino-Soviet split they recommended adopting a wedge strategy, especially after October 1962 (Kochavi 2000). However, the administration was still uncertain about the road to take. This indecisiveness was augmented by U.S.- Soviet discussions in the spring of 1962 whereby earlier American estimates of Khrushchev were challenged and also by conflicting reports about the benefits of undertaking food aid to China in terms of its effects on Soviet behaviour.

One paradox of the wedge strategy however is that ‘wedging’, so to speak, was itself indeterminate on the question of ‘toughness’ on China. For instance, wedging in its first phase implied some sort of recognition and appeasement of China; we may call it wedging through inducement. However, the experiences of the Indochina Geneva conference in 1954 convinced the U.S along with Senator Knowland’s intelligence report at the same time and Eden’s conversation with Molotov, that applying threats and the adoption of a more bellicose approach to China would be more productive in bringing about a wedge in Sino-Soviet relations (Zhai 1994: 152). This framework also explains the American approach to China post-Cuban missile crisis despite the awareness of serious Sino-Soviet tensions

(Tucker 1996). The logic in both cases was that one great source of tension regarding the two were 'disagreements' on foreign policy issues and especially regarding the level of commitments the communist world needed to undertake in facing up to the U.S. Hence, any provocative American move in China's neighbourhood, such as Vietnam, would only cause further strain in the relationship by making the divergences in their national interests and foreign policies clearer to both of them.

It is also worth mentioning that Beijing softened its international stance greatly after the Korean War. During the Geneva conference, it was China that was more willing to reach out to the U.S than the other way around (as was the case in 1948-50). During the conference, Zhou En Lai took advantage of America's need to address the issue of American prisoners of war in China (Tucker 1996: 150). Mao signalled optimism during an address to a CCP conference in 1956 in the following way, "The current situation is turning better...our door is open. In 12 years, Britain, America, West Germany and Japan will all want to do business with us" (Di 1994: 151).

Such a foreign policy compelled China to demand restraint from its North Vietnamese allies in seeking re-unification. The agreements of the Geneva Convention of 1954 failed however for various reasons and gradually the situation worsened in South Vietnam, with the U.S side ever more actively assisting the Diem regime in the south and China supporting the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the north and the insurgency in the south (Porter 2006). In 1956 for instance Mao told a Thai delegation, "We need many friends, the help of many foreign friends. It does not matter which country these friends are from, including Americans and Japanese" (Khan 2018: 75). Incidentally, China and Soviet Union were simultaneously keen on peaceful existence, with the former giving up on it only after the Geneva talks with the U.S. failed and primarily on the issue of Taiwan (Di 1994).

In other words, whereas a wedge strategy required inducements to the Chinese side to distance themselves from the Soviets pre Korean War, the strategy was now aimed at promising better relations with the Soviet Union in order to help it distance itself from China.

Greater Clarity was however gained during and after the dual crisis of October 1962 (Kochavi 2000: 59-63). This is illustrated by intelligence reports that suggested that the Kremlin secretly almost welcomed western aid to India as a means of forcing China to the negotiating table. One would think that entering the brink of nuclear Armageddon with the Soviet Union would propel the American administration to subsequently seek better ties with China as a counter-balance but the experience, in fact, had quite the opposite effect. Firstly, the de-escalation was itself seen as proof of Soviet rationality and moderation. Secondly, it was concluded that the Soviets had been made aware of American conventional superiority during and because of the crisis. The Soviets had been 'taught a lesson', so to speak. Moreover (and further sharpening the Soviet-PRC distinction), individuals in the administration such as Rusk and Llewellyn Thomas interpreted that Khrushchev was forced into starting the crisis as a consequence of Chinese pressure in league with his enemies in the Kremlin (Kochavi 2000: 65).

American views of a moderate peace-seeking Soviet Union were strengthened and re-enforced after a test of nerves in which each side broached the other's thresholds. This new-found mutual understanding between the two led to greater co-operation between the two—resulting in Khrushchev's withdrawal from the Berlin dispute subsequently in January of 1963 and also the framing of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty which came at the cost of China.

#### *Détente as a threat to China's security interests: 1958-63*

Détente was a direct threat to vital Chinese security interests for various reasons. At the more abstract level, it was akin to abandonment by an ally. At the more concrete level, the results of détente started affecting China since 1959. Three primary consequences were upon the Soviet line on Taiwan, greater Soviet support to India in the ongoing Sino-Indian border conflict and probably most importantly - Soviet withdrawal of assistance to China's nuclear program. If such were the consequences of détente within three to four years, Mao had every reason to fear the outlines of the future if détente were to continue, intensify and result in the Soviet Union and the U.S. forming a quasi-alliance against China. After all, China was dismembered and annexed by several European powers in the 19th century by similar concerts or condominiums.

During this period, Mao and the Chinese Government did express their bitterness towards the Soviet Union for pursuing détente directly and yet also attempted to conciliate relations between the two till as late as 1961 (Wang 2005). Clearly, the PRC was not yet ready for a frontal challenge to the Soviet Union. Even as China and the CCP verbally and rhetorically attacked the Soviet Union for lacking anti-imperialist fervour, it itself sent feelers to the U.S. through various means in 1961-62 to try to improve bilateral relations (Kochavi 2002: 108-113, 118-119). The U.S. intelligence community at this point was intrigued by “the disparity between the overt and covert postures Beijing displayed” (Kochavi 2002: 111). In Noam Kochavi’s account, an American positive response to these feelers was blocked by Secretary of State Dean Rusk out of concern that any leak regarding a meeting between Averill Harriman and Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi would look and make the U.S. appear “weak and anxious” (Kochavi 2002: 112). Clearly, ideology or radicalness did not prevent China from testing the waters in terms of Sino-American rapprochement even during the height of its ‘left turn’ (Jun 2005).

The essential strategic choices now facing Mao were the following – 1. Simultaneous improvement of relations with the U.S to avoid isolation (neutralism) 2. Balance the Soviet Union in Asia (balancing) 3. Dislodge détente and propel USSR towards continued hostility towards the U.S (bloodletting). From all the available evidence it would seem that of the three above hypothesis the third one is most capable of explaining the disparate series of actions that China undertook in this period until 1969.

#### *The Vietnam War – Conflict in Indochina as Foreground to Triangular Politics*

“All you have to do is provoke the Americans into military action, and I’ll give you as many divisions as you need to crush them.” (Khrushchev 1971: 519)

- Mao Ze Dong to Nikita Khrushchev.

The Vietnam War became a conflagration that took upon itself more meaning than the actual stakes suggested. There were indeed actual stakes involved such as the effect of a communist victory in Vietnam upon the domestic balance of power in Thailand, Indonesia and to some extent even Japan. But Vietnam acquired much greater meaning than even the sum of these stakes and interests. This greater meaning can only be understood in the context

of the Sino-Soviet split and American diplomatic involvement in determining the direction and outcome of the split. To put it briefly, Mao had a strong interest in sabotaging détente between the Soviet Union and the U.S. The strategy that Mao had adopted to pursue the same is to intensify the cold war by radicalising it. Bellicosity on the Taiwan issue, revolutions in South East Asia, Chinese rhetoric during the Cuban missile crisis, China's policy on the Sino-Indian border, Nuclear belligerence along with ideological offensives aimed at the Soviet Union were all aimed at forcing the latter to adopt similar bellicose policies and rhetoric against the U.S. In other words, China would continue to lean on one side, but only if the Soviet Union itself does not keep leaning on the side of the U.S and against Chinese national interests.

The extensive debate around 'peaceful co-existence' versus 'wars of national liberation' hence at the end of the day was a rhetorical reflection of the strategic choices each side was making and wanted the other to make. If the 'debate' is settled in favour of peaceful co-existence China would have to get in line with Soviet policies and if it is settled in favour of 'revolutionism', the Soviet Union would have to abandon détente with the west and adopt an approach to the west as hostile as the one adopted by China. The shift in Soviet stance into one more belligerent towards the U.S. in 1964 was partly brought about by Chinese goading, leading to what Jeffrey Friedman calls a "Pyrrhic" victory since it entailed the adoption of the Chinese stance against anti-imperialism (Friedman 2015: 218).

In his recent study of the Second cold war, i.e. the cold war between China and the Soviet Union in the Third World, Jeremy Friedman, however, goes on to argue that as soon as the Soviet Union began to adopt anti-imperialist policies, aimed at winning the battle for favour against China in the third world, China itself abandoned such a policy as a result of its awareness regarding the gap between Beijing's ambitions and resources (Friedman 2015: 100). Such an explanation, however, is untenable. Either Chinese leaders were deeply unaware of their power/capabilities during this whole time (the left turn, 1962-67) or they sought to bait the Soviet Union into adopting more anti-western positions in the third world and globally in general. China's strong restraint vis-à-vis Vietnam, Taiwan, Hong Kong and limited aid to the developing world do not demonstrate a lack of awareness of its own power (Lumbers 2005). During discussions the Chinese side was prone to bring out the lack of



sufficient Soviet assistance to Cuba, leading the Soviets to point out China's continuing restraint and non-action vis-à-vis Taiwan (Friedman 2018: 105).

It is easy to discern that the Soviets did have a point here. The Soviets had detected that Chinese revolutionary fervour was quick to urge the Soviet Union to abandon realism while itself acting under the dictates of the same. The Soviet view would be seconded by President Lyndon Johnson. In the wake of the Chinese hasty de-escalation of the Sikkim ultimatum to India in 1965, the President was struck by how the Chinese "have done a great deal of talking in the past week or so, but have not acted, and they have probably lost a great deal of prestige in many quarters" (Lumbers 2005:117).

Similarly, During a heated debate with Mao, the then Premier of the Soviet Union Alexei Kosygin confronted Mao on whether he actually thought that "you [the CCP] are fighting more against imperialism than we [CPSU] are?". Despite all his bombastic rhetoric regarding himself and the CCP being 'combative' and 'dogmatists', Mao's reply to Kosygin's taunt was simply, "In any case, not less than you". To settle the matter further Kosygin continued,

"The fact remains that nowhere does the fight against imperialism take place without our participation. It is carried out everywhere with our contribution, with the help of our weapons and with our risk. However, we cannot see your particular combativeness anywhere, except in words. It does not reflect much in reality, and words alone are not enough in the fight with imperialism" (Mao Zedong-Kosygin 1965).

The two leaders subsequently continued when spoke of the need to pursue armament, with Kosygin again pointing out the Soviet Union expended a greater share of its budget on the same compared to China. The Soviet Premier also pointed out that China was not bombing American bases in South Vietnam despite his zeal for war with the 'imperialists'. Mao only replied sheepishly, "The people of South Vietnam are fighting well without us, and they will drive the Americans away on their own" (Mao-Kosygin 1975).

Indeed, if the Vietcong was so self-reliant, then what was the rationale in accusing the Soviet Union of not extending sufficient help to the same? This, in many senses, is the nub of the matter. If debates regarding 'peaceful coexistence' was a central source of the dispute

between China and the Soviet Union, then Mao's actions and policies fall very short of being persuasive in terms of his anti-imperialist zeal. After all, how could Mao split with the Soviet Union for exercising caution while employing the same caution (if not greater) in his diplomacy towards the 'imperialists'.

Meanwhile, Chinese concerns regarding Soviet-American détente and rapprochement is well documented and thus better explains the shift mentioned above (bait and switch). Furthermore, Lorenz Luthi argues that Mao indeed 'incited the Soviet Union to demonstrate greater anti-imperialist commitments' but it was done not to make the Soviet Union fight alone but to 'force it to join the PRC in such a struggle' (H-Diplo Review 2008). If that indeed was the goal for so many years then why did Maoist China change sides just when U.S.-Soviet détente was being compromised? Furthermore, such an interpretation goes against what we know about Chinese willingness to reconcile with the U.S. as well as its fears pertaining to the Soviet Union. Thus, the about-turn in the 1960s can be best explained in terms of Mao's strategy of 'bloodletting' – a converse form of Stalin's own policy (1950-1953) when using ideology, he had forced Mao to enter the war against the U.S. while himself acting most cautiously towards the same. In this context, Mao's revolutionary zeal by which he wanted to goad the Soviet Union towards a more confrontational relationship with the U.S. can be seen as Mao's revenge for what the Soviet Union had done to Mao and China in 1950-53.

Throughout the Vietnam War, China opposed peace moves/negotiations and in discussions with the Soviets had asked them to assist Vietnam - not just by sending weapons and aid but by also putting pressure on the U.S in Europe; in other words, putting an end to détente. Such demands and the public rhetoric against the USSR support the interpretive hypothesis that Vietnam, among other things, was also a means by which China attempted to disrupt détente between the two superpowers. For instance, a CIA analysis of 1965 hinted at the possibility that because of the dilemma the Chinese had forced the Russians into with the ongoing Vietnam War, the Soviet Union may be compelled into counter-attacking the other side where it is most vulnerable – Germany. At the same time, the Danish Prime Minister had opined that China wants war between the U.S and Soviet Union and hoped that the Cuban crisis had culminated in such a conflict (Dobbs 2010: 122, 109).

Meanwhile, on the American side, the Vietnam War further re-enforced American convictions regarding the permanency of the Sino-Soviet rift. Despite blustering rhetoric of fighting imperialism all over the world, China signalled to the U.S. through various means, including by way of a press conference by Chen Yi, that China did not seek war with the U.S. in Vietnam, except if “American attacks on North Vietnam endangered the Vietnamese-Chinese border region” (Young 1968: 270; Rogers 1976:296-297). During the same time, the U.S. also sought to reassure China that it had no intention of invading China (Rogers 1976: 297). Recalling the nature of Chinese diplomacy at the time, Vietnamese General Vo Ngyeun Giap commented,

“The Chinese government told the United States [during the Vietnam War] that if the latter did not threaten or touch China, then China would do nothing to prevent the attacks [on Vietnam]. It was really like telling the United States that it could bomb Vietnam at will, as long as there was no threat to the border ... We felt that we had been stabbed in the back ... Later when the United States began systematically to bomb North Vietnam, the Soviet Union proposed to send air units and missile forces to defend Vietnam. It was the Chinese leaders that had prevented it from doing so” (Pike 1987: 87-88).

Similarly, Foreign Minister Ngyuen Co Thach complained in 1982 that subsequent to the rapprochement, Mao had urged Vietnam to halt unification and recognize South Vietnam – in a move that reenacts Stalin’s similar suggestion to the CCP in 1949 (Ngyuen Co Thach’s interview 1982). Interestingly, from the Vietnamese point of view, both China and the Soviet Union could be accused of revisionism (or just realism) or ‘machiavellian compromise’ in that they sought to improve relations with the U.S. at the cost of international revolution (Khoo 2005: 541- 543). The gap between Chinese ideological rhetoric and its narrower realist foreign policy was almost an open secret at the time.

The Cold War in the 1960s is especially obscure and puzzling only because the strategies being adopted by the great powers were very duplicitous. China spoke the language of Anti-Americanism and seemed to act on it to only to sabotage détente between its ally and the target of the alliance, only to then ally with the latter against the former. Similarly, the U.S. ostensibly threatened and contained China with an active military policy to prevent Soviet Union from having to toe the Chinese line in opposition to the U.S, only to then

subsequently ally with the supposed threat and against the Soviet Union itself. Soviet duplicity consisted of ostensibly providing Vietnam with military and economic aid in the name of communist solidarity while at the same time undermining the communist side itself through various diplomatic means. Even relatively small Vietnam was not to be left behind in the duplicity game. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam) toed the Chinese ideological line till the time its interests coincided with the PRC and it needed Chinese assistance, and conveniently shifted its ideological positions, such as during the Czechoslovakia crisis, when it sought greater co-operation with the Soviet Union (Leighton 1978). Vietnam would subsequently form a full-fledged alliance with the Soviet Union to balance China. However, once all the webs of duplicity and deceit are removed the classical geopolitical balance of power motivations become visible.

### **The Road to Rapprochement: 1965-1979**

#### *Changes in U.S. perceptions of Mao's China, 1965*

Moreover, 1965 also happened to be a particularly bad year for Chinese foreign policy. The military coup in Indonesia that resulted in the elimination of China-backed communists, diplomatic reverses in the Second Bandung Conference, Fidel Castro's chastisement of Chinese imperial expansionism and Albania distancing itself from China all led to acute international isolation. The subsequent year witnessed congressional hearings in both houses in which the renewed interpretation of Chinese objectives and power took hold (Goh 2005: 72-80). China was being seen as a normal power instead of a malignant revolutionary power. For instance, John Fairbanks testified to the effect that because of its modern historical experience, China was insecure regarding its border and that this had led to a 'maximum conceptions' of their borders which goes a long way in explaining their behaviour vis-à-vis Tibet, Korea and India (Goh 2005: 74). Benjamin Schwartz and Samuel Griffiths had argued that the foregoing concerns would be the concerns of "any strong central government in Peking" and not just a revolutionary communist one (Goh 2005: 74). The academic realist Hans Morgenthau argued that traditionally and throughout history, China had sought spheres of influence in its region but had sought to achieve it in a peculiar manner, by means of attracting other powers to its rich civilisation rather than relying on its military capabilities. In this manner, present and recent Chinese activism in South East Asia

can be understood as traditional Chinese policy of establishing tributary states relationships with its weaker neighbours. This very ingeniously re-interprets apparent communist ideological crusade as traditional Chinese sphere of influence politics in alignment with its much narrower national interest.

Hence, China came to be seen as a normal power, much like the Soviet Union - with the earlier distinction of the Soviets and Chinese communists as Mensheviks and Bolsheviks all but vanishing. Chinese restraint also played its part in re-enforcing this new image. Chinese nuclear weapons, fears of Chinese intervention, greater recognition of Chinese internal weaknesses (especially economic), concern over rising Soviet power and hopes of socialising China are all variables that worked in conjunction with each other in order to create the possibilities of a tacit alliance with China in the subsequent years. An argument can be made that these variables were always in place since 1949 and that it was only the Korean War that delayed an acknowledgement of the same. If Korean War made it extremely difficult for the U.S to acknowledge these facts (read McCarthyism and its impact on foreign policymaking) it took the Vietnam War to finally change material conditions, which in turn compelled a re-assessment of American relations with China.

#### *Chinese threat perception of the U.S.*

On the Chinese side, one would expect that the beginning of the American escalation in Vietnam and the real threat of a Sino-American confrontation would place the U.S as the primary threat in Chinese assessments. This oddly however was not the case. As Li Danhui points out, "From the mid-1960's onward, in their deliberations about the main threat facing China, the Chinese leadership determined that the relative threat posed by the Americans had decreased, and that defending itself against the Soviet Union had become its primary objective" (Khoo 2011: 32). This is the clearest empirical manifestation of the argument put forward by those scholars that argue that maritime/insular states do not threaten the core interests of states in the same manner that continental army based states do. That is, even when the insular state would deploy a significant portion of its land forces right up to the borders of the continental state to fight against its ally, the targeted continental state in this case still prioritised the continental threat over the insular threat (and that too despite having an alliance with the continental state). Explicit re-evaluation of threats facing China was

made as early as September 1958 immediately following the Second Taiwan Straits crisis, whereby defensive motivations were attributed to general American grand strategy vis-à-vis China and the Soviet Union (Zhai 1994: 188). In fact, to Mao, one of the ‘key problems’ with the recently negotiated U.S. security treaty with the GMD was the long term harm it would cause to “our relations with America” (Khan 2018: 78).

Starting from 1964 Soviet Union became a clear and near term military threat to China as it began to strengthen its divisions in the far east as well as increase its number from 12 in 1962 to 25 in 1969 and all the way to 45 by 1973 (Bacon & Sandle 2002: 93).

### *Sino-Soviet Military Clashes: Borders, Territories and mobilisations*

Accounts of the shifting alliances before and during the Vietnam War one often end up ignoring or under-estimating what was actually occurring across the borders between the Soviet Union and China throughout the 1960s. A more detailed elaboration of the border conflicts, unfortunately, lies outside the scope of this chapter. But suffice it to say that the border witnessed ever greater mobilisation, re-enforcement, skirmishes and so on. During as early as 1962, for instance, the Chinese Government closed Soviet consulates in the Xinjiang province because the Chinese accused the Soviets of aiding and abetting secessionist movements in the same ethnically volatile region (Luthi 2008: 214-218; Bevin 1992: 192-200). A key cause of the violent conflagration that constituted the border wars of 1969 was the Soviet Mongolian treaty alliance and the stationing of Soviet troops in Mongolia in 1967 (Radchenko 2009, Ch 4). The Sino-Soviet border witnessed a series of tit for tat skirmishes that were reminiscent of border incidents between Japanese forces and Soviet troops along the same border in the 1930s (Gerson 2010; Gobarev 1999; Holdridge 1997: 33-36). Soviet press at the time evoked Soviet nuclear capability and China’s lack of it repeatedly (Zorza 1969), while Chinese officials complained about Soviet military leaders “raving wildly about launching an ‘unexpected’ ‘surprise attack,’ just as Hitler boasted of the ‘blitzkrieg’ in his day” (Gerson 2010: 40). Chinese military leaders concluded in September that Moscow “wants to seize this opportunity to use missiles and tanks to launch a quick war against China and thoroughly destroy China, so that a ‘mortal danger’ for them will be removed” (Gerson 2010: 42). The U.S. did not pose a comparable existential and

territorial threat of this nature to China even during the height of the Korean or Vietnam war.

Tapping on U.S. strategic thinking and balance of power theory, a report by prominent Chinese Marshalls (and blessed by Mao) concluded in September 1969, “The last thing the U.S. imperialists are willing to see is a victory by the Soviet revisionists in a Sino-Soviet war, as this would [allow the Soviets] to build up a big empire more powerful than the American empire in resources and manpower... The Soviet revisionists’ fears about possible Sino-American unity makes it more difficult for them to launch an all-out attack on China” (Report by Four Chinese Marshalls, 1969a). In a similar report in June of 1969, the authors outlined the reasons why China need not fear an ‘attack’ from the U.S., “The United States and China are separated by the vast Pacific Ocean. The U.S. imperialists’ defeats in the Korean War and the Vietnam War have taught them a bitter lesson causing a deeper crisis both at home and abroad”. In contrast, the Soviet Union “have made China their main enemy, imposing a more serious threat to our security than the U.S. imperialists. The Soviet revisionists are creating tensions along the long Sino-Soviet border, concentrating troops in the border area and making military intrusions” (Report of the Four Chinese Marshalls 1969b). Meanwhile, while accusing both the U.S. and the Soviet Union of seeking to buck-pass any future anti-China war, the report itself urges a postponement of any decision for war since, “In Europe, if the contradictions develop further, the possibility cannot be excluded that a conflict might happen between the United States and the Soviet Union. We must pay close attention to this development” (Report 1969b).

Also, despite overwhelming conventional and strategic superiority Soviet leaders were preoccupied with ‘nightmare visions’ of millions of Chinese invading Soviet Far Eastern territory and bogging the Soviet Union down in ‘endless war’ (Shevchenko 1985: 164-166), with some advocating nuclear mining the border (Leonov 2003: 119). Kosygin and other policymakers calculated that an American victory in the cold war would only result in a change in political colours, whereas a Chinese victory in the Sino-Soviet cold war would result in Russia’s annihilation (Radchenko 2009: 194-198).

The regional security dilemma between the two Eurasian giants had echoes both in Sino-Russian traditional hostility and rivalry as well as more general security dilemma's between regional powers. It is with this insight that C.P. Fitzgerald had articulated in 1967,

“In the past, when a bitter quarrel broke out between neighboring nations, rival territorial claims were often the underlying cause.... In the early stages of the Sino-Soviet dispute, on the other hand, ideology seemed to be the only point at issue. Russia was denounced as revisionist for believing in the false theory of a ‘parliamentary road’ to socialism and faintheartedness in backing revolutionary wars. Her boundaries with China seemed no part of the problem. Recently, however, the Russians and the Chinese have themselves hinted at incidents along their common frontier, which extends from Mongolia eastward 1500 miles to the sea, and westward from Mongolia 1200 miles to the Wakh panhandle of the Afghan frontier” (Fitzgerald 1967: 683)

Chinese fears, interests and strategies indeed became clearer with U.S.-China rapprochement that occurred between 1969-1972. Chinese leaders made plain their geopolitical interest in balancing the Soviet Union, for the purpose of which greater U.S. involvement in Asia and Eurasia, in general, was sought. China cooperated with the U.S. and its allies (even South Africa and the Afghan Mujahedeen's to some degree) in containing and rolling back Soviet influence in various third countries. China also assented to a continuing U.S. -Taiwan security partnership. Even here, the U.S. used Chinese fears of Japanese military expansion into Taiwan to gain China's assent. The Chinese side conveyed to the U.S. that they even understood the Japanese security need for the U.S.-Japan treaty (Ito 2003:123).

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union also considered China a more serious threat to Soviet interests. During Kissinger's visit to Moscow in May 1973, Brezhnev suggested “the possibility of taking joint action against Chinese nuclear facilities, or at least having the U.S. remain passive while the Soviets did so” (Kissinger to the President 1973). The U.S. found itself in a situation where the two Communist (or continental) states feared each other more than the U.S. and even sought U.S. support in countering the other.

The rapprochement also clarified the role of ideology within China's balancing strategy. During a particularly tense meeting between Mao and Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin in



February 1965, the latter aggressively pushed Mao to engage the Soviets regarding ideological grievances to form a united front against the U.S. Amongst other things Kosygin also invoked the overthrow of Khrushchev the previous year as a factor that should further facilitate an end to ‘public polemics’ and accusations of collusion and revisionism. Instead of welcoming such an overture, Mao insists that such polemic is not dangerous as “nobody will die from it” (Mao Zedong-Kosygin 1965).

What happened to ideology when Mao was replaced by the non-ideological Deng Xiaoping? As it turns out, even under Deng (a pragmatic market embracing politburo), Chinese foreign policy continued to emphasise ideology. For instance, during a CCP meeting in 1979 Deng co-opted ideology to serve balance of power imperatives and its policy seeking closer ties with U.S. and Japan, “It is now even clearer to everyone how brilliant and farsighted was the strategy of differentiating the three worlds formulated by Comrade Mao Zedong in the evening of his life.....This strategic principle and these policies have been invaluable in rallying the world’s people to oppose hegemonism, changing the world political balance, frustrating Soviet hegemonists’ arrogant plan to isolate China internationally” (Xiaoping 1979: 168).

## **Conclusion**

The evolution of Sino-Soviet relations since the primary and earliest analysis of the state department and Acheson had been vindicated by subsequent events. *China by virtue of its level of power and geography was destined to be an ‘Asian Tito’ and co-operate with U.S against Soviet Union.* Several exigencies did get in the way of this occurring smoothly and the traditional and conventional balance of power outcome finally came into fruition in a very long about manner - in a path full of disjunctions and diversions. This interpretation has several implications for perennial debates related to the triangular relationship such as – the lost chance thesis, the ideology-power debate, levels of analysis, balance of power theory and so on. The broad consensus around the lost chance controversy has been the ‘Cohen-tucker’ thesis. The argument is that despite common interests the U.S and China could not normalise relations because of two primary reasons – misperception and the irrationality of domestic politics. In other words, politicians on both sides happened to prioritise domestic mobilization and the domestic balance of power over real politick

foreign policy considerations. The U.S needed to ideationally construct a crusade against global communism and the PRC both became anti-American because of aid to GMD and also, in turn, used anti-Americanism to consolidate domestic power.

Other interpretations zero in on variables such as Americans non-engagement with the CCP, ideological animosity on both sides; American position on Taiwan etc. the interpretation presented in this paper, however, takes a different position and in the process introduces a somewhat novel hypothesis as well.

The thesis attempts to tie loose ends in the debate and present a somewhat coherent account of the explanandum. The thesis is that the lost chance is a myth not because of the above-stated reasons but because of the variable of Soviet Hegemony over China. Mao had almost no choice but to insincerely ally with Stalin to wean back Chinese territory. In this context, an explicit or even a tacit understanding with the U.S was out of the question since Anti-Americanism was an integral component of winning over Stalin's trust and confidence. Misperception was in fact not that potent since the American administration did not assume until as late as the beginning of the Korean War that the Chinese were exclusively influenced by ideology, in fact, if anything Truman administration's perceptions of the axioms guiding Chinese foreign policy were by and large accurate. China was primarily nationalistic, had conflicting interests with the Soviet Union and was open and receptive to Western rapprochement and co-operation.

The above account also tries to demonstrate that ideology was almost entirely a cloak/cover or an instrument towards power-related ends and objectives. The Wennan incident is an early demonstration of how in China's case, foreign policy problems seeped into the domestic sphere instead of the other way around. Similarly, anti-Americanism emanated from the need to assure the Soviet Union and not from inherent domestic imperatives. Mao's radicalism since 1958 had a foreign policy rationale to it since it was motivated by the need to sabotage détente between the Soviet Union and the West.

### *Balance of Power*

The account also very strongly supports the geopolitical view of balance of power. China and Soviet Union had the same ideology and faced a common enemy that was far superior

to them in terms of power and capabilities and also a global hegemon that was explicitly hostile to their core national interests. These circumstances should have guaranteed a successful alliance between the two, and yet the alliance not only floundered but also split with one side (the weaker of the two) allying with the hegemon against the other. This is one reason, for instance, why even Lorenz Luthi outrightly dismissed balance of power theory as a possible candidate in explaining the Sino-Soviet split. As he writes, “Because the Sino-Soviet split occurred when the PRC and the USSR were still weaker than the United States, the implicit Realist assumption that changes in the balance of global power will trigger transformations in alliance systems seems not to apply to partnerships between Beijing and Moscow” (Luthi 2008: 13).

However, What Luthi (2008) undermines and ignores is the historically recurring pattern of weaker continental powers allying with the insular power(s) to counter-balance the stronger continental power. The Soviet Union itself, for instance, allied with a much more powerful U.S. to balance the Soviet Union before and during the Second World War. History is replete with examples of such a configuration occurring. The weaker continental power does not feel as threatened by the insular power as it does by the stronger continental power and even hopes and aims to benefit from the power of the insular state. The Insular power, in turn, seeks to ally with the weaker against the stronger power and even the stronger continental power may feel more threatened by the weaker continental power instead of the much stronger insular power. This seeming puzzle occurs because security dilemmas between contiguous powers with large armies facing each other are much more volatile and dangerous to both.

The variable of Soviet hegemony may also throw light on the debate regarding the Sino-soviet split. There have been multiple accounts attributing multiple causes to the split (Radchenko 2009: 15-18). The interpretation provided in this chapter might in fact suggest that the debate could end up in a manner similar to the ‘lost chance’ thesis. The thesis eventually got turned on its head with the counter-question as to when did the U.S possess China to lose it in the first place. Similarly, one may ask as to when China and the Soviet Union had a union of interests to have a split in the first place.

*Assessing the Ideology variable*

There are several different trajectories that the ideology narrative takes. For example, one of them is the matter of differences between Khrushchev and Mao. But this is rebutted by the fact relations continued to deteriorate even after Khrushchev's ouster. Similarly, Chen Jian hints that after the demise of Mao and along with him his radical policies of linking revolutionary internal politics with external policy, Sino-Soviet relations had finally somewhat improved due to ideology becoming less and less of a factor. This narrative is however difficult to accept since relations continued to be marked by strife even under the pragmatist Deng Xiaoping. The Sino-Vietnam war occurred in 1979, three years after Mao's demise and for reasons and causes that were not very different from the circumstances that prevailed between the Soviet Union and China under Mao's leadership. China also funded and trained the Afghan Mujahedeen against Soviet forces in Afghanistan and disagreements about force deployment across China's Northern border remained. If anything, China's re-evaluation of its relation with the Soviet Union towards the late '1980s follows from and is intimately linked to its more general re-assessment of American military revival, Soviet decline and the international balance of power.

Meanwhile, we have significant evidence suggesting that Mao formulates the contours of ideology based on Chinese national interest rather than the other way around. For instance, Mao wholeheartedly supported the Soviet initiative of an East Asian Nuclear Free Zone from 1957-59 because till then it mostly applied to Japan and the Koreas and undermined American alliances (Luthi 2008: 81). But when Khrushchev withdrew nuclear assistance from China in June 1959 under the same banner of Nuclear Free Zone, Mao had accused the Soviet Union of being 'Right-Deviationist' (Westad 1998: 177). There is ostensibly nothing ideologically incorrect in the argument that Communist China may be included in the Nuclear Free Zone, and hence the ideological charge of 'Right-Deviationist' could only be a retrospective rhetorical cloak to express justified resentment related to disagreements related to power and Chinese national interests.

A lucid and seemingly accurate account of the apparent 'co-incidence' between ideological and national interests is provided for instance by Robert C. North, writing on the subject in 1960,

“For at that Juncture the Chinese Communists transformed themselves from a rebel movement into a Chinese government, just as Lenin and his Bolsheviks, more than three decades earlier, had assumed the responsibilities of a Russian Government. In each case the Communist leaderships brought powerful new values and procedures with them, but in each case, too, they subordinated themselves to traditional and inescapable *national* demands. Inevitably, as the People’s Republic gained strength, there developed a powerful coincidence of Marxist-Leninist and purely Chinese motivations, just as Soviet policy has revealed a merging of ideological with historically indigenous impulses” (North 1960: 57).

## **Chapter Seven: Europe and the U.S.**

As the previous chapter on the Soviet Union has already attested, Europe was the primary theatre of competition between the U.S. and Soviet Union – with Germany taking a special place within the same. But whereas IR scholarship has sought to explain the cold war through balancing choices made by the U.S. and the Soviet Union – very few works have attempted to explain European balancing choices during the period. Indeed, most accounts of Cold War Europe tend to see Europe primarily as a unit that was on the receiving end of others' balancing actions rather than making balancing choices of its own. This is unfortunate since it is European people's and European states (both Eastern and western) that after all decided the eventual outcome of the cold war. There are some notable exceptions such as William Hitchcock and Marc Trachtenberg however.

In this chapter, I intend to ask and address the following fundamental questions – Did Europe balance against the U.S. during the cold war? And if it did not, then why? The previous chapter has already demonstrated that the U.S. was the predominant power in the system throughout the cold war. From a balance of power perspective, Europe could have been expected to ally with the Soviet Union to balance the U.S.

This chapter will focus primarily on French actions. There are three fundamental reasons for making such a choice. Firstly, France was the strongest unit in the system in terms of military capabilities and population. Secondly, Britain undisputedly remained a committed ally of the U.S. throughout the cold war that it becomes unnecessary to explore whether Britain balanced against the U.S. (Parr 2005; Baylis 1993; Hughes 2014; Clarke 2009; Bange 2000; Taylor 2018; Wevill 2012; Ruane 2000). Moreover, the previous chapter on British balancing choices (1865-1945) makes it very clear as to what are the drivers of British balancing policy are and why it sought to ally with a much stronger U.S. and balance a much weaker Germany. Thirdly, the Federal Republic of Germany also remained an unambiguous ally and partner of the U.S. throughout the Cold War. Its primary concern for much of the cold war was reunification, which it sought to achieve in strong association with the U.S. However, this chapter does engage with German concerns and motivations during key moments of the Cold War.

Finally, there is an additional reason to focus on French policy during the cold war. This thesis came into being in response to a vigorous debate among IR scholars on whether signs of balancing behaviour against the U.S. were already present by 2004-05 (Pape 2005; Paul 2005; Walt 2005; Posen 2006; Lieber & Alexander 2005; Wohlforth & Brooks 2005; Howorth & Menon 2009). Scholars had leaned heavily on French behaviour and rhetoric to underscore the evidentiary nature of claims of counter-balancing behaviour against the U.S. Scholars, therefore, highlighted French rhetoric and policies pertaining to the ESDP and its function in replacing NATO and thereby American influence in Europe. French cooperation with Germany and Russia in the United Nations (UN) in opposing American invasion of Iraq was also interpreted as an early sign of embryonic alliance making (external balancing) aimed at constraining American actions abroad. As Walt writes,

“That coordinate positions on minor issues may become more comfortable with each other and thus better able to collaborate on larger issues, and repeated successes can build the trust needed to sustain a more ambitious counter-hegemonic coalition. Thus, successful soft balancing of today may lay the foundations for more significant shifts tomorrow” (Walt 2006: 114).

Finally, statements calling for a balance in the world and multipolarity made by French leaders and officials were also seen as obvious evidence of French concerns and intentions pertaining to American predominance.

Ironically, this heated debate had also occurred just a few years prior to France’s return to NATO in 2009 and Franco-British-American joint operation in Libya in 2011 (even as Germany chose to abstain and Russia opposed the same). Meanwhile, the Russian annexation of Crimea would have the effect of fostering greater German-American cooperation and also lead to joint EU actions aimed at Russia.

It is worth noting that the above debate pertaining to French and German actions and statements around 2003-2005 made almost no reference to Cold War strategies of the two countries. This is somewhat odd since even a casual familiarity with French cold war behaviour would readily present various similarities with PCW French actions. Four such parallels are – Statements that call for multipolarity, balance and a more autonomous Europe – France’s attempt at forming an independent strategic consensus with Germany in 1963

(Treaty of Elysee) and the Soviet Union in 1966 even as it exited from NATO – French, German and Soviet disagreement with American actions in Vietnam (Lawrence 2005)– Soviet invasion of Czech Republic in 1968 and its parallel in the form of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.

More recently, French President Emmanuel Macron’s criticism of NATO, outreach to Russia and calls for a more independent European policy have elicited comparisons with De Gaulle. One may also add the signing of the Treaty of Aachen in January 2019 between France and Germany, amidst French frustration regarding German non-willingness to go along with the former’s vision of a stronger Europe (Kunz 2019). Therefore, this chapter begins with the supposition that European cold war strategies could help explain European balancing choices in the Post-Cold War era.

### **Aim**

In this chapter, I survey European Cold War decision making and reach the following interrelated conclusions – 1. France was primarily concerned with balancing German power 2. France adopted a strategy that sought to channel both Trans-Atlantic ties and its relations with the Soviet bloc to reach its objectives vis-à-vis Germany 3. French decision to opt for European integration emanated from its concerns pertaining to Germany and reconciliation with U.S. cold war strategy of building up German economic and military power to balance the Soviet Union 4. De Gaulle sought greater autonomy for France within the Trans-Atlantic alliance but also sought to further embed American power in Europe to contain Germany 5. Despite calls for a more European Europe, France was unwilling to accept greater German power in Europe 6. Given the primary imperative of balancing German power, there were serious limits to De Gaulle’s ‘anti-Americanism’ 7. Mitterrand was opposed to German reunification during the end of the cold war and sought to resist, delay and ameliorate against the consequences of the same. 8. Other European powers such as Germany, Britain and even the smaller Benelux countries sought to embed American power in Europe as a counter-weight to larger powers such as Germany, France and the Soviet Union.



## **Background: France and the Cold War**

United Europe was constituted of an economy that could match the American economy and a population that was much larger than the U.S. Why did not such an entity, in accordance with Waltzian theory (Waltz 1979: 126-27), ally with the weaker Soviet Union to balance the much stronger U.S.? European history after all is replete with examples of former enemies turning into allies to check a rising or stronger power. American hegemony over Europe was preponderant and that by itself provides a significant incentive, from a Balance of Power theory perspective, to forge counter-balancing coalitions.

Even recent history had demonstrated that significant balancing coalitions were possible. France and Russia had formed a very strong alliance (1894-1917) to check Germany and nothing stopped the two from forming a similar cold war alliance - aimed at the U.S. Two costly European wars against each other had devastated both Germany and Russia (S.U). This realisation could have led both powers to seriously consider another attempt at Rapallo or Bjorko style treaty. At the very least, Europe could have strived to emerge as an independent pole during the cold war; that would not amount to balancing the U.S but such an outcome by itself would have by default limited American influence and power in the continent and by extension in the international system. In this context, Europe's behaviour count as a puzzle from a balance of power perspective.

Europe decided to neither balance against the U.S nor emerge as an independent pole. To make things even more puzzling it allied with the U.S to balance a much weaker pole in the system, thereby mirroring and foreshadowing China and Japan's strategic calculus in the cold war. how did this come to be?

## **France in the Early Cold War: 1945-1958**

### *French Strategic context: Return to Interwar policy*

French rationale and strategic orientation in the early cold war cannot be understood without a brief foray into recent French pre cold war strategic history. France had fought three costly wars with neighbouring Germany; in all of which German troops had occupied French territory and exacted heavy casualties. Even periods of relative peace (1871-1914, 1919-

1939) witnessed war scares, security competition, military crises and coercive diplomacy. Germany had been the primary focus of French foreign policy since its emergence in 1871 and posed a threat to France that was territorial, demographic, social and economic. French traditional conflicts with Italy in the Mediterranean, with Austria over Italy, with Britain over Belgium and colonies, with Russia over access to the Mediterranean all assumed low priority over time and shifted to the back burner in light of the German problem (Young 1981; Chassaing and Dockrill 2002; Keiger 1983).

The post-war scenario saw French leaders reference and frame policies keeping the lessons of the inter-war period in mind. The period (1919-1939) saw France favouring a harsh peace that would weaken German power and thereby forestall any possibilities of Germany re-emerging as a major European power capable of threatening France. The demand for reparations, the occupation of Ruhr, support of the union of Silesia with Poland were all derived from this grand strategic outlook. This policy, however, conflicted with Anglo-American objectives and diplomacy, which in turn resulted in incoherent joint diplomacy towards Germany. Concerns regarding the international financial and economic system, potential French hegemony in Europe and possibilities of German-Russian understandings propelled the maritime-insular powers to use various means to undermine French policy toward Germany throughout most of the inter-war years (Boyce 1998; Bell 2014). Bitter memories during both this period and even during the war to some extent pre-disposed France to become more unilateral in its early approach to the cold war. This is the background to French diplomacy during the cold war.

More crucially, the background also offers a clue regarding French balancing choices. Its fixation with Germany meant France would continue to concern itself with German power and frame its diplomacy in accordance with that end (Cresswell 2019). As Hitchcock writes, “Yet the Cold War necessitated only a shift in tactics and not in overall strategy. France continued to insist on a post-war European settlement that constrained German independence and enhanced French influence” (Hitchcock 1998: 4). Its willingness to invite American power and commitments into the continent, its occasional and consequential diplomacy and co-operation with the Soviet Union and East European states, its pressure on Germany to abandon its national currency in the 1980s would all emanate from this concern.

It is worth noting that the first treaty that France concluded in the cold war was the Dunkirk treaty that was meant to deter and prevent the re-emergence of German power. The treaty itself in part emanated from concerns that the U.S. could withdraw from Europe and leave Europe to manage a resurgent Germany or Soviet expansionism on its own. (Baylis 1983; Greenwood 1983; Deighton 1990: 38-43).

But the fundamental question seems to be about the evolution of French policy toward Germany from one of overt balancing to containment through rapprochement and engagement. The next section briefly describes this process.

### *The Transformation: Balancing through Integration*

France emerged from the end of the Second World War as a victor power, whose great power status was put into doubt by its rapid capitulation to the German army in 1940. It was, however, awarded a seat at the Allied Control Council (ACC) in 1945 along with U.S., UK and the Soviet Union. The ACC was the governing body of the allied powers in the Occupation Zones in Germany. This made France an equal partner in governing German affairs. The French grand strategy from the beginning of 1945 until sometime in 1947 consisted of objectives including allied control over the Rhineland, the annexation of the coal mines in Saar, the elimination of German war industry, use of German resources for the reconstruction of Europe, advocacy for a federal Germany instead of a centralised one, and occupation/administration of Southwest Germany (Hitchcock 1998: 44-46; Spevack 2004: 44-50). But France eventually had to compromise on, if not abandon altogether, almost all of these stated goals. The U.S. administration of President Truman increasingly realised that the revival of the German economy was needed for the revival of the whole of Europe and that over time Germany would have to be rearmed as a more forward allied defence of Europe was considered and accepted (Beisner 2006; Leffler 1992; Steil 2018). Thus, much like the interwar years, the maritime powers and France had divergent views regarding the 'German question'. These disagreements came to a head in the most concrete form on the first of January 1947 when Britain and the U.S. decided to combine their separate zones of occupation in Germany. France was left almost as uninformed of these developments as the Soviet Union.

France agreed to zonal fusion in August 1948 in return for the internationalisation of the Ruhr (an international agency would make decisions regarding the consumption and export of coal and coke and thereby integrate the region with the European economy) – not annexation, occupation, or return to Germany - but internationalization. The French decision for fusion was also motivated by the fear that Anglo-American diplomacy could lead to German restoration of economic power without putting prior adequate checks. However, several influential figures were strongly opposed to zonal fusion (including Charles de Gaulle). General Jean Humbert (vice chief of the General Staff), in a testimony, warned that fusion would further enable re-arming, which was the eventual goal of U.S. and Britain, which would, in turn, go against neutrality. This would provoke the Soviet Union, he argued, at a time when European defences were weak. Furthermore, once rearming occurs, Germany would break free from artificial structures to wreak havoc on Europe (Hitchcock 1998: 87-88).

Those who were in support of the fusion argued that without it French influence would continue to wane. Moreover, separation of zones was only contributing to German economic instability, which in turn helped soviet expansionism. The U.S. was hard-headed in its policy to deter soviet expansionism and hence it would be prudent to align French policy accordingly and exert influence from within the American sponsored tri-zone than outside of it while remaining aloof – it was argued (Wills 1962; Glees 1996).

The high economic costs of the occupation and also of the separation of Saar from the other zones further reinforced the argument for fusion. The decision to agree to zonal fusion is key because it represented a choice France made, to rely more on Anglo-American policies to contain Germany, than to go-it-alone. Decision-makers were also aware that such a step would be further used to make France acquiesce to German re-armament.

#### *French objections to the restoration of German power*

Thus as of 1948, France had already objected to further devolution of powers from the occupation forces to the German government (especially in tax collection, financial policy, and policing). Tendencies of the parliamentary council to create a more centralised Germany instead of a federal one also bothered French leaders. France was objecting to the

handover the Ruhr area to Germans and also resented the status West Berlin acquired first as an outpost of western democracy and potentially as a symbol of German reunification and nationalism. As the French diplomat Saint-Hardouin rationalised, "Berlin naturally draws western Germany toward the Slavic world, and reminds her of her bellicose, Prussian traditions" (Saint-Hardouin to the Direction 1948). France thus objected to the idea of including representatives from Berlin in the Parliamentary council and even advocated for the abandonment of Berlin (Schuman to Koenig 1948). Currency reform, liberalisation and the economic growth such policies produced were also causes of concern in France.

By December 1948, France began reviewing its Germany policy and concluded that its policy of retarding German growth was failing and needed to be replaced by a more positive policy. As a memorandum from the Central Europe Division of the Direction d'Europe warned, "This [Anglo-American zonal] policy poses a threat to France all the more grave in that, given our internal situation, it is difficult for us to compete at equal strength with Germany on the economic plane. She already produces as much steel as we do, and tomorrow she will produce more... We must, by all means possible, try to dam up this flood which threatens to carry everything away" (Hitchcock 1997: 610).

The U.S. sought to transfer ownership of the resources and industries in the Ruhr area to Germans and thereby undermine French policy of keeping Ruhr under the control of some form of an international authority to be controlled by France, Britain and the U.S. Since German ownership was undesirable and internationalisation unlikely, France considered common control, shared by Germany and France. This review and compromise is what led to the Europe coal and steel community (Hitchcock 1998: 125-134).

In September of the same year, the ranking civilian in the zonal administration (Jacques Tarbe de Saint-Hardouin) wrote, "It is in presenting ourselves as willing to lay down the basis for a free European community that we can orient and dam up German nationalism, which is trying to profit from the Soviet-American rivalry.....The affirmation of the European character of French policy, which yesterday was but a possibility, today has become a pressing necessity" (Saint-Hardouin to de Leusse 1948). Thus, we here witness the beginning of the need to construct an ideational concept called 'Europe' to balance German power through means that are less openly confrontational than French strategy

during the interwar years. As Schuman tried to explain to more sceptical colleagues and parliamentary members, “The methods are new, but the direction is unchanged” (Hitchcock 1997: 630).

Furthermore, it is during the same period and for the same reasons that French leaders gradually came to terms with the idea that balancing German power would require France to adopt and accept limited sovereignty itself. As the head of the Foreign Ministry’s European Division reasoned that a “supranational authority, able to impose its decision upon Western Europe” would limit French sovereignty but that itself would be a small price to pay since “Germany would not recover her complete independence. From her present regime of trusteeship would follow without transition another régime under which other limitations would restrain her liberty No moment would be allowed to pass during which Germany would be the complete master of her destiny. She would leave the framework which presently contains her only to enter into another”. Moreover, such an arrangement would have the added advantage of appealing to Anglo-American sensibilities (François Seydoux note 1950). It is the same tradeoff between containing Germany by creating supranational institutions and losing some sovereignty in turn to the same institutions that De Gaulle seemed to have rejected in the 1960s and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher refused to make in 1988 and December 1989 (Ludlow 2016: 17).

#### *Ambivalence towards Soviet power*

The centrality of Germany and ambivalence towards Soviet power is revealed throughout the cold war (Carmoy 1970: 21-24). For instance, France rejected the European Defence Community on the basis that it allowed for the participation of German units in the integrated command. France also objected to conferring equality upon Germany and allowing it to enter NATO. What is telling is that even on the issue of German rearmament, France eventually had to compromise on its early stand because it feared American withdrawal from Europe by way of frustrating Acheson’s proposal. This eventually led to the Monnet plan, which was to enlarge the Schuman plan. It would seek to ameliorate the effects of allowing German rearmament by linking it with integration into Europe.

Somewhat curiously, the American negotiation position got enhanced because it could threaten withdrawal from the region; a testament to how different the American role was in comparison to past European hegemons.

French ambivalence towards Soviet power was so evident during the Bermuda conference in 1953. French Minister Georges Bidault sought to convey that France agreed that the EDC was the only way rearm Germany but political problems in Paris had so far constrained the government's ability to rally the country behind the same. In turn, President Eisenhower bluntly asked the French Foreign Minister, "Just what nation does France regard as a potential enemy? Germany or Russia?" (Young 1986: 904). During the negotiations for the European Defence Community (EDC), the French government 'created difficulties' and were in a 'class by themselves' in doing so. Its demands included British association with the EDC, that the U.S. promise to keep troops in Europe and even that NATO support the French position in Indochina (Warner 1985: 283).

During De Gaulle's rule (and later Mitterrand's) this ambivalence would at times transform into close partnership and engagement with the Soviet Union on a variety of European issues.

### **Charles de Gaulle and French Strategy: 1958-1969**

There is a widespread perception that France under De Gaulle (1958-69) represented an attempt at achieving a sovereign European identity (Mangold 2006; Martin 2013; Vaïsse 2013; Layne 2003). According to this thesis, France sought to organise Europe in partnership with West Germany as an independent pole in world politics, capable of both balancing the Soviet Union on its own as well as pushing back the U.S from European politics. The French exit from NATO, the veto against British entry into the EEC, the 1963 Elysee treaty with Germany and exhortations for moving beyond the rigidities of the cold war gives such an explanation initial plausibility. The reality, however, is more complex.

#### *Doublespeak on German Reunification*

For instance, De Gaulle did vocalise at times and till 1963 that he was ready to accept a reunified and independent Germany and that too with nuclear weapons (Trachtenberg 2012:

82). But his policies did not reflect this sentiment. De Gaulle came out as being against Germany having its own nuclear weapons. In fact, he was so opposed to the idea that it made him reject even the U.S proposed Multilateral Force Treaty (MLF) - which was designed to allow Germany some form of control, arguably theoretical, over NATO based nuclear weapons. When the U.S in return suggested a feebler substitute in the form of Nuclear Planning Group, France rejected even that because it apparently involved West Germany too much in such a sensitive issue as Nuclear Planning (Trachtenberg 2012). Furthermore, following Khrushchev's ultimatum in 1961 to hand over power over Berlin to the GDR, de Gaulle opposed all talks with the Soviet Union on the basis that it could lead to concessions, thereby leading to the neutralisation of Berlin and gradually even of a united Germany. A neutral Germany could then start to lean towards the East out of several pressures (Mahan 2002).

France adopted an approach towards German reunification that was similar to the approach adopted by the Fourth Republic towards the EDC – to attach so many conditions to the enterprise that it never takes off. In his conversation with Brezhnev in Moscow in 1966, de Gaulle clarified his view on reunification – that it should be a ‘hope’ to offset the emergence of dangerous trends in German domestic politics (Soutou 2007b: 20). Moreover, the French attitude towards reunification seemed no different from that of its western allies. It would provide lip service to the idea but not act to facilitate the same (Newhouse 1970: 36-38). In a very telling conversation with Italian Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani, for instance, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev lamented De Gaulle's doublespeak on German reunification, “During the conversations I had with him, he told me he opposed the German reunification, considering it dangerous for France; in the course of a private meeting Macmillan told me that he favoured the existence of two Germanies, however both of them refused to say these things publicly. Is this a fair attitude?” (Fanfani's visit to Moscow, 1961).

### *Limits to Anti -Americanism*

France exiting NATO again is not evidence that it wanted the U.S to leave Europe. While exiting NATO, French leaders (De Gaulle included) were content to see the German military being enmeshed within an integrated military command under U.S control (Trachtenberg



2012). Similarly, the NPT was rejected because it was ominously based on a super-power understanding between the U.S. and Soviet Union (Deporte 1990: 26), but De Gaulle was still interested in Germany signing up for the same treaty. In a conversation with U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey Jr., de Gaulle conveyed France's desire to see German participation in NPT as it would "limit the possibility of Germany acquiring nuclear arms," adding that French policy towards Germany would 'radically change' if Germany acquired nuclear weapons (U.S. Embassy, Paris, Telegram 1967). German Foreign Minister Willy Brandt understood de Gaulle's signals - when in a conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, he observed that de Gaulle wanted Germany to sign the treaty but if directly approached for his advice, "he would undoubtedly advise the Federal Government not to sign" (Rusk-Brandt 1967).

*The pattern reveals that France under De Gaulle objected to France losing its freedom of manoeuvre to the U.S led order but also had a deep interest in seeing the same order contain and check German power. Furthermore, French exit from NATO was cushioned by the Ailleret-Lemnitzer accords of 1967 and various other more ad hoc arrangements (Bozo 2001: 24-28). The accord allowed French forces to remain in the French zone within Germany in a state which was independent of NATO and yet part of NATO in terms of operation plans at the same time (Mission to NATO to State Dept. 1966). After all, during a conversation in May 1965 on possible French withdrawal from NATO with U.S. Undersecretary of State George Ball, de Gaulle confided, "There would still be a de facto understanding for the common defense, even if no signed treaty existed" (Ball 1982: 334).*

After all, de Gaulle had repeated numerous times in private that French troops in Germany was a source of prestige and a reminder of French victory in World War Two - even as he would threaten occasionally to pull out troops from West Germany as a way of putting pressure on Bonn (Martin 2014: 141) – a sentiment not very conducive for the formation of an alliance with the same. As Fortmann and Haglund write, "Despite Gaullist rhetoric, France remained militarily much more closely linked to its allies than has been imagined, even if this *ersatz* 'integration' could hardly be advertised by decision-makers in Paris" (Fortmann & Haglund 2010). Incidentally, even as France would withdraw from NATO it conveyed to the U.S. that the latter could be given access in wartime to some facilities

located in French territory (Katzenbach to Johnson 1966). These buffers indicate that France's exit from NATO can hardly be seen as an attempt at expunging the U.S. from Europe.

Moreover, there was some cooperation between De Gaulle and the U.S. even as the former prepared to visit the Soviet Union in 1966. De Gaulle would consult with and assure Ambassador Chip Bohlen that he would not compromise on certain fundamentals – such as any indication towards recognition of the German Democratic Republic (Reyn 2011: 286). France, under De Gaulle, was as opposed to the idea of a European defence community as it was during the Fourth Republic (1950-1958). Europe could emerge as an independent pole only if it could provide for its own security, and yet France rejected such an idea, ironically enough, because such an outcome would weaken American commitment to the defence of Europe (Couve-Schröder meeting 1965).

De Gaulle's position during the most intense crisis periods of the cold war also reveals limits to his Anti-Americanism. De Gaulle supported the western alliance and U.S. actions during both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin crisis unambiguously (Vaisse 2004: Mahan 2002). De Gaulle wholly approved of President Kennedy when the latter announced in July 1961 that he was intending to respond to Soviet machinations to end the U.S. presence in Berlin and thereby ask Congress to provide him with a supplement 3 billion U.S. \$ for the defence budget as well as reinforcements of reservists (de Gaulle to Kennedy 1961).

#### *A Germany centred policy*

If de Gaulle was genuinely interested in organising Europe as a third force, then it stands to reason that he would have been inclined towards abandoning the traditional French policy of balancing or containing German power. But French policy even under De Gaulle remained focused primarily on the German threat with that imperative in turn shaping every other objective. Upon coming to power in 1958, de Gaulle presented a bolder French foreign policy which aimed to transcend the cold war divide, unite Europe and enable Soviet and American withdrawal from Europe. Such grand visions however also co-existed with demands for greater consultation with the U.S. and appeals for a triumvirate with Britain and U.S. separate from NATO – for the sake of discussions on nuclear and global issues.

(Costigliola 1984: 230-236; Reyn 2011:25-32). They also coincided with De Gaulle's scurrying of much-advanced plans of nuclear co-operation with West Germany and Italy that were introduced and implemented by the previous government (Reyn 2011: 35; Bozo 2001:5). De Gaulle was no more willing to make French policy non-German centric than previous administrations. Incidentally, the Kennedy administration's efforts to forestall a German nuclear bomb by offering the Multilateral Force plan or MLF only further exacerbated French and Soviet fears. The plan consisted of organising a joint NATO fleet armed with Polaris nuclear missiles that will be manned by various nationalities, thereby theoretically allowing various countries a 'finger' on the nuclear button.

As Garret Martin writes, "The MLF crisis, not the change of Soviet leadership, provided an important impetus for the Franco-Soviet rapprochement. Both states came together in their fierce opposition to West Germany gaining access to nuclear weapons" (Martin 2013: 62). The whole incident embittered De Gaulle towards Germany, leading him to view Germany as a "permanent problem, which had poisoned Europe since Charles the Fifth" (Soutou 1996: 59). Consequently, he confided to his then Minister of Information Alain Peyrefitte, "automatically we [France] are getting closer to the Russians to the extent that the Germans are moving away from us" (Peyrefitte 1964: 62)

The Kennedy administration's concerns over the issue of German acquisition of nuclear weapons led it to pressure France and Britain to roll back their nuclear ambitions. It was reasoned that Germany would find it difficult to remain a non-nuclear power for very long, given the nuclear statuses of France and Britain German decision to go nuclear was seen as being a function of the security dilemma it shared vis-à-vis Soviet Union, UK and France (Barnett 1983: 221-222). It was not seen as being related to American nuclear capabilities and if anything American capabilities in this regard only acted to assure Germany. Franz Josef Strauss, Germany's Defence Minister mused in 1958, "if other nations-particularly the French make their own H-bomb, Germany may well be sucked in, too" (Barnet 1983: 221-222).

*Courting the Soviet Bloc to balance Germany*

De Gaulle's west politick towards the U.S and Germany was intricately linked to his own Ostpolitick or détente towards the Soviet Union (Hanrieder 1989; Martin 2013: 44-71; Soutou 2007(b): 14-16; Schoenborn 2019). As Garrett Martin writes, "there was a significant link between the timing of the withdrawal from NATO and De Gaulle's upcoming trip to the Soviet Union in June 1966" (Martin 2014: 145). While De Gaulle did not overturn the foundations of post-war grand strategy, he did represent, the most traditional realist strain within the French leadership. His discussions with Stalin in 1944 reveal his preference for a continental understanding with the Soviet Union regarding the future German threat over a more Anglo-American policy towards the same (De Gaulle- Stalin 1944). In the meeting, Gaulle repeatedly emphasised his concerns regarding the future power of Germany and sought greater co-operation with the Soviet Union in this regard. Incidentally, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher thought along very similar lines in December 1990 when she had called for strengthening the Committee on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) to "help balance German dominance in Europe...Looking well into the future, only the Soviet Union – or its successor – could provide such a balance" (Thatcher 1993: 798)

It seems de Gaulle was more interested in reaching a greater understanding regardless of Anglo-America than was Stalin. He tried to persuade Stalin that the maritime powers had different interests and concerns regarding Germany owing to geography. These powers did not neighbour Germany and were somewhat aloof or immunised from continental affairs. The interwar years had demonstrated that a Germany policy headed by the maritime powers was inherently ineffective. Moreover, such leadership could only come about because there was a continental counter-balancing vacuum owing to mistrust between France and the Soviet Union. The lesson and implication were that in the future, the containment of Germany ought to be primarily carried out on the basis of a Soviet-French understanding and only secondarily based on inputs from the maritime powers. This strategic framework goes a long way in explaining de Gaulle's vacillating policies in the 1960s.

Wolfram Hanrieder, for instance, describes the policy,

"An essential element of de Gaulle's reorientation of French foreign policy was a loosening of ties with the western alliance (especially the United States) and a corresponding readiness to establish closer contacts with the Soviet Union and Western Europe...In 1964 de Gaulle

warmly celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Franco- Soviet alliance, extended seven year credits to Moscow through a new trade agreement....In his press conference of February 4, 1965, de Gaulle pointedly noted that German reunification was a European problem that would have to be settled largely by Germany's neighbors, implying that Germany as well as the United States would play a secondary role in the settlement. Both dimensions of French foreign policy – loosening ties with the West, creating ties with the East - were highlighted by de Gaulle's decision to withdraw from NATO in 1966 and by his state visits to the Soviet Union in 1966 and Poland in 1967" (Hanrieder 1989: 185).

De Gaulle, employing classical balance of power thinking, also concluded that the future rise of China would itself make a rapprochement with Europe necessary for the Soviet Union (Deporte 1990: 32; Klein 1977). He was thus more inclined than most western leaders to discern a growing movement towards peace and normalisation in the Soviet Union in the mid-1960s. Thus, by deemphasising ideology France also sought to invite the Soviet Union to play its traditional great power role in Europe – and to help France address the 'German problem'.

De Gaulle was clearly alarmed by German economic growth in the 1950s and 60s and signs of growing German revanchism and nationalism, which reflected in its demand for nuclear weapons. As de Gaulle is reported to have warned, "I am not going to give our bombs to Germany! You can be quite sure that I will not give up the enormous advantage we have over the five other members of the Common Market by virtue of the fact that we are the only ones who are armed with nuclear weapons and are thus in a position to defend ourselves!" (Peyrefette 1964: 63).

It also did not help that after years of scandals, mishaps and erroneous planning, the Bundeswehr finally became a respectable military and Europe's largest conventional military force by 1965 – 12 NATO assigned divisions, ten wings of tactical aircraft and more than 450,000 soldiers (Duffield 1995: 180-184).

It is worth noting that the General's first conference, 15 March 1959, was one in which he presented an outline of his policy and views towards Germany and the Soviet Union. In it,

he called for the recognition of the Oder-Neisse Line,<sup>5</sup> German renunciation of nuclear weapons in its entirety and the gradual establishment of relations between the two Germany's. Furthermore, he stated that any settlement of the boundary issue and German reunification could not be achieved without the involvement of the Soviet Union. Frederic Bozo would call this stated policy outline as a "mixture of intransigence in the short term and openness in the long term" (Bozo 2001: 32). But instead, could it not be alternatively described as being assertive regarding French immediate interests (intransigence in the short run) while indefinitely postponing the achievement of German interests (openness in the long term)? – given that the interests clash.

The role the Soviet Union occasionally played in advancing French interests could also be seen in the midst of the Berlin crises – 1960-61 in particular. On the one hand, De Gaulle would express his displeasure at the spirit of Camp David (Khrushchev-Eisenhower summit) since he, "had many reservations about what could be obtained in a conference at the summit" and because he would have liked for the Western side to have prepared for it as much as possible first (Bozo 2001: 33). While on the other, from 1959 till 1961 he was willing to make significant concessions to the Soviet Union when it came to West Berlin and German nuclear weapons. France was willing to come down on ties between Bonn and West Berlin, inhibit air travel of East German refugees from Berlin to the Federal Republic and lock in Germany's non-nuclear status – all in the name of reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union in order to defuse mounting tensions (Trachtenberg 1999: 272-274). Similarly, from December 1966, with a new government in power, De Gaulle succeeded in persuading Bonn to adopt a more conciliatory policy towards the Soviet Union. This policy also needed to include 'greater flexibility' on the issue of reunification (Heimann 2010: 74). In the name of realism and pragmatism, France seemed willing to sacrifice key German interests. In some sense, Soviet power itself, and its actions even more so, allowed France greater options concerning its German policy. In a somewhat similar fashion, and three decades later, Mitterrand tried to persuade President Bush in May 1989 that the Soviet

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<sup>5</sup> During the final months of the Second World War Poland's western frontier was demarcated adjacent to the Oder river – essentially transferring a territory of close to 40,000 square miles from Germany to Poland.

Union “will not accept [German unification] as long as it remains strong” (Mitterrand-Bush 1989).

### *De Gaulle and contradictions*

Commenting on all the contradictions that make up De Gaulle’s worldview, Trachtenberg remarked,

“So what does this all mean? The main point, perhaps, is that de Gaulle’s political program, as he laid it out both in public and in private, is not to be taken at face value, if only because the pieces do not quite add up to a clear and consistent policy. That basic point has major implications. For one thing, given the way I now understand de Gaulle’s policy, I am much more sympathetic to Andrew Moravcsik’s general argument about the role that economic considerations played in shaping France’s European policy” (Trachtenberg, 2012: 91-92; Moravcsik 2000).<sup>6</sup>

But there is a simpler interpretation – De Gaulle bluffed in order to enhance his leverage over all other actors in the system. De Gaulle expressed his acceptance of a nuclear Germany only because it would not be allowed by the other powers anyway and regardless of French support or lack of it. Meanwhile, stating acceptance had its own diplomatic benefits – it ideologically made the case for a more independent France within the western alliance system stronger. Secondly, it did not allow the U.S. to use the issue as quid pro quo for cooperation on other issues.

Similarly, proclamations towards a more ‘European Europe’ could be afforded because it was ultimately unlikely, and meanwhile put the U.S on the defensive regarding its position in Europe, while having to concede and defer to France more and more. When push came to shove, De Gaulle could not help but reveal his own disapproval of both concepts because they both empowered Germany at the cost of France.

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<sup>6</sup> Moravcsik argues that since De Gaulle was instrumental regarding his ideology it was all about achieving economic benefits from West Germany’s commitment to the idea of Europe, and primarily through the Common Agricultural Programme (CAP). But Trachtenberg himself walks away from this thesis because it is ‘rational’ and it could be the case that De Gaulle, a ‘giant’ had ‘feet of clay’ in that he got carried away by his own rhetoric and lost touch with reality – evidenced by his remark that if the Soviet Union and China were to engage in a war, the FRG is likely to use the opportunity to attack the Soviet Union (Trachtenberg 2012: 92-93). Moravcsik’s thesis and his sources have been under some scrutiny, however (Lieshout et al 2004).

Détente with the Soviet Union was attempted not in order to fundamentally alter the international system and make it truly multipolar; it had more limited objectives and they pertained mostly if not entirely to a rising Germany – nuclear weapons and border issues. For instance, When President Eisenhower suggested the idea that the U.S. could one day withdraw its troops from Europe and devolve NATO into a European defence organization, De Gaulle was ‘unreceptive’. As Trachtenberg argues, “the French president was not in any great rush to see the Americans go and to replace NATO with a purely European defense system. The basic reason had to do with Germany” (Trachtenberg 2012: 85).

Relations between U.S. and France improved to such a degree that by July 1969 President Georges Pompidou could tell U.S. Ambassador that ‘wheat’ was the ‘only outstanding issue between the U.S. and France’ (Reyn 2011: 249). This relationship was also bolstered by common concerns pertaining to the German-Soviet rapprochement (Juneau 2011). Of course, this relation would be affected negatively in the coming years by various events – such as the U.S. unilateral response to the 1973 Yom Kippur war and the subsequent Arab oil embargo – but France would not exhibit any form of behaviour that could be even remotely interpreted as ‘balancing’ towards the U.S. The perception of contradictions in French foreign policy – pronouncements and operationalising – were not unique to just De Gaulle after all. American and British actors had to deal with the same contradictions before De Gualle and since.

#### *De Gaulle as part of Cold War French Strategic outlook*

De Gaulle was not the first or last statesmen to use propaganda, bluff and ideology for strategic purposes. With disappointment towards the Soviet Union rising by 1968, the last months of De Gaulle’s Presidency saw relations between the two powers (U.S and France) improving (Reyn 2011: 342-356). President Johnson’s declaration of a shift in policy towards negotiations in Vietnam – hailed by De Gaulle (Harrison 1981:167-68), the May 1968 civil unrest in France as well as Soviet invasion of the Czech Republic in 1968 were all contributing factors to this new bilateral stability.

By 1969 there was also less need for both Gaullism in French foreign policy regardless of who was in power. With the U.S extricating from Vietnam (a process greatly aided by De



Gaulle and his facilitation of backchannel diplomacy between the U.S. and Vietcong) and adopting relative retrenchment in terms of international responsibilities and the détente with the Soviet Union already bearing results, France had less need to antagonise the U.S.

Georges Pompidou served as Prime Minister under de Gaulle from 1962-1968 and replaced him as President in 1969. While maintaining co-operation with the Soviet Union, France sought to improve relations with the U.S to meet a new range of challenges. For instance, the race to the Soviet Union that France had started off in 1965 was naturally taken up by the U.S first and then by Germany. While France benefitted from the early results of the rush it was more unsure and nervous regarding the direction of the détente between U.S and Soviet Union on the one hand and Germany-Soviet Union on the other (Bange: *undated*). As such, France remained concerned about both U.S – Soviet co-operation in matters such as Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions agreement (MBFR) and Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) and German-Soviet rapprochement (Bange: *undated*).

It could also be argued that significant French concerns were addressed by the string of treaties Bonn ended up signing (Treaty of Moscow and Treaty of Warsaw in 1970 and Basic Treaty of 1972) in the early 1970s. Collectively, these treaties amounted to Germany renouncing the use of force and recognising post-war borders with Poland. It also entailed recognition of the People's Republic of Poland as well as the Germany Democratic Republic. The spectre of closer Soviet-French ties in the mid-1960s may have propelled Bonn to itself improve relations with the East to avoid isolation or a balance of power forming against it.

Meanwhile, SALT could undermine the American security guarantee to Europe by establishing greater parity between the super-powers and also allowing both to co-operate in regard to a third nuclear power such as France. MBFR could undermine European conventional defence and lead to some form of 'neutralisation' of Europe. Even more worrying however, was Germany's *ostpolitik* towards the Soviet Union. This brought back memories of Rapallo when Russia and Germany negotiated without involving the western powers. France feared that *ostpolitik* could enable German reunification at some date in the future and on the basis of a Soviet-German understanding. These fears were shared by the U.S and that in turn facilitated greater co-operation. If the 1960s demanded détente with the

Soviet Union and distance from the U.S., then the strategic context of the 1970s required some form of correction or a reversal. Moreover, similar to the Chinese communists, Pompidou was much concerned by the then much real possibility of significant cuts in U.S. military spending and U.S. European troops reduction (Soutou 2007; Peyrefitte 2000: 274). George-Henri Soutou sees an intellectual difference between Pompidou and de Gaulle on the issue of the American role in Europe and despite acknowledging the former as a Gaullist. A conceptual lens which sees de Gaulle's anti-Americanism as a time-context sensitive tactical move would see fewer dissimilarities between the two on the issue however.

### *German policy and de Gaulle*

“de Gaulle speaks of Europe, but means France”

- Harold Macmillan (Williams 1993: 432)

In the early 1960s the U.S. saw the momentum towards a bilateral treaty between France and Germany as benign. The two powers had significant differences and thus public displays of solidarity were seen as acts of reassurance towards each other rather than foreshadows of a substantive treaty that excluded Washington (Giauque 2002).

This changed, however. As Jeffrey Giauque describes,

“The French leader's negative comments on British entry into Europe while he was in Germany rang alarm bells in Washington, and State Department officials began to fear that the Franco-German relationship would overshadow not only a wider political union, but also the negotiations of the Six with Britain. Washington received disturbing reports from the British and Benelux on alleged French and German plans to exclude the United Kingdom and seize hegemony in Western Europe. A bitter Foreign Minister Spaak informed the Americans that France was not seeking to create a unified Europe, but rather ‘a Franco-German alliance which de Gaulle generously will permit Benelux countries to join as satellites’” (Giauque 2002: 206).

Meanwhile, strong elements within the German government itself sought to oppose Adenauer's flirtation with De Gaulle and especially after the EEC press conference of 1963. Herbert Blankenhorn, for instance, was convinced that De Gaulle sought to isolate Germany

from the U.S. and Britain, dominate Europe and reach an agreement with the Soviet Union – aimed at Germany (Giauque 2002: 211-213).

The treaty got almost nullified by the preamble added by Germany that reemphasised German transatlantic ties to the U.S. and included a commitment to German reunification – an act that angered De Gaulle and led to a protest by the French ambassador. Subsequently, De Gaulle has been reported to state, “The Germans are behaving like pigs. They are putting themselves completely at the Americans’ service. They’re betraying the spirit of the Franco-German Treaty. And they’re betraying Europe” (Peyrefitte 1997: 270; Williams 1993: 433). In subsequent years de Gaulle will repeatedly attempt to get Bonn to implement the principles laid out in the Treaty but without much avail (Soutou 2007: 21-24).

Furthermore, evidence that the treaty would remain relatively inconsequential from the strategic point of view emerged almost immediately. Even before the first obligatory summit between the two powers, France had unilaterally decided to withdraw its naval units from NATO without consulting Germany. German co-operation with the US continued on all fronts while Franco-German discussions on military co-operation made no progress and kept stalling. Also worth noting that the Soviet Union seemed more alarmed by the treaty than was the US. They characterized it as ‘revanchist Germany looking for allies’ and also denounced the 1944 treaty between France and the Soviet Union that was aimed at balancing Germany (Giauque 2002: 221).

France’s withdrawal from NATO did create an unprecedented problem for the future of Europe. Amongst other things, it led to a new enthusiasm in Britain to join the European community. It also led to Germany seeking greater participation of Britain in the EC in order to assuage the concerns of smaller powers regarding possible German hegemony in a Europe without France in it. As the then British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart reasoned regarding French withdrawal, “creates a gap which other countries and public opinion in France would like to see filled by stronger UK influence in Europe” (The National Archives 1966). At the same time, President Lyndon Johnson sought to persuade PM Harold Wilson, “Our best hope of peace and stability lies in the inclusion of Germany in a larger European unity, in which any latent nationalistic drives can be submerged. I am sure that you and your

country hold the key to this possibility and that you can play a role of great leadership in Europe” (Johnson to Wilson 1966).

Whereas Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was more sympathetic towards France, his successor Ludwig Erhard was more of an Atlanticist in his orientation, prioritising ties with Britain and America (Blang 2004); Erhard wanted relations with France regarding integration and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to be on a more *quid pro quo* basis, and not permit progress in other fields to be conditional on progress on CAP. The new Chancellor moreover feared that any move towards a ‘European Europe’ would only jeopardise U.S. commitment to the security of Europe (Schoenborn 2014; Hanrieder 1989). The German reasoning was also that Franco-American differences were transitory and would revert to normalcy. Bonn on the other hand could not afford to alienate the US and undermine its own primary interests.

Meanwhile, despite the promise of offering German re-unification, Chancellor Erhard was sceptical of ‘European Europe’. He had told Harold Wilson in May 1965 that any such offer would only be implemented within the framework of Franco-Soviet hegemony, something not very appealing to German interests (Parr 2005: 65).

#### *De Gaulle: The Personae*

De Gaulle’s policy was a combination of personal characteristics and creative foreign policy responses to structural imperatives. This section shall clarify each of these aspects – personal characteristics, creative responses and structural imperatives very briefly.

De Gaulle in essence was a traditionalist who was very sceptical of progressive movements that undermined or ignored more traditional forms of existence or the primordial human realities. This explains his reluctance in acknowledging the relevance or potency of soviet communism as an ideological factor. He saw it as a mere cover for more real Russian concerns and modes of behaviour. Stalinist Russia was merely a more brutal form of Tsarist rule; which in turn was imprinted on the Russian political character. Just as Kennan’s traditionalism prohibited him from both understanding and accepting the new kind of relationship establishing between the US and Europe, De Gaulle also felt that the US-led European order was likely to be a transitory artificial arrangement (Harper 1994). Europe

was likely to revert to more traditional forms of power politics and in those circumstances, France's traditionally European allies based in the continent would serve her better than her distant maritime allies who had neither a feel for European politics nor shared similar stakes.

At the heart of De Gaulle's vision of a proud independent Europe lay the contradiction that France was more opposed to Germany having a say in western multilateral nuclear decision making than either the U.S. or Britain. Just as De Gaulle was adept at seeing the more abiding and narrower national interests behind the lofty and ideological proclamations of international actors, his grand visions themselves appear to be a functional cloak aimed at achieving narrow French national interests. Moreover, what is true of de Gaulle seems to be also true of French foreign policy in general during the cold war – albeit to a lesser degree possibly.

This feature was described most starkly by President Eisenhower in a letter to President Truman, “At the very bottom of all their [the French] ‘backing and filling,’ their seemingly contradictory statements and actions, is an instinctive, inbred fear of Germany and the Germans. With a growing realization of the severity of their economic crisis, occasioned partly, although not wholly, by the Indo-China war, they have to accept a slower rate of military preparation than originally planned. This, in turn, makes them fear that in any collective venture in Europe, be it political, economic, military, or all three, Germany would completely dominate” (Eisenhower to Truman 1952).

### **End of the Soviet rapprochement: 1968-1982**

By 1972-73 it seemed as if the policy of rapprochement with the Soviet Union had failed and France feared it was getting isolated mainly due to German Ostpolitik and American détente towards the Soviet Union. In 1973, for instance, the Soviet Union rebuked French foreign minister Michel Jobert (also a Gaullist) for pursuing the idea of a European defence security system. In 1971, the Soviet Union still held steadfastly to its policy of not recognising the EEC because it “on principle, was against all military and other groupings” in Europe (Gromyko to Barzel 1972). This leaves open the question of whether the Soviets

preferred a Trans-Atlantic military grouping (NATO) over a purely European one – a very pertinent question for balance of power theory.

Towards the very end of his presidency, Pompidou tried to maintain and enhance French-Soviet relations. In a meeting in Pitsunda (in modern day Georgia) with Brezhnev, he requested that the two powers maintained a special understanding despite the simultaneous improvement of relations with the other western powers. Among several concessions, he offered the withdrawal of criticism of lack of human rights in the Soviet Union in the CSCE meetings, restraint in extending diplomatic support to China in its anti-Soviet policies (unlike other western powers) and also resistance to American energy policies for Western Europe (Soutou 2007: 250-270).

The Gaullist President also closely oversaw increasing American-French military cooperation whose top secrecy was maintained by both sides firmly. The cooperation entailed American aid to the French ballistic missile program as well as the French nuclear program (Kissinger-Schlesinger and Galley 1973). Greater cooperation in this regard was a function of White House attempts at changing French foreign policy orientation on several European issues as well as a French desire to improve relations with the U.S. Whereas sensitivity to German sensibilities forbid nuclear assistance to France in the 1960s (Mahan 2002: 70-84; Maddock 2009: 155-170), the new strategic context of post détente early 70s allowed the same cooperation to take place, albeit secretly.

Furthermore, Georges-Henri Soutou shows how the German question was central to French foreign policy even under President Giscard d'Estaing – arguably the most Germany friendly President in the cold war era, “This revelation would come as a shock to naïve historians, victims of the media hype at the time, who believed in an intimate Giscard-Schmidt relationship” (Soutou 2012: 218). D'Estaing repeatedly conveyed to the Soviet side that France was opposed to German reunification – adding that it constituted ‘one of the most important common interests between France and the Soviet Union’ (Soutou 2012: 218). He conveyed that there was a need to maintain the Franco-German balance – meaning a margin of superiority over a non-nuclear divided Germany. This also meant, to the President, a Germany not enjoying too much of an advantage vis-à-vis France in terms of conventional military forces and economically.

Meanwhile, in the 1980s, President Mitterrand was alarmed by pacifist, neutralist and anti-American sentiment amongst the masses in West Germany (Stent 1989: 11; Schabert 2009: 47-51). Left unchecked such sentiments could lead to German estrangement from the west. Hence, once again France was reminded of America's central position in Europe and it helped Mitterrand adopt policies more aligned with American objectives. These included support for human rights within the Soviet Union, diplomatic sanctions against the Soviet Union for its invasion of Afghanistan, the censure of martial law in Poland, support for the deployment of Pershing and Cruise missiles in Europe. Frederic Bozo argues that this enhanced anti-Soviet stance taken by Mitterrand was expected to yield in greater political capital for France in influencing East-West relations – leaving open the question whether policies emanated from concerns over Soviet power (Bozo 2001: 9).

When push came to shove, despite the common desire for a great understanding, France would revert to being a loyal ally to the western alliance in times of crisis (such as during the Berlin blockade of 1948) and the Soviet Union, in turn, would prefer to reach a better understanding with the U.S. on a bilateral great power basis and even at the cost of excluding France (such as during the 1967 Arab Israel war as well as NPT in 1963).

### **The End of the Cold War and Europe: 1982-91**

Studying the end of the cold war presents a valuable and rare opportunity to assess balancing theories. Did Europe and France have a unified common approach towards its own unification? Did European states, including Germany, look forward to unification as a way to balance American power. Did the Soviet Union look forward to unification as a way to push the U.S. out of Europe now that NATO's rationale becomes no longer valid?

The last years of the cold war witnessed the spectre of a re-unified Germany. A reunified Germany would naturally imply a stronger Germany and probably even a more independent Germany. Much of the cold war centred on questions pertaining to German power. The structure and nature of Germany (both FRG and GDR) was itself determined to a large extent by the prevailing and changing balance of power in the continent. The U.S. led west preferred a divided Germany with the larger, industrious and populous Western part attached to Western alliances and institutions. The outcome itself eventually, was a function

of two different balance of power systems. On the one hand was the balance of power between the U.S and the Soviet Union. But this interacted with another system which then in combination shaped events, processes and negotiations. The second system was the balance of power within the western alliance. *It was the differing levels of power, concerns and interests among U.S, France, Britain and Germany that constituted a balance of power system in its own right.* In this system, despite American presence and primary security responsibility, France, Britain and the smaller Benelux countries sought to balance and check German power through various means. As Elizabeth Pond writes, “By 1990 the issue was no longer keeping the democratically reformed Germans down as in the 1940s. But there was a more subtle need—which the West Germans themselves accepted—for the American counterweight to growing German might to assure the anxious French, Italians, and Dutch that the Germans would not overwhelm them (Pond 1993: 175).

Germany itself was not helpless since other powers had to be cognizant and considerate of German interests unless it provokes German revanchism and nationalism. For instance, Chancellor Helmut Kohl used this pertinent concern tactfully and during a few occasions. During a walk along the river Rhine, (behind the scenes of the Bonn summit between Kohl and Gorbachev in November 1990) Kohl used the metaphor of a river to allude to the inexorable nature of German people’s will for reunification. As he later described, “Then I pointed to the Rhine and said that this water will go to the ocean, and if the river is dammed up it will overflow and destroy the banks, but it will reach the ocean. So it is with German unification... [Gorbachev] listened and did not contradict me” (Newnham 1999: 427). The Chancellor had put similar pressure on President Bush to remove intermediate or short-range missiles from Europe (Costigliola 1994: 105).

Moreover, German economic, moral power and alliances were ably deployed to achieve ends that could no longer be achieved through more traditional means. France had the second-largest economy and the strongest military in the continent and based on the same, claimed leadership for itself in the task of integrating Germany into a larger western order. This process of integration also allowed France significant power in influencing German domestic politics. France was also willing at times to step out of the east-west rigid cold war divide in order to engage with the Soviet Union to balance Germany. The U.S sought



to ameliorate against the undesirable effects of the second balance of power system on the first. It recognized that France would resist the restoration of German power that was so needed for the counter-balancing of Soviet power. Thus, the U.S both sidelined France entirely on some issues while also appeasing it on others. Britain initially envisaged a strong Anglo-American partnership claiming decisive leadership over European politics. This was made more and more unlikely by America's own strategic preference for a Franco-German led European community which would be able to decide its own affairs within a broad framework of the Western alliance in which Britain was just one of several significant powers. Over time Britain found itself having to forego its own great power status and assume roles within the U.S defined system, such as infusing Atlantic ideas into a continental European community. Britain for instance sought to join the European community in the 1960s as a reaction and counter to French exit from NATO.

Hence, the prospect of the reunification of Germany forced other powers to reveal their true strategic thinking and interests. Re-unification would be a historic event and several politicians and strategists could not help but think in terms of past precedents and outcomes.

For instance, Raymond Seitz, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, during a Congressional hearing voiced his concern, "The history of the 20th century is a history in which a unified Germany has led to instability and that, in turn to war" (House of Representatives 1989). The division of Germany and its weakening, after all, were both inspired by the German confederacy that existed until 1871. A Germany divided was associated with a Germany that was not a threat to neighbouring states or even to the world. Thus, a Germany re-united naturally led to nervous anticipations regarding its future conduct. Hence, the climate and context of reunification offer an opportunity to observe and assess the strategic priorities and strategies of different powers.

#### *American interests*

Contrary to certain assumptions regarding American power in Europe the U.S was interested in continuing its leadership over Europe. American realists and conservatives, among others, tend to presume that U.S. forces remained for so long in Europe only because the European powers by themselves did not have the sufficient power to balance the Soviet

Union on their own. What this implies is that if either Europe became capable someday or if the Soviet threat dissipated, the U.S would extricate itself from European politics similar to post 1919 (Glaser 1993; Walt 1989). This was the basis of Mearsheimer's argument in the early 1990s – that the end of the cold war would result in withdrawal of American power, thus leading to a new round of great power conflicts between Germany and Russia (Mearsheimer 1990). Walt similarly argues from the premise that “Since the Second World War, the main objective of U.S. grand strategy has been to prevent territorial expansion by the Soviet Union while avoiding a major war” (Walt 1989: 5). Incidentally, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas had recently (2019) commented regarding the prospect of constructing and building a European army, “when Europe is one day able to defend its own security, we should still want NATO” (Bershidsky 2019).

But evidence from the end of the cold war demonstrated that the U.S was intent on continuing its leadership despite the end of the Soviet threat (Castigliola 1994; Pond 1993; Zelikow and Rice 1995; Hutchings 1997; Bush and Scowcroft 1998; Baker and DeFrank 1995; Sarotte 2009). This is where revisionism regarding the beginning and end of the cold war converge. American post-war policy was one of double containment regarding Europe. It was also, in essence, a revisionist strategy which sought to continuously undermine great power politics and thereby deepen American hegemony – both being mutually co-dependent. *Both these imperatives meant that the U.S had an equal interest in the Post Cold war world to continue to pacify Germany as well as to take steps to prevent the re-emergence of Russian power at a future date. In other words, double containment continued by other means.* The same strategy made NATO expansion necessary both as a means to avert power competition between Russia and Germany over historically contested lands (Eastern Europe, Baltic and Balkans) as well as to prevent the newly independent emerging states from becoming unstable (or even threatening to Russia and Germany).

This is not limited to the final years of the cold war. In 1950 President Truman assured, “We certainly don't want to make the same mistake that was made after World War I when Germany was authorized to train one hundred thousand soldiers” (Truman memos 1950). During the same time, the State Department wanted to delay German militarisation till there was enough time to “develop democratic tendencies on the part of the German

people and a more responsive form of government” (NSC 71/1 1950). The then secretary of state John Foster Dulles observed to American diplomats in 1958, “If I had to choose between a neutralized Germany and a Germany in the [Soviet] bloc, it would be almost better to have it in the bloc” (Costigliola 2008: 93). Similarly, in 1964 President Lyndon Johnson mused that if the western alliance did not “tie the Germans in there was some 17 year old now in Germany who would be a 20 year old little Hitler in another three years” (Johnson-Krock 1964).

Thus, as the Soviet Union was crumbling in May 1990, Paul Wolfowitz argued that American troops and nuclear weapons would remain in Europe even if the Soviet Union were to completely withdraw from Germany and Eastern Europe. He explained that American power and role in Europe would allow German moderates to, “argue: ‘Our security needs are met in an arrangement with our friends, and we don’t have to do the things on our own which would be particularly disturbing in the modern age” (Costigliola 101-102). Senator Joe Biden, during the same time, argued that if Soviet withdrawal were to encourage Germany to say ‘Yankees go home’ he would respond with a ‘Bring back the Russians. Bring back the Russians’. For the senator, a future Germany compelling the U.S. to withdraw would be a worse outcome than the Soviet occupation of central and eastern Europe (Foreign Relations Committee 1990: 598).

Contrary to conventional wisdom and the assumptions of various IR scholars, the cold war entailed more than the mere containment of Soviet power – that is, it included the containment of German power as well. This also explains why NATO survived the end of the cold war and why American pre-eminence in Europe both remains strong and as welcome as it was during the cold war.

### *The myth of European coherency*

Contrary to assumptions that posit Europe as an almost unitary entity in international politics the end of the cold war and how it occurred revealed that France and Britain had greater concerns regarding German power than American power and sought the engagement of the latter to balance the former. Such diplomacy reveals that ‘Europe’ is a contrived entity and contains power contradictions within it. Most illustratively, during a meeting with

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher conveyed, “Britain and Western Europe are not interested in the unification of Germany. The words written in the NATO communique may sound different, but disregard them. We do not want the unification of Germany. It would lead to changes in the post-war borders, and we cannot allow that because such a development would undermine the stability of the entire international situation, and could lead to threats to our security” (Gorbachev-Thatcher 1989). In her memoirs, Thatcher notes that French President “was even more concerned” than she was on the issue (Thatcher 1993: 796-7).

Neither did European integration neutralise fears of German economic rise and its implications. Even before reunification seemed to be around the corner, European states were already concerned about Germany’s growing power within the European community (Gros & Thygesen 1998). Such concerns by European states towards Germany took a somewhat unpleasant turn during the Strasbourg European Council Meeting (8 and 9 December) where Kohl faced “tribunal like interrogations” about German ambitions (Engel 2011: 59).

### *Bipolarity and Soviet concerns*

Waltzian balance of power theory and preponderance theory would predict that the Soviet Union would welcome the emergence of a strong re-unified Germany as a possible ally against the overbearing American hegemon – after all balance of power operates through the process of weaker powers finding common causes in the face of a much stronger power in the system. If there was any hope of maintaining some semblance of balance in the international system and in Europe, then Germany would have to re-emerge. The Soviet Union, however, was more concerned about the re-emergence of German power than they were about balancing American power – from a security point of view. In fact, the balancing thrust moved in the opposite direction. The Soviet Union conveyed that it would be reassured by a reunified Germany continuing to operate within NATO; thereby by default agreeing to and facilitating some form of NATO expansion. Thus, the Soviet Union/Russia, at least tacitly, was as complicit in the expansion of American power in Europe in the post-cold war world as was Britain in an earlier age when it facilitated the Monroe doctrine and thereby paved the way for eventual American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. It was

the U.S that behaved more in accordance with the balancing imperative or balance of power policy than did the Soviet Union.

For the U.S., threats and balance of power imperatives converged in balancing both the Soviet Union and Germany. For the Soviet Union, no such analogous convergence existed. If anything, it was faced with a divergence in this regard – balance of power required it to facilitate a stronger Germany but a stronger Germany was itself a much more significant concrete threat to the Soviet Union than the abstract imbalance of power in the system. Prior to his agreement to united Germany being under NATO, Gorbachev had sought to suggest that such an outcome was ‘inadmissible’ because, “One cannot allow the breakdown of the balance of power in Europe, the basis of stability and security, and of mutual trust and cooperation” (Vstrecha M.S. Gorbacheva 1990). And yet, four months later in July 1990 Gorbachev had agreed to just such a further ‘breakdown’ in the balance.

If Waltzian balance of power were to hold then Gorbachev would be more interested in propping up German power as a counterweight to American hegemony rather than curtailing it. And yet, Chancellor Kohl was compelled to pledge to Gorbachev (July 1990) that the German military would be cut down in size from 480,000 troops to 370,000 (Lee 1990).

Furthermore, during the Malta meeting between President Bush and Gorbachev, the American delegation was surprised by Gorbachev’s insistence that the U.S. should stay in Europe and that both superpowers “are equally integrated into European problems”. As the General-Secretary stated, “We understand very well your involvement in Europe. To look at the role of the U.S. in the Old World any differently is unrealistic, erroneous, and ultimately unconstructive. You must know this; it is our basic position” (Malta meeting 1989).

#### *German concerns*

Whereas France, Britain and the Soviet Union considered German power to be the most problematic, Germany itself was concerned about counter-balancing behaviour from both these groups. Germany was very much concerned that its own economic growth and greater independence was leading to greater counter-balancing tendencies among its cold war European ‘allies’. Hence, Germany was sensitive to and wary of adversarial steps these

allies could take to further downgrade or circumvent German power. It is this concern that led Chancellor Erhard to welcome Britain into the European community since without Britain within it the smaller powers would be uncomfortable functioning within a regional grouping marked by the imbalance of power between them and Germany (Parr 2005; Colman 2004). It is the same concern that led Chancellor Kohl to heed French concerns in the 1980s regarding the strength of the Deutschmark and subsequently agree to a common currency. The same concern and counter-pressure drove Germany to abandon the more revanchist strands within its foreign policy in the 1960s in favour of détente, treaties with the Soviet bloc members recognizing the legitimacy of the GDR as well as recognizing the border with Poland (Plock 1986; Hanrieder 1989).

German concerns regarding European powers as well as the Soviet Union naturally led it to value the American role in Europe since without it these tendencies were likely to only get strengthened. American decision-makers and officials were keen on allowing Germany some decision making power in terms of nuclear weapons as a result of its sensitivity towards German insecurity in light of Britain and especially France acquiring nuclear weapons. Henry Kissinger at this time conveyed to President Kennedy that Germany was ‘a candidate for a nervous breakdown’ (Costigliola 1984: 231-232). In a letter to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, Kennedy sought to persuade the former that if MLF fails, “The Germans are bound to move in much more dangerous directions” (Kennedy to Macmillan 1963). Kurt-George Kiesinger, an influential CDU parliamentarian, put the matter well while debating proponents of ‘disengagement’<sup>7</sup> during a Bilderberg meeting in 1957,

“But even if we have realistically abandoned this notion [of a European centred World Policy] and confined ourselves to maintain a modest but dignified existence as smaller powers, we must – with or without a unified western Europe - recognise the fact that even this modest existence *depends largely on the interest the United States* – their government and their public opinion– take in western Europe’s freedom and independence” (Gijswijt 2012: 33).

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<sup>7</sup> British Labor party member, German Social Democrats – aided by George Kennan – argued that the right approach would be for the U.S. and the Soviet Union to disengage from Germany in exchange for German reunification and neutralisation as well as Soviet relaxation of controls in Eastern Europe. Various members seemed to be in favour of abandoning NATO for German reunification and an early end to the cold war (Gijswijt 2012).

This was a response to the fact that British Labor party members as well as German Social Democrats – aided by George Kennan – argued that the right approach would be for the U.S. and the Soviet Union to disengage from Germany in exchange for German reunification and neutralisation as well as Soviet relaxation of controls in Eastern Europe. Various members seemed to be in favour of abandoning NATO for German reunification and an early end to the cold war (Gijswijt 2012).

Even though the U.S. shared concerns regarding a revanchist Germany along with the Soviet Union, Britain, France and the Eastern Bloc countries; it took a much more long term, accommodative and enlightened view of the situation. Its prognosis to the problem did not lie in straitjacketing Germany further, but by responding to Germany's legitimate security and national interests to forestall a more unfavourable German course. More than any other power it was interested in integrating Germany into the west.

In a conversation with the Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Jozef Winiewicz, Dean Rusk emphasised that Poland and U.S. both shared common concerns about the future of Germany. The Polish representative was opposed to placing any trust on “the Germans” who had “one face for the East and one for the West” and whom “Poles understood ... better than the U.S.”. In contrast, Rusk argued for respecting Germany's legitimate interests in security (given that it was the target of hundreds of Soviet missiles) as well as “ensuring that the Germans are a part of the fiber of Europe” in order to “guard against the reappearance of a Hitler” (Rusk-Winiewicz 1965). But more than anything else, the U.S. knew that what kept the German problem from boiling over was American presence and security assurances to Germany (NIE 23-66 1966). It seems to be the case that such a difference in attitude and policy is best explained by America's own geographically distant and insular position.

Christopher Layne, for instance, describes the Treaty of Elysee in 1963 as one of traditional alliance politics – by which two weaker powers ally in order to push back against a common hegemon (Layne 2003: 98-110). German statesmen and diplomats however never saw it in the same way. Most illustratively, for instance, Chancellor Adenauer explained the dynamic in the continent to Dean Rusk in terms not very different to the continental political alignment prior to 1914. He argued that Germany must do everything possible to prevent a

Franco-Russian arrangement against Germany and hence ‘complete intimacy’ between Germany and France was ‘utterly fundamental’ (Reyn 2011: 417). Furthermore, contrary to Layne’s reasoning, Germany feared the withdrawal of the U.S. from Europe. In the 1960s, German policymakers had a choice to make between pursuing nuclear weapons despite American objections or forsaking the same in order to not precipitate an American withdrawal from Europe. Washington had conveyed through various private channels that any German move to arm itself in the nuclear sphere would result in the U.S. “hauling out” of Europe (The National Archives 1962). By the late 1960s, Germany had finally made its choice – U.S. presence in Germany and Europe over nuclearisation. Furthermore, a July 1962 dispatch from the U.S. Embassy in Bonn to the Secretary of State noted that Germany at present accepts, “French Nuclear Program as part of status quo. But attitude might change if U.S. were to change policy and provide nuclear assistance to France” (U.S. Embassy 1962). The U.S. was clearly Germany’s ally of choice, instead of France.

The Elysee treaty was as much a genuine alliance as the alliance between the Soviet Union and PRC in February 1950. De Gaulle did not seek to ally with Germany to balance the U.S. in the distant future, or even seek greater autonomy for Europe. He sought to use it further shape and influence Germany into remaining a contained or restrained power. Incidentally, he seemed to have very little faith that the terms of the treaty will be adhered to by either side for long (Klein 1977: 28). Germany, on the other hand, did not seek to challenge American hegemony in Europe by allying with France. Germany only sought to prevent a Franco-Russian understanding regarding Germany.

Furthermore, contrary to what Waltzian Balance of power theory would expect, The U.S.’ greatest leverage during various occasions seemed to be the threat to withdraw American troops from Germany – something that was used most assertively by President Johnson while demanding German offset payments for America GI’s stationed in Germany as well as contributions of German troops in the Vietnam war (Blang 2004: 349; Shifrinson & Schuessler 2019; Ikenberry 1998). A balancing power does not let itself be pressured by a threat by the hegemon to withdraw its power from its home territory.



## **German Reunification, end of the cold war and Balance of power theory**

The end of the Cold War has been the cause of two primary puzzles for IR theory (Kegley 1993; Lebow 1994; Kratochwill 1993; Gaddis 1992/93). The first being the ability of IR theory to predict events. The second being the cause of the end of the cold war and whether such an end validates realism or constructivism (Wohlforth 2003; English 2002). There has been no significant work on the relation between the end of the cold war and balance of power theory. This is primarily because the cold war had so widely been framed as a clear bipolar contest – with smaller powers such as Europe and Japan acting as mere satellites and protectorates of the two superpowers (Waltz 1979: 130-132). But a closer look demonstrates that both these assumptions deserve greater scrutiny. The Soviet Union never achieved parity vis-à-vis the U.S. (except maybe in strategic nuclear weapons) and nor were the smaller powers mere protectorates who made simplistic choices that were devoid of balance of power thinking.

The bipolarity premise does not sit easily with the notion that the U.S. seemed as interested in the survivability of the Soviet bloc as it was in ending the cold war. It also does not sit easily with the notion that the U.S. and its western allies were as concerned about the future trajectory of German power as it was about the then-contemporary menace associated with Soviet power in Europe. And finally, it does not fit with the fact that the Soviet Union seemed more assured by a continuing American presence in Europe and primarily in order to contain present and future German power.

If there is a common theme in all of the above three disjunctures, it is that the cold war was as much about containing German power as it was about containing Soviet power. Fear of Germany and the need to balance the same is key in understanding French, British, Soviet and U.S. reaction to the gradual disembodiment of the post-1945 cold war balance of power structure. The terms and conditions imposed upon Germany, in order to allow its reunification, had their source in traditional balance of power thinking.

### *France, Mitterrand and German reunification*

France was deeply apprehensive of reunification. Amongst various steps undertaken in the period, Mitterrand attempted to bolster the GDR regime (Plato 2015: 108-110; Childs

2014:97-100), enumerated several prerequisites for reunification in a manner so as to delay the same, and made reunification contingent on greater European integration and the launch of the European Monetary Union (EMU) (Dyson & Featherstone 1999; Marsh 2009; Sarotte 1989). As Frederic Boze notes the French President's conditions, "The process should unfold peacefully and democratically; it should neither challenge guaranteed borders... nor upset European equilibriums; and it should not overtake the evolution in the East, the Community strengthening in the West, or the emergence of pan-European structures at the East-West level. German unity, in other words, could not occur without the completion of necessary European transformations". (Bozo 2009: 136). In a telephone conversation with Gorbachev, Mitterrand outlined his and France's position on November 14 1989,

"Our two countries are friends of East Germany. I plan to visit the GDR in the near future. I am convinced that they should not undertake any hasty actions which could destabilize the situation. There is a certain equilibrium that exists in Europe, and we should not disturb it. We will also talk about this with leaders of twelve nations of countries--members of the European Communities in Paris" (Gorbachev-Mitterrand 1989a).

In an effort to defy the then momentum towards reunification, Mitterrand signed six agreements with the GDR during his December 1989 trip – including an economic and industrial cooperation accord for 1990-94. Frederick Bozo, a preeminent scholar of French cold war foreign policy, argues that Mitterrand had put pressure on Kohl to recognize the Oder-Neisse border only to ease eastern European anxieties about German intentions (Bozo 2009). According to Bozo, this concern of Mitterrand was driven by his concern that such anxieties in Eastern Europe may risk disrupting the EC's rapid movement towards further integration. In this manner, Bozo seeks to argue that French pressure on such a sensitive geopolitical issue emanated only from its desire to achieve smoother European integration.

But such a narrative overlooks the fact that France had always concerned itself with the Oder-Neisse border and even sought cooperation with the Soviet Union in the past to put pressure on Germany to accept the same. That is, such pressure precedes Mitterrand's enthusiasm for European integration and can be explained in balance of power terms. There is enough evidence to suggest that Mitterrand's concerns were geopolitical in nature. According to the British record of his meeting with Thatcher, "He was fearful that he and

the Prime Minister would themselves in the situation of their predecessors in the 1930s who had failed to react in the face of constant pressing forward by the Germans” (Salmon 2009: 164-165). In a meeting with the U.S. President, Mitterrand would use analogies of 1913 to express the same concerns (Bush & Scrowcroft 1998: 201). Moreover, the goal of European integration was deeply tied in with fears regarding a reunified Germany. Margaret Thatcher would herself later describe Mitterrand’s policy as one “of moving ahead faster towards a federal Europe in order to tie down the German giant” (Thatcher 1993: 796). Interestingly, Prime Minister Thatcher contrasted Mitterrand’s policy to that of de Gaulle who had earlier responded to fears to a rising Germany by emphasising French sovereignty and ‘striking up of alliances to secure French interests’.

Besides, a long French tradition of curtailing German power and objectives indirectly by arguing for the consequences of the same on other states, and not its own national interests, can be discerned. Complaints against central administration as well as German rearmament under a European army were both made on the basis of the consequences of the same on Soviet power and conduct. Similarly, during the tumultuous months of 1989 and 1990, the French government voiced concerns that too strong and narrow a focus on German national interests might negatively affect the political position of Mikhail Gorbachev within the Soviet regime (Bozo 2009: 41).

In another parallel with earlier French policy, France under Mitterrand framed its Germany policy in 1989-90 under the assumption that with the end of the cold war or with the reunification of Germany the U.S. was bound to end its engagement with Europe. Reviewers of Bozo’s book on Mitterrand point out that such an assumption was ‘foolish since it was evident that U.S. was redoubling its efforts to keep Germany within NATO’ (H-Diplo Roundtable 2010). This in indeed correct. President Bush had written empathically to Mitterrand himself in April 1990, “I hope that you agree that the North Atlantic Alliance is an essential component of Europe’s future” (Bush to Mitterrand 1990). His top foreign policy aide Hubert Védrine thought that the continuity of NATO in Europe was the U.S. administration’s “the only issue” during the end of the cold war (Védrine 1996: 443).

However, as we have seen earlier, France seemed to operate under a similar assumption for most of the cold war and despite increasing and consistent American engagement. Could it

be that it was in French interest to hold such a general assumption? A point of view on this matter, after all, decided the solution to the German problem. If U.S. commitment or its duration is in question, then there is a greater need for restraints on German power as well as greater cooperation between France and Russia. For similar reasons, French officials were reluctant to assume that a reunified and sovereign Germany would accept the political and military constraints imposed upon it since 1945, and despite Germany assuring them that the same would not be the case (Bozo 2009: 206).

Mitterrand, Similar to De Gaulle, also spoke passionately of a European Europe. French officials were aware that such an entity implied German nuclear armament (Bozo 2009: 245). But, just like De Gaulle again, Mitterrand was axiomatically opposed to the idea of ‘nuclear sharing’ with Germany. Mitterrand’s diplomacy was intent on keeping Germany within NATO even as France remained outside of it. As Bozo writes about Mitterrand, “seems to have been the first to convince Gorbachev of the unavoidable character of a unified Germany in NATO” (Bozo 2009: 207). Despite calls for European Europe, Mitterrand in January 1983 advised Germans in the Bundestag to accept American mid-range nuclear missiles in Germany as a counter to Soviet SS-20 missiles (Vinocur 1983). In the same speech, he warned against a German decoupling from the U.S. in the wake of increasing German protests against U.S. missiles in Germany. His actual policies and strategies do not seem to fit Bozo’s description of his thinking during the same time, “A Europe emancipated from the United States – hence less disturbing for Moscow – might even bring the USSR in time to abandon the logic of confrontation, and perhaps release its hold over Eastern Europe” (Bozo 2009: 9). During a conversation with Soviet premier Gorbachev on the 6th of December, in the midst of renewed anxieties caused by Kohl’s announcement of the 10 point plan, Mitterrand deployed the idea of Europe yet again to seek to delay or mould German reunification, “First and foremost among them should be European integration, the evolution of Eastern Europe, and the all-European process, the creation of a peaceful order in Europe,” and consistent with general French cold war strategy he added, “If the United States participates in these processes, it would give all of us additional guarantees” (Gorbachev –Mitterrand 1989b). European processes needed American participation.

If Mitterrand's policy in 1989 seemed 'opaque and inconsistent' (Engel 2011: 60), it could very well be for more structural reasons. French policy seemed similarly inconsistent during the late 1940s as well as during De Gaulle's rule. This is so because France had adopted a grand strategy of balancing Germany through cooperation; even as it sought to avoid rousing German nationalism. Furthermore, throughout the cold war, France sought to exploit both power blocs – western and soviet – for the purpose of balancing Germany even as it sought to achieve some form of 'friendship' with the same. With such preliminary axioms, the foreign policy of any French administration was bound to appear 'opaque and inconsistent'.

As U.S. presence in Europe allowed Germany to achieve reunification with less resistance than would have been the case otherwise, continental politics required the continuing presence of U.S. in Europe – making any notion of balancing the U.S. impractical and undesirable. As Pond writes, "By 1990 the issue was no longer keeping the democratically reformed Germans down as in the 1940s. But there was a more subtle need—which the West Germans themselves accepted—for the American counterweight to growing German might to assure the anxious French, Italians, and Dutch that the Germans would not overwhelm them" (Pond 1993: 175).

*What does it mean for balancing?* - Firstly, neither France nor Germany saw American power as the source that needed to be balanced. France sought to involve American power in the continent for its own security for perfectly understandable reasons; the same reasons it sought to involve American power since the beginning of the century. Germany at some level had no choice but to accept American occupation since they had lost the war but even here the German state had several choices that indicated its preference for American power over Soviet power. Moreover, in accepting American power in the continent and choosing to integrate with the west, Germany had also demonstrated that it was willing to trust the U.S – to both not subjugate Germany and also to take into account German interests in formulating policy. To be sure, there were several significant disputes between the Bonn republic and the U.S. – over MLF, nuclear weapons, internal organization, relations with Poland, policy towards the Soviet Union. But these were resolved within the framework of Trans-Atlantic alliances and were not allowed to become a significant factor in East-West

relations. German trust and choice seem validated by the fact that the U.S turned out to be the most consistent ally of Bonn throughout the cold war. France would frequently express anxiety regarding German power and would seek to balance against it both within the alliance system and also through improving relations with the Soviet bloc. Britain was also interested in balancing German power and during the final years of the cold war Prime Minister Thatcher had grave concerns regarding the reunification of Germany and hoped that such an outcome never occurred. On the other hand, it was the U.S that was the most enthusiastic (or the least unenthusiastic) regarding reunification, even while being seriously concerned by the same. There is a semblance of replay in such a phenomenon. After all, even during the inter-war years American and German interests regarding *German reconstruction and re-armament* overlapped the most, causing serious concern in Paris and Moscow. There are a few foundational geopolitical reasons for such recurrences and such a consistent pattern of outcomes. Firstly, the U.S is least threatened by the re-emergence of German power since it does not neighbour Germany, unlike the other powers – a return to German expansionism and militarism would threaten only the U.S.’ balance of power interests in Europe, whereas such an emergence threatens the very existence of Germany’s neighbours. This in turn means that Germany, also, is threatened less by American power than it is by other European powers. In other words, the security dilemma between the two powers is the weakest in comparison to other dyads Germany shares with European powers. Secondly, from this basic geopolitical fact also emanate a certain convergence of interests. Distance, insularity and power-preponderance meant that the U.S could afford to have a Europe policy rather than merely a Germany policy. France on the other hand had neither the distance, insularity or power preponderance to meaningfully afford a Europe policy.

The U.S was as concerned with Soviet Power and the threat it posed in the future to the European/Eurasian balance. This necessitated for the U.S, the recruitment of German economic and military power in the containment and balancing of Soviet power. Such recruitment imperatives then, in turn, necessitated the conferring of the status of equality upon Germany and also greater consideration of German interests and concerns. This is similar to Anglo-American inclinations towards restoring German strength and appeasing the same in the 1920s as a hedge against both French hegemony over Europe and also to forestall a greater German-Soviet understanding.

France on the other hand was predominantly concerned with German power and to such a degree that systemic balance of power concerns was mostly absent from French considerations. France was much more accepting of Soviet power than the U.S despite geographic proximity. This lack of concern for systemic balance made it under-estimate and misunderstand Anglo-American diplomacy toward Germany before and during the Ruhr crisis. It also made France relatively complacent regarding the Soviet threat to the European balance during the cold war.

Eventually, the most crucial decision made by both France and Germany was to choose to rely upon American power and policy for the achievement of their own security objectives. France would no longer seek to balance Germany in its traditional overt manner. It would, instead, rely on American power, assurances and regional institutions created in co-operation with the U.S. Similarly, Germany would no longer seek to balance Soviet power in the way it did during the 1930s and the pre-Great War era. Instead, Germany would rely on American extended deterrence and integrate its own military into the U.S created Western alliance system. Both these choices allowed for better French-German relations as well as German-Soviet relations – and also made a Franco-Soviet alliance less attractive. These co-operative relationships and their cascading peaceful outcomes produced the peace and certainty that enabled a peaceful resolution of the cold war as well as German reunification.

In sum, Europe failed to balance the U.S during the cold war because – *Firstly*, There was no Europe; there were only major powers in Europe. *Secondly*, France remained concerned with German power and welcomed American power into the continent as a check on German power. *Thirdly*, Germany feared both reaction of allies to its growing power as well as Soviet power and sought to ally with the U.S. in order to manage both these threats as well as achieve its more positive foreign policy objectives

Geography and American insularity best explain this outcome rather than preponderance of power or maritime theory. Maritime theory is refuted because it assumes that weaker states would prefer the hegemon to have weaker armies and stronger navies. In this case, however, the weaker states in Europe were not reassured by a weaker American army, they were more likely to be alarmed by it. These states sought to perpetuate and increase American military

presence in Europe than to abolish it; similar to South Korean concerns when President Carter sought to decrease the number of American troops in the Korean peninsula (Niksich 1981).

Preponderance theory would predict that Europe would find an opportunity in the growth of Soviet power to balance American power but Europe in a sense did not fail to balance against the U.S because of its preponderant strength; on the other hand, it wanted to increase American power vis-à-vis the much weaker Soviet Union and even Germany in case of France. To the degree that Preponderance theory and Waltzian Balance of Power theory assume that weaker states in Europe did not have much choice other than to live within the framework of bipolar bloc politics or simply wait for the balance between the superpowers to reach a stage where balancing against the strongest hegemon becomes possible, to that degree both theories fail to explain European choices during the cold war.

### **Macron as De Gaulle 2.0?**

A series of speeches and actions by French President Emmanuel Macron has elicited comparisons with De Gaulle – especially noteworthy given that De Gaulle was an unadulterated nationalist while Macron is considered to hold strong globalist beliefs. His admiration for De Gaulle is also well publicised, illustrated by the placement of the General's memoirs in his official portrait in 2017 as well as his visit to Britain to celebrate the 80th anniversary of General de Gaulle's call for resistance against Nazi occupation of France (Zaretsky 2019). There are several essential similarities between the two Presidents. In this section, I briefly discuss the similarities and argue that the same is a product of post-war French strategic context and especially in terms of its relationship with Germany, U.S. and Russia.

#### *Anti-Americanism and its limits*

Like De Gaulle and Mitterrand, Macron is known for having an "on the one hand, on the other hand" style with regard to the U.S. and Russia (Kluth 2019). Like his predecessors, Macron would combine an assertive posture towards Russia on core issues pertaining to the Trans-Atlantic alliance with a policy of strategic outreach to Russia to enable the latter to play a more constructive role in Europe (defined by French interests). Macron has criticised



and promised to overhaul the “Neo-Conservative” and Atlanticist orientation of the previous two governments under Sarkozy and Hollande (Zaretsky 2019). He has also called for greater European and French strategic autonomy, advocating a more independent foreign policy approach on global issues as well as on Russia. In recent years he has regularly emphasized that American and European interests do not always converge, “Who suffers today from economic sanctions, frozen conflicts, the impossibility of stabilizing the architecture of confidence in Europe, other than Europe and Europeans? Not those who live on the other side of the world and push us to go further in this direction” (Momtaz 2020). Macron has at times rationalised Russian actions in Crimea as being caused by NATO expansion – specially expansion which does not take Russian interests into account. He has called into question America’s role as a ‘gwarant of last resort’ and lamented that President Trump “does not share our idea of the European project” (Schake 2019).

However, even as Macron spoke for improved Europe-Russia ties he would criticize the Nord Stream gas pipeline between Germany and Russia (Maio 2019; Posaner et al 2019; Keating 2019) and echo improved U.S.-France ties in light of apprehensions regarding German *ostpolitik* towards the Soviet Union during the cold war.

Macron’s criticism of American preponderance exists in parallel to his interest in achieving great power cooperation with the U.S. As Kori Schake write, “Like de Gaulle, Macron envisions the United States, the United Kingdom, and France (representing Europe) bringing their military power into a Directorate of Three to determine security policies for the West” (Schake 2019).

This policy would include a certain rhetorical duality, whereby French leaders would criticise and speak out against American policy in Europe (and against Russia) and yet at the same time would take measures to earn its credentials as a strong and reliable American ally. During the cold war, such a duality served the purpose of making the best from both relationships (U.S. and Russia) to contain German power and shape its rise. However, there is very little evidence so far that French policy under Macron is aimed at containing Germany – notwithstanding French coalition-building in EU to corner and put pressure on Germany on the issue of the Covid related 500-Billion-euro recovery plan. Although, this study naturally leads to the hypothesis that such an objective is possible if not likely.

Applying balance of power thinking, Macron bets on Russia's concerns over a rising China to align Russia towards the West, "The principal objective of my approach to Russia is the improvement of the conditions of the collective security and stability of Europe. This process will take many years" (Momtaz 2020; Klijn Deen 2020).

In line with the "Gaullo-Mitterrand" approach, Macron's strategic empathy towards Russia does not exclude standing firmly with U.S. and allies when it comes to deterring Russian actions that are seen as inimical to Western interests. Two clear examples of this are the French-British-American joint operation against the Assad regime in April 2017 as well as the participation of French troops in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in Northern and Eastern Europe.

### **Conclusion: French policy and the Balance of Power**

"The brake on France's ambitions isn't the U.S.; it's other Europeans. Macron advocates a Russia policy of European re-engagement with the Kremlin to negotiate a new security order in Europe, which neither the Baltic states nor the Poles support; he advocates a European army Germany doesn't want, but that Germany, more than others, would have to fund". – Kori Schake (Schake 2019)

Such similarities only represent both a continuation of French grand strategic outlook spanning from the end of the Cold war to the present day – an outcome of French geo-strategic realities. Consequently, French calls for a more independent Europe, criticism of NATO and its outreach to Russia can be seen in the same light – not as attempts to balance the U.S. but to make the best out of American presence in Europe to serve French strategic interests. Similarly, France continues to cloak French interests as European interests while pursuing policies – which is often resented by other European powers with dissimilar national interests. For example, French outreach to Russia has caused significant concerns in Eastern European capitals (Bel 2020).

Whereas France tries to present a geostrategic reality whereby American and European interests stand far apart (on Russia for instance), a more holistic interpretation of the balance of power would recognize that there are greater divisions within Europe than between Europe and the U.S. Despite speaking for Europe, France's relations with its European

partners are very fraught. France and Germany have different interests (not just strategic cultures) on almost every significant issue ranging from Russia to overseas operations to managing the rise of China. France has similar differences with Eastern European countries and with Britain as well. Earlier arguments pertaining to European balancing of the U.S. occurred at a time when Europe was far more united than now – that is prior to the 2008 financial crisis, the Eurozone crisis and the migration crisis of 2014. Europe is now split east and west when it comes to Russia and migration and North and South when it comes to economic interests and policy. Trump’s call for an American exit from NATO ought to have been welcomed by a balancing Europe, but instead, such a posture was met by dismay, concern and fear.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This study began with a central puzzle –the lack of balancing behaviour against the U.S. in the Post-Cold War world? This research aimed to address the puzzle by assessing great power behaviour towards the U.S. prior to post-cold war, i.e. 1865-1989. In the process it sought to gauge as to which theory best explains the range of great power behaviour towards the U.S. in this period. Prominent scholars have attempted different answers to this question based on their theoretical constructs. Wohlforth and Brooks have argued that other states have failed to balance because the U.S. is simply too strong, accounting for over half of global military spending by the first decade of this century. Other states are wary of drawing America’s hostile attention by showing signs of balancing behaviour.

Defensive realists such as Barry Posen, Kenneth Waltz, T.V. Paul and Stephen Walt dispute, for the most part, that there has been no counter-balancing behaviour against the U.S. in the post-cold war world. They have identified embryonic signs of balancing in various actions such as the formation of an autonomous European defence capability, cooperation between various states in order to deny the U.S. UN legitimacy in its war on Iraq, defence trade between Russia and China, the formation of RIC (Russia-India-China) and so on.

Jack Levy and William Thompson have argued, based on their study of alliance behaviour over the last 500 years, that maritime powers such as Portugal, Netherlands, Britain and even the U.S. do not provoke counter-balancing alliances whereas land and army based continental states such as Germany and Russia do. Meanwhile, David Blagden sought to improve upon the above thesis by pointing out that rather than maritime states, it is insular states that do not provoke counter-balancing alliances.

The study of great power decision making of states such as Britain, Japan, Germany, France, Russia, China strongly indicate that the non-balancing of U.S. power predates the Post-Cold War world and in fact had almost never occurred. This is a point that is obscured because of the interpretation of the cold war as an instance whereby the Soviet Union sought to balance against the U.S. This study has found that such a characterisation of the cold war is misleading. If anything, and contrary to balance of power theory, it was the U.S. – aided by its allies - that was engaged in classical balancing of Soviet power.

However, an even better test of balance of power theory vis-à-vis the U.S. lies in the time period of 1865-1945. Whereas there are significant disagreements regarding the operational scope of BOP theory – in that whether it applies to states after they have achieved hegemony or dominance in the system - there is no dispute whether the theory is operational when a power is rising and has not yet achieved dominance. The U.S. was arguably not strong enough to be balance-worthy in the first half of the 19th century but doubts regarding its future ascendancy had disappeared by the second half of the 19th century. Assessing great power motivation and decision making in this period would therefore be as good a test of both Waltzian as well as preponderance theory (and even Power Transition theory) as there can be.

Furthermore, this extensive study also allowed for several opportunities to test the Levy-Thompson thesis. For instance, if the thesis is right then we could expect that counter-balancing behaviour against Germany prior to the Great War would subside to the degree Germany directed its resources towards acquiring naval capabilities. Did it? The thesis, by the same token, would expect that counter-balancing against the U.S. would initiate or accelerate in response to it acquiring overwhelming land-based capabilities as it did during the Second World War and even during the Cold war.

In the next section, I shall briefly outline the results of the study and reject the two above mentioned hypothesis (Preponderance and maritimity) and confirm one (insularity). Subsequently, I shall also briefly outline a new theory that seeks to modify traditional balance of power theory by integrating the variable of insularity into the same. Such a theory aims to provide the best possible explanation of balancing choices of states over the last 150 years and also explains the lack of counter-balancing behaviour against the U.S.

### **Preponderance Theory in light of broad sweep of American history**

Preponderance theory states that balancing should not be expected against the U.S in the present context owing to American preponderance. Simply put, the U.S is too strong to be balanced. American unipolarity also awards benefits to key states and the costs of drawing the ire of the U.S and also of forming a comprehensive counter-coalition is risky and difficult, owing to the free-rider problem among others. As Wohlforth and Brooks put it,

“The comprehensive nature of U.S. power, finally, also skews the odds against any major attempt at balancing, let alone a successful one. The United States is both big and rich, whereas the potential challengers are all either one or the other. It will take at least a generation for today's other big countries (such as China and India) to become rich, and given declining birth rates the other rich powers are not about to get big, at least in relative terms. During the 1990s, the U.S. population increased by 32.7 million—a figure equal to more than half the current population of France or the United Kingdom.” (Wohlforth and Brooks 2002: 25).

The most important import from the above line of thinking is that balancing efforts and behaviour ought to be expected only if and after the U.S loses its preponderant position. To the degree the international system actually approximates a multipolar world to that degree states will gain greater confidence in balancing against the U.S since the costs and risks will become less intense or weaker. Fortunately, there is a way of evaluating this thesis – by reviewing a historical time period when the U.S was not preponderant - when it was merely one of several poles. In fact, the time period 1865 to 1945 covers two sub-periods, one when the U.S was emerging as a pole in a multipolar world and another when it had become one pole out of several others. If preponderance theory is right we should expect to see balancing behaviour occurring against the U.S in this period. Did it?

Britain clearly did not balance against the U.S in the stated time period. Britain was incomparably more concerned about French, Russian and German power in the European continent during this period. Itself an insular power, Britain sensed that its insular defence could be annulled only by a rival European great power owing to regional proximity. A hypothetical European hegemon would both have the capabilities and the strategic interest in neutralising Britain. Specific disputes and crises did force Britain to perceive American power as hostile to British interests, such as during the Venezuela disputes, the boundary disputes vis-à-vis Canada, rights to the Panama Canal and so on. But the interests that were threatened by rising American power were in far off continents and regions and paled in comparison to the threat to British security interests from Europe. Britain made the strategic choice to sacrifice its interests in the western hemisphere to the U.S in order to appease the same for the sake of balancing German power.

Wohlforth, in his assessment of power primarily considers aggregate power i.e power in all its forms – economic, technological, military, and political. For most of the 19th century, Britain had greater aggregate capabilities than the U.S. It was the pre-eminent economic, naval, maritime, trading power. It had a land army much larger, better trained and organized than its American counterpart. It also accounted for close to 53 per cent of World manufacturing output. Despite such a power disparity Britain still could not balance the U.S. Canada had a population incomparable to the U.S and was in actual terms more a liability to Britain in terms of the balance than an asset. In any hypothetical war, the U.S would retaliate by invading Canada and thereby forcing Britain to mount an extremely costly land defence of the long Canadian frontier. Rather than compromising American insularity, Canada served as leverage in the hands of the U.S. in its strategic competition with a more powerful Britain.

Britain did consider Mexico as a potential recruit during few instances before 1865. It probed this possibility in conjunction with France both in 1830-40s and also very half-heartedly during the American civil war. What put a halt and later reversed all such schemes was the fact that these efforts were seen as nowhere sufficient enough to yield in any significant or long-lasting strategic advantage - owing to Mexico's weakness as well as mutual mistrust between France and Britain. The Canadian liability and Mexico's non-viability as a continental ally vis-à-vis the U.S in effect meant that the U.S was for all intents and purposes was an insular power. This also meant that the U.S was uninvadable. In any hypothetical war, Britain would have very little choice other than to bombard coastal cities and in turn have its extensive maritime trade be harassed and sunk by American ships and also have Canada threatened. The war of 1812-14 for instance was itself caused by U.S. objectives of annexing Canada and Florida and thereby supplanting British influence in North America (Lind 2006: 56-62). Britain would have no means of forcing the U.S to a ceasefire devoid of any convincing invasion plan. Such war could be easily initiated but would be extremely difficult to terminate – As German and Japanese war planners would also realise later.

Hence, Britain did not balance against the U.S because of U.S preponderance, but because Britain could not – owing to American geography. When the U.S was weaker, Britain had

relative will but still no capability to balance and when the U.S was stronger Britain had neither the will nor the capability to balance.

For similar reasons, Germany did not balance the U.S. in the 1890s or earlier. Bismarck would understand – in the middle of a crisis – that America’s geopolitical position allowed it significant diplomatic-military advantages over Germany despite relative parity in terms of aggregate power. During 1899-1904, Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm tried to resolve whether Germany had significant military leverage over the U.S. This enquiry was necessitated by the fact that the colonial and imperial interests of the two powers were increasingly clashing in places such as Samoa and the larger Pacific, Venezuela, the Caribbean and so on. Upon investigation, it was discovered that Germany was in the same position as Britain vis-à-vis the U.S in that all it could hope to achieve was a bombardment of its coastal cities with no means of bringing an end to the war. An invasion or threat of invasion was out of the question. This assessment was made in 1898, the situation had only become drastically worse in the coming years. For instance, German naval power projection became significantly more complicated owing to British balancing efforts in the coming years. Furthermore, the alliance between France and Russia was much weaker in 1898, and in the coming years, Russia would significantly grow as a threatening military power and Britain would join the alliance.

German continentalism and its place at the centre of Europe meant it could not grow without provoking counter-alliances, some would argue even disproportionate counter-balancing. During the same period, American power grew without provoking any counter-alliance or counterbalancing behaviour. Eventually, during the Great War, the U.S intervened in Europe to tilt the balance in favour of France and Britain and against Germany. Ironically, Germany was defeated in its quest for security from fellow European great powers by a non-European power that Germany almost completely ignored out of the calculation during the preceding years.

Despite being knocked out of a costly bloody war by American entry, Germany chose close cooperation with the U.S. during the 1920s – primarily as a balance against French domination. German rearmament in the 1930s was not aimed at the strongest unit in the system – the U.S. It was aimed at the power that was seen as most likely to expand into



Europe and threaten Germany's existence – the Soviet Union. German war planning did not take into account American power and in the early period of the Second World War (1939-1941) the German policy toward the U.S. was one of appeasement and deterrence – to provide no opportunity to the U.S. to intervene in the then-ongoing war and then to use Japan to increase the costs and risks of an intervention in Europe for the U.S.

Japan, much like Britain and Germany, was pre-occupied with its neighbouring regional threats – China and Russia. It sought a large continental appendage in China to add to its precarious insular position and in order to balance Russia/Soviet Union primarily and China secondarily. Its continental grand strategy led it down a slippery slope where in order to ameliorate against the reaction to its territorial aggrandisement Japan had to try to acquire yet more territory. This territorial expansion threatened not only the Soviet Union and China but also British interests in the region. A Japanese empire consisting of China's infinite man-power combined with Japanese organisation and military skill was seen as naturally threatening to American interests in the region and also capable of plausibly threatening the American West Coast in the future.

The U.S used diplomacy in 1941 to prevent, avert, deter a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union in order to help the latter focus on its Western front in Europe. Furthermore, the U.S armed and trained Chinese forces fighting against Japan the same way it assisted Soviet forces against Nazi Germany. This was a classic offshore balancing strategy that resembled Pitt's diplomacy of aiding and subsidising continental allies against the regional hegemon (Layne 1997; Kennan 2012).

Why did Japan not ally with other states? The answer lies in the fact that other states were simply not interested in an alliance with Japan against the U.S and the reasons were related to American insularity. The closest Japan came to such an alliance was the axis pact with Nazi Germany. But the above chapter explains why the alliance was a non-factor and ironically only helped the U.S in garnering domestic support for a global intervention. Japan

chose the Soviet Union to balance against rather than the U.S. because the former was more threatening (for geopolitical reasons) and could be balanced (for geopolitical reasons).<sup>8</sup>

Having barely survived a devastating conflict with Germany and Japan from 1939-1945 the Soviet Union strongly sought to maintain good relations with the U.S. in the post-war years. Instead of balancing American power (and thereby souring relations), the Soviet Union merely reverted to its traditional strategy of establishing spheres of influence around its periphery as well as moving diplomatically (in cooperation with western powers) to impose checks on the future growth and direction of German and Japanese power. Its entire European policy was based on keeping a check on German power – be it discouraging the formation of a strong German centralised state or a German army, obstructing German access to nuclear weapons and working with other powers (from both blocs) to force Germany to declare its peaceful intent towards its neighbours. Throughout this period (1945-1989) Soviet Union showed greater interest in ending the cold war, in establishing détente with the U.S. and even sought a proxy alliance to balance a rising China. Consistent with state behaviour in the period under study, the Soviet Union was less responsive to the global imbalance of power than it was to threats from nearby neighbours – China, Germany and Japan. In fact, Soviet trust in the U.S. during the end of the cold war and its acceptance of a reunified Germany under NATO merely build upon prior Soviet perceptions and behaviour concerning the U.S.

China did not balance against the U.S. during the cold war. The Sino-American conflict, however, is explained by Mao's decision to assure the Soviet Union in order to wean back Chinese territory and possessions still under Soviet control even after CCP victory in 1949. The Korean war was thrust upon China by Stalin as a way to force China to burn its bridges with the U.S. – its natural ally from a geopolitical perspective. After Stalin's death, Mao sought to reverse the tables on the Soviet Union by accusing the Soviet Union of betraying the revolution by seeking détente with the U.S. Mao's greatest fear in this period (1957-1964) was the perceived (and real) ongoing American-Soviet cooperation vis-à-vis China – termed as 'collusion' by the Chinese. Incidentally, China itself sought détente with the U.S.

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<sup>8</sup> A similar continental foothold in North America as Japan acquired in Korea and Manchuria was out of the question and was never considered.

subsequent to the Korean war. Mao's attempts at executing a strategy of bloodletting towards the two superpowers, the Taiwan issue as well as the Vietnam war intervened to delay the inevitable – the natural realignment of China and the U.S. 1969-1972. Subsequent years had only made clear the underlying dynamic between the three powers in the preceding period. Absent Soviet hegemony over China, the latter would have formed an understanding with the U.S. after 1949 – similar to communist Tito in Europe. Stalin forced Mao to choose between such an alliance and gaining back Chinese territory in the North-east. Consistent with the behaviour of great powers in the period under study, China was less responsive to the global imbalance of power than it was to regional threats – the Soviet Union. In fact, China clearly expressed its concerns regarding the weakening of American power in its own region in the 1970s. Throughout the last two decades of the cold war, China actively cooperated with the U.S. to balance Soviet power – all the while maintaining its ideological facade.

Britain continued to pull the U.S. into security commitments in Europe and the Near East throughout the cold war. Germany saw in the U.S. its most preferred option in terms of an ally – a guarantee from both Soviet hegemony as well as French dominance. Did France, however, balance against the U.S. and if not, why? Contrary to popular opinion France's primary concern during the cold war was not the Soviet threat and nor was it American preponderance in the world or even in Europe. Its primary concern was German power and the direction it could take in the future. In other words, France spent a great share of its political and diplomatic power in making sure that a repeat of 1940, 1914 and 1871 does not take place. France cannot be blamed for such an emphasis on German power since the Soviet Union, Poland and other European states shared the same concern – if not to an equal degree. Even Britain and the U.S. were deeply concerned about the shape and direction of German power during the cold war. Distance and water bodies however afforded the insular powers additional protection from a future less than benign Germany.

In the early cold war years, France did everything to try to obstruct the formation of a viable centralised and efficient German state. Having failed at achieving the same, owing to Anglo-American policy and the cold war, France shifted gears and sought to contain German power through partnership and engagement - illustrated most prominently by the European Steel

and Coal Community. Anxieties persisted and constrained France from agreeing to a European army out of the concern that such an entity could socialise Germany towards militarism or become a slippery slope towards a full-fledged German army.

France under de Gaulle sought to construct additional barriers against German power. His opposition to various aspects of American power did not emanate from a concern regarding overwhelming American power in the system or even in Europe – he was quite welcoming of American power in Europe since it acted as a check on German power. His opposition, a combination of reality and show, emanated from differing strategic interests vis-à-vis Germany. This was not new, France and the U.S. had earlier run into similar problems in the interwar years. Most significantly, France was thoroughly opposed to MLF because it entailed some form of nuclear access to Germany. Whereas the U.S. on the other hand was equally concerned about the consequences of complete denial of nuclear access on the German mind and body politic. Differing geopolitical locations best may explain the different strategic interests and perception vis-à-vis Germany; de Gaulle himself thought this to be the case.

Moved by the perception of American forbearance on the German issue, de Gaulle decided to use the Soviet card against Germany in the period (1961-1968). Withdrawing from NATO and moving towards closer relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc states was de Gaulle's way of exploiting France's both eastern and western links in the pursuit of German containment. Bonn, in turn, would receive the message and begin to gradually change its position on a wide range of issues – recognition of East Germany, détente with the Soviet bloc, renunciation of nuclear weapons as well as agreements on resolving territorial disputes peaceably.

During the final years of the cold war, the German question rose to the surface again with Mitterrand seeking to delay and slow down reunification. If France could not prevent such reunification, then France would at least construct enough fail-safe measures. This took the form of persuading/coercing Bonn to dump the Deutschmark, pushing Bonn towards accepting deeper European integration as well as greater German-Franco military and defence cooperation; and also forming closer ties with Britain, U.S., Poland and the Soviet Union.

In light of the above history, Preponderance theory comes across as unconvincing. Consequently, judging by the historical pattern it would seem as if the scenario of U.S. declining substantively and India and China rising simultaneously would not yield in an outcome whereby the two rising powers would form a coalition to balance the U.S. Instead, the more likely outcome would be India and China balancing against each other with very little concern regarding the inexorable decline of an insular power such as the U.S.

### *Power Transition theory*

Power Transition theory states that wars, great power or hegemonic, occur when a rising power approaches towards overtaking the dominant power in a system. The primary mechanism that accounts for the decreasing gap in the power of the two competing states consists of differential growth rates. The rising state challenges different aspects of the international system as well as the trade or security interests of the dominant state. The latter, in turn, resorts to opting for conflict sooner rather later before the transition is completed or before the power gap decreases further (Levy 1987; Greve & Levy 2018; Organski & Kugler 1980; Tammen et al 2000; Gilpin 1981).

The classical example of the power transition theory in action has been the First World War. William R. Thompson explains the great war as being caused by “German attempt to succeed Britain as system leader” and British opposition to the same” (Thompson 2006: 3). But is this really true? Did Germany initiate or walk into the great war with the primary objective of replacing Britain as the system leader? Is it feasible to explain the whole sum of the great war (and even the Second World war) as a bilateral contest between a rising Germany and a declining and anxious Britain?

The diplomatic history strongly indicates that such considerations were simply not present in the minds of key German decision-makers. Their focus was narrower – the growth of Russian power and its implications on German territorial security and sovereignty.

If the desire for ‘system leadership’ is a primary variable in explaining systemic wars then what explains the willful handover, not just non-resistance, of such a role to the U.S. by Britain over a long period that finally culminated in 1941-1945? The only explanation is that Britain had more substantive ‘negative concerns’ rather than being moved by a positive

concern such as maintaining system leadership. Its concern over continental threats such as Germany and later the Soviet Union made it desirable to facilitate greater American involvement in the world as well as set the rules of the road in terms of international institutions and global commerce.

Similarly, the thesis that states fight over the distribution of goods in the international system (Kugler & Organski 1989: 173) also is not supported by the findings in this study. The various major great power wars (Franco-Prussian war of 1871, Russo-Japanese war of 1905, German-Russian wars of 1914-1917 and 1941-45, Sino-Japanese war of 1937 and U.S.-Japanese war of 1941) did not arise from disputes over the division of benefits. Ironically, all major wars in the period saw great powers that were *not dominant* choose to balance against or initiate wars against other great powers that were also *not dominant*. Whether it was German war on France in 1871 or Japan's war on Russia in 1905 or Germany's war on Russia and France in 1914 and China's war against Japanese occupation in 1937, in all these cases non-dominant powers initiated conflicts or arms races against neighbouring states for clear security reasons. If any of these powers were unsatisfied with the division of benefits in the system why did they plan on wars against other states that were in an equally bad place in terms of system hierarchy?

Stalin is reported to respond to the Cripps mission's feelers for security cooperation in light of the German conquest of France and much of Europe in the following way, "the Soviet Government does not see any danger in the hegemony of a single state in Europe, still less in Germany's ambition to absorb other nations As far as the restoration of 'equilibrium' in Europe is concerned, that 'equilibrium' was suffocating not only Germany, but the USSR as well" (Gorodetsky 2015: 293). Despite the power transition logic of the above statement, the Soviet Union did eventually care about the restoration of equilibrium and the 'danger in the hegemony of a single state in Europe'.

The fact that all these wars took place between contiguous states itself is either a remarkable coincidence or it merely reflects the insular balance of power principles at work. States do not engage in arms races, form alliances and go to war to climb the ladder of power hierarchy in order to improve their ranks or become system leaders. This is where PTT and realism differ.

Power transition and other long cycle system theories often ignore state motivation and the diplomatic historical record. They argue primarily from outcomes rather than specific motivations that lead to those outcomes. Furthermore, the theory may suffer from an Anglo-centrism in that the evidentiary heart of the theory consists of the idea that both world wars were a function of Anglo-German competition for system leadership. Such a view of both wars ignores the centrality of the Russo-German dyad in explaining both wars. Hitler after all sought to appease Britain consistently so that he could focus eastwards.

Neither is it possible to easily define a central variable of the theory – state satisfaction (Rauch 2016; 2017; Sample 2018; DiCicco 2018). The PTT research paradigm relies on the variable of ‘state satisfaction’ in order to classify some states as ‘revisionist’ states and others as ‘satisfied states’. Carsten Rauch highlights the tautological nature of some of PPT classifications of state satisfaction for instance, “it seems that they engaged in a simple post hoc logic: there was parity and no war, ergo Germany must have been satisfied” (Rauch 2016:3). Prominent Power Transition Theory theorists consider Germany to be a satisfied power from 1920 to 1932 and a dissatisfied power from 1933 onwards (Tammen et al 2000). The primary reason for such a characterisation is the occurrence of an arms build-up in the latter stage. In this instance, does it not matter whether the arms buildup was aimed at Britain (the system leader) or the Soviet Union (outside the system)? the problems that PPT run into only illustrate the follies of explaining wars without looking closely at independent state motivations and strategies.

Another key illustration of PPT theorists’ disregard for exploring the motivations and reasoning of decision-makers is the following description of Japanese decision making during the Second World War,

“Japan won a series of smashing victories in the early years of the war. Rapid growth and a series of victories over weak opponents made it appear to Japan that the power gap between herself and the United States was much smaller than it really was, and as a result, Japan attacked the United States. It was a mistake of the first magnitude” (Organski 1968: 359).

*The Security Curve*

David Fiammenghi's (2011) thesis, which can be seen as a subset of preponderance theory, seeks to synthesise defensive realism and preponderance theory. It postulates a parabolic relationship between power and security – the latter being determined primarily by counter-balancing behaviour provoked by a state's level/thresholds of power (Fiammenghi 2011). The thesis builds upon the Waltzian idea that, "Excessive weakness may invite an attack that greater strength would have dissuaded an adversary from launching. Excessive strength may prompt other states to increase their arms and pool their efforts against the dominant state" (Waltz 1988: 616). The thesis identifies three stages of a state's trajectory in terms of power acquired and security derived from it. In the first stage, a state benefits from additional power by way of gaining allies and deterring rivals. In the second stage, additional power acquired makes allies defect and other powers undertake counter-balancing actions, thereby possibly maintaining or restoring balance. In the third stage, the state acquires so much power that resistance seems futile and most states decide to bandwagon.

The broad survey does not support the security curve explanation. American stages of power aggregation do not mirror the three stages outlined by Fiammenghi. The U.S. did not form alliances in the first stage to augment its security – since it already felt very secure, represented most clearly in the disbandment of its navy after the War of Independence. More crucially, there was no counter-balancing behaviour against the U.S. in the second stage. Furthermore, bandwagoning has prevalent in all three stages of U.S. power aggregation. If anything, contrary to the Security Curve thesis, the U.S. arguably faced greater counter-balancing behaviour in the first stage than it did in the second.

### *Hegemonic Stability Theory*

Duncan Snidal presents the central axioms of Hegemonic Stability Theory as, "The theory, to state it baldly, claims that the presence of a single, strongly dominant actor in international politics leads to collectively desirable outcomes for all states in the international system. Conversely, the absence of a hegemon is associated with disorder in the world system and undesirable outcomes for individual states" (Snidal 1985: 579).



The evidence for the above thesis coincides with the evidence for the insular non-balancing thesis. However, in contemporary history, it has been only insular states that have been hegemon – Britain and the U.S. The chapters in this thesis have shown the consequences of American primacy or lack of it upon state behaviour (great powers). American power (and strategy) during the cold war subdued and suppressed regional security dilemmas between various dyads that had hitherto been very active – France-Germany, Germany-Soviet Union, Japan-China, Japan-Soviet Union. Furthermore, even the security competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was relatively benign compared to the latter’s security competition with past rivals such as Germany and Japan. American primacy deterred both the Soviet Union as well as threatened powers such as Germany and Japan from launching major wars against each other.

The system seemed much less ‘stable’ in the pre Second World War world (1880-1945) as it was plagued by wars, dangerous arms races and regional security competitions that had fuelled militarism and autarchy in various countries. The key difference between the pre and post-1945 world is that in the former the insular power was neither predominant nor very active in terms of choosing a strategy of imbalancing. As such, regional great powers such as Germany and Japan considered and implemented major wars out of core security concerns against the perceived continental hegemonic threat.

The primary question then becomes – was systemic stability a consequence of the configuration of the system or a function of the geopolitical nature of the hegemon. Could a continental hegemon also cause a similar level of stability and peace in the system? There are two key ways of answering this question. Firstly, how did states react to the ascendancy of the different states? Secondly, what would have been the incentives of the continental hegemon?

The research in this thesis has shown clearly that great powers (both insular and continental) reacted very differently to the ascendancy of the U.S. on the one hand and continental states such as Germany and the Soviet Union on the other. Why? These states failed to see a clear threat to their territory and sovereignty emanating from American ascendancy. What interest would the U.S. have in annexing Russian, French or German territory? The same states did not fail to forecast and anticipate the consequences of the rise of their fellow

continental states on their territory and sovereignty. If the great powers gambled by choosing to ignore and then invite American power into their regions, then it can be said that their gamble has been vindicated by the historical record. Despite predominance, the U.S. has not threatened the territory and sovereignty of neither its allies nor even its great power rival (with the partial exception of China during the Korean war). A continental state on the other hand is likely to enter into security dilemmas with neighbouring powers even after achieving hegemony in its region.

We do not have direct evidence of a continental hegemon *not* causing system stability. This is primarily so because other great powers did not choose to gamble on allowing such a scenario to take place. In choosing to balance against the rising continental hegemon, great powers had theorised, with limited available knowledge, that a continental hegemon was unlikely to act with restraint.

To conclude, this study strongly indicates that the stability of the post-war world has been a consequence of the nature and strategy of the reigning hegemon rather than a function of the configuration of power in a system. In terms of future predictions, both the HS theory as well as the Insular balance of power theory point in a similar direction. The international system is likely to undergo strain as and to the degree the reigning hegemon (the U.S.) loses its predominance in the system (or chooses to withdraw from its current primacy based strategy). Unlike HS theory, however, IBOP does not anticipate ‘stability’ if the U.S. is replaced by China as the system hegemon.

#### *Inward looking Great powers*

In an attempt to explain British non-confrontation towards an ascendant U.S. (in terms of power transition theory), A.F.K Organski relies on variables that have very little to do with PTT and everything to do with the peculiarities of the U.S. itself. Amongst other things, he cites the U.S.’ supposed unwillingness to assume world leadership, the nature of its growing power in the form of ‘internal development’ and finally American acceptance of the Anglo-French international order. All these points have an element of truth that reinforce the point regarding the peculiarity of American power. However, I shall argue that the peculiarities emanate from American insular position primarily.

Unwillingness does not explain British acceptance of American supremacy. Did the U.S. come across as less willing than the Soviet Union during the cold war, Imperial Germany before World War, the Federal Republic of Germany during the cold war? More crucially, Britain worried about the U.S. not having the will to play a greater role in world politics – hence, any display of greater ‘willingness’ would have had the effect of being welcomed by Britain – as it has been since 1945. British efforts at establishing the EDC and later the Western European Union, for instance, were motivated by its fears pertaining to the possibility of the U.S. undertaking an ‘agonising reappraisal’ of its politico-defence commitments to Europe (Ruanne 2000; Duchin 1992).

Similarly, the variable of internal development also does not explain British acceptance. Germany’s power ever since 1871 was also as much driven by ‘internal development’ with contributions from colonies playing a very marginal role. Britain understood the need to balance German power in the late 19th century – at a time when Germany had not engaged in any war with a rival power, unlike the U.S. which had just fought against Spain and annexed territories in the Pacific. U.S. and British interests clashed in various spheres and spaces – including Panama Canal, the Caribbean and on the issues of colonialism, the Anglo-Japanese alliance and naval parity. The more determining variable is not the absence of a clash of interest (Organski 1968: 362; Kissinger 1995: 354) but British concessions and appeasement of the U.S. on the conflicting issues.

However, the U.S. was indeed allowed the luxury of growing without being balanced or the growth being disrupted by other great powers. Such an advantage or privilege is difficult to not appreciate, especially when one recalls the circumstances that Russia had been forced into throughout the 20th century – owing to the fear it caused in its neighbouring great powers. Comparing American and Russian power on the eve of the Great War, Paul Kennedy writes,

“The former [Russia] possessed a front-line army about ten times as large as the latter’s [U.S.]; but the United States produced six times as much steel, consumed ten times as much energy, and was four times larger in total industrial output...No doubt Russia seemed the more powerful to all those European general staffs thinking of swiftly fought wars involving

masses of available troops; but by all other criteria, the United States was strong and Russia weak” (Kennedy 1989: 248).

And yet Russia was the primary concern of various great powers in the period to varying degrees – including Germany, Japan, Turkey, China, Britain and the U.S. itself. Similarly, Germany in the 1930s provoked counter-balancing coalitions and arms races by the mere fact of choosing to rearm itself – and even before it had annexed neighbouring territories. American unbridled ability to be unaffected by other powers in its pursuit of ‘internal development’ cannot be explained without taking into account its geopolitical position.

States fear power because of the assumptions regarding the power it holds. Greater power is to be feared when it is also anticipated to negatively affect a state’s security interests. Britain feared German power because it anticipated that it would be in German interest (regardless of regime type or statesmanship) to subdue Britain once it had achieved continental hegemony over Europe – much the same way it has been in the British interest to subdue Ireland as an independent power. Germany, in turn, feared and balanced Russian power because it could anticipate that it would be Russia’s interest to convert its industrial power into expansionist policies in Eastern and Central Europe – gradually making Germany a vassal state in a future Russian empire in Europe. In both instances, the key factor was location.

Conversely, great powers could not anticipate what greater American power would mean for their territorial security. No clear link could be drawn between growing American power and territorial or security threats emanating from the same. Germany could to some degree foresee that the U.S. would be opposed to a German hegemony over Europe but this threat was not of the same order as the threat it perceived from a growing Russia. Japan also could not link American growing power to any direct threat to its territorial security the same way it could link Russian growing power to its security interests. These were not cases of simple cognitive failure. The U.S. actually did not pose a direct threat to great powers’ territorial and security interests in the direct sense. It was not interested in establishing a territorial sphere of influence in Europe or Asia – its interest was in that sense ordered around preventing continental hegemonies or preserving the balance the power.

In other words, both American security interests and great power perception of American security interests are shaped by its geographic location – its insularity. Both sets of actors also agree that it is not in U.S. interest to invade or annex their territories the same way it is the interest of continental powers to do so.

### **Balance of Power, Sea Powers and Trans-Maritime systems**

“France is chiefly, if not solely, to be dreaded by us in the light of a maritime and commercial power” –

William Pitt, 1763 (Scott 1979: 17)

“It may be pointed out, in the first place, that if a nation be so situated that it is neither forced to defend itself by land nor induced to seek extension of its territory by way of the land, it has, by the very unity of its aim directed upon the sea, an advantage as compared with a people one of whose boundaries is continental. This has been a great advantage to England over both France and Holland as a sea power”.

- A.T. Mahan (1890: 16)

The Introduction Chapter had outlined the scope of the debate between Levy-Thompson (LT) and the Blagden theses. The LT thesis argues that there is a strong correlation between sea power states and lack of balancing behaviour against them. These states historically include the Dutch Republic, Portugal, Spain, and France under Louis 14th, Britain, the United States and Japan. Continental states with large ground forces on the other hand frequently produce counter-balancing coalitions.

The variables involved in the causal mechanism include factors such as public goods, global maritime trade but the most fundamental variable is the nature of power – concentration of naval forces or concentration of land forces. The argument runs that states which are sea powers (either by choice or accident) do not in themselves threaten other significant powers because their strategic orientation is determined by their interests, which in turn lie in expanding their global trade and enhancing their sea power. Moreover, in contrast to land power, large concentration of naval forces does not pose a threat to the domestic political order of states. Furthermore, by their very nature sea powers out of their own interests end up supporting and providing public goods such as free trade which incentivise states to

bandwagon instead of balancing. As they write, “Balance of power theory was developed to explain the balancing mechanism that accounted for this outcome and to guide future policymakers. It was never intended to apply to transregional maritime systems characterized by high concentrations of naval power and economic wealth.” (Levy and Thompson 2010: 8).

*The causal mechanism runs along the following lines –*

State Choice regarding form of power (Sea or Land) → Strategic Orientation (Trade and Seapower or territorial aggrandizement) → Response from other states (Balancing or absence of balancing).

David Blagden does not challenge the core of the argument but seeks to improve upon the thesis by clarifying or improving upon both the scope conditions and the causal mechanisms. He argues that both State choice regarding the form of power (Sea or Land) and strategic orientation that emanates from the choice are by-products of the state’s given geography. As he writes,

“Sea powers focus on maritime strength for a reason—usually, when their principal strategic threats are separated from them by a large body of water. In short, great sea powers tend to be insular powers—they benefit from the absence of other great powers on their landmass—and notably, on Levy and Thompson’s coding, the naval leader has not been a continental power since 1699. Dependence on maritime commerce also plays a role in driving states to generate naval strength, but such dependence is itself often causally related to insularity. A focus on procuring naval strength over land forces represents a strategic choice over which states have control, but whether a state is insular or continental is largely a matter of blind luck.” (Blagden 2011).

### ***The Maritimity of power thesis***

In the following section, I present four key arguments for rejecting the Levy-Thomson thesis. *Firstly*, I argue that ‘insularity’ acts as a lurking variable in their analysis of state choices, capabilities and orientation. *Secondly*, I argue that their findings regarding alliances formed against non-insular sea powers are questionable given that they were not the strongest power in Europe and were capable of being balanced by the actions of any one

state. *Thirdly*, I argue that whereas evidence of coalitional balancing against predominant sea powers in the international trans-maritime system may be wanting but evidence of counter-balancing being accelerated or intensified due to the acquisition of sea-based capabilities is not. *Fourthly*, insularity acts as a meaningful barrier against invasion and the examples cited by the authors do not prove otherwise.

#### *Insularity as Lurking variable –*

A Lurking variable is commonly described as a variable that is not measured in the study but it affects both the independent as well as the dependent variable. For example, a quantitative study could form an association between the number of firefighters sent to fires (x) and the number of lives claimed by the same fires (y). Without identifying the lurking variable of fire intensity (z), one could erroneously make a causal association between x and y, i.e. the number of firefighters sent being related to casualties.<sup>9</sup> Levy and Thompson associate variables such as maritime power and the absence of a strategy of territorial annexation with non-balancing. However, the lurking variable, in this case, is insularity since it itself is strongly associated with both maritime power as well as a strategy of forsaking territorial annexation. Continental states, owing to their geography, have found it very difficult to *not build* strong armies or refrain from territorial aggrandisements. Their security interests drive them towards having large armies as well as expanding their peripheral lines. Having a weak army is particularly punishing for a continental state – evidenced by French occupation of the German Ruhr region in 1923 and Japanese incursion in the Russian far east in 1918-19, for instance. Insular powers do not suffer comparably when they maintain weak land armies – for clear geopolitical reasons. Identifying the lurking or hidden variable allows us to form a more complete understanding of a given phenomenon.

#### *Evidence of balancing against non-insular sea powers*

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<sup>9</sup> Causation and Lurking Variables (1 of 2). Distinguish between association and causation. Identify lurking variables that may explain an observed relationship. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wmopen-concepts-statistics/chapter/causation-and-lurking-variables-1-of-2/>

The Levy-Thompson thesis is driven towards identifying state choice (sea or land) as the primary causal variable because they have found that the evidence suggests an equal amount of non-balancing against all predominant sea powers – both insular and non-insular. The inclusion of Portugal and the Netherlands is crucial in claiming that non-balancing is associated with state choice and orientation instead of political geography. There are two primary problems with this finding though. The method used to discern the frequency of balancing – alliances (external balancing) – by its very nature excludes internal balancing. However, even as a strong correlation between internal and external balancing is possible, there may be states which, owing to their geography, size or power, may be amenable to being balanced by the efforts of a single power. This is evidenced by Spain's forceful absorption of Portugal into a union in 1580 as well as the weakening of Netherlands in various continental wars of survival in the 17th and 18th centuries (and finally being invaded by Napoleonic France). Both states seem to be ideal candidates for balancing (if such was needed) by a single European power – making internal balancing suffice and thereby making external balancing unnecessary.

Secondly, As Levy and Thompson themselves note – balance of power theory is supposed to be applied only to continental Europe and not the trans-maritime international system. This raises the question as to why Portugal and the Netherlands were seen as candidates for balancing in the first place – since neither of the two powers was ever close to being the strongest states in Europe. These states, despite their impressive overseas trade and colonies, found themselves pushed against the wall – so to speak – by continental territorial threats. It is worth noting that even at the height of Dutch wealth and power, the year 1672 is still known as *Rampjaar* or 'Year of Disaster' in Dutch history – owing to the French invasion of Netherlands, supported by England, Münster and Cologne.

Balance of Power theory is not meant to be applied to the most preeminent trading nation, but only to the strongest power in a continental landmass. To do so is to make the error of testing a concept that belongs to one theoretical tradition (Long Cycles theory) by using a concept that belongs to another (balance of power theory). Each theory has its own parameters of identifying the leading state in the system.

*Balancing against Naval Capabilities*



Of all case studies studied by Levy and Thompson, there is only a single instance when a relatively large continental state was found to be the leading sea power as well. The instance is of France (1670-1699). There were indeed numerous coalitions formed against France in this period. However, Levy and Thompson's methodology of counting alliances to gauge balancing does not allow one to distinguish between balancing against sea power and balancing against land power since France was both the leading land and sea power in this period. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that Britain was spurred towards balancing France, at least in part, by its concerns regarding growing French sea power (Zwitzer 1990: 34). As Alfred Thayer Mahan in his most seminal work describes,

“The policy of the English people, though not of their king, turned toward the Dutch. In the increased greatness of Louis they saw danger to all Europe; to themselves more especially if, by a settled preponderance on the continent, his hands were free to develop his sea power. ‘Flanders once in the power of Louis XIV,’ wrote the English ambassador Temple, ‘the Dutch feel that their country will be only a maritime province of France;’ and sharing that opinion, ‘he advocated the policy of resistance to the latter country...and he urgently pointed out the need of a prompt understanding with the Dutch’” (Mahan 1890: 66).

However, in this study, it has been found that contrary to Levy and Thompson, naval capabilities do not lead to balancing *only if* it is wedded to an insular state. A continental state's acquisition of naval capabilities causes additional concern that contributes to balancing behaviour. This is the case vis-a-vis Imperial Germany, Imperial Russia as well as France till mid-19th century if not later still.

Germany's naval capabilities prior to 1914 reinforced the need to balance Germany in the minds of British and American leaders without offsetting the relative assurance France and Russia are supposed to have received (according to the Levy-Thomson thesis) by a German diversion away from its land capabilities. Neither was Japan reassured by the fact that the completion of the Trans-Siberian railway was projected to allow Russia to combine its Northern and Southern fleets (Nish 1985: 154-160). It was the threat of Russian naval access to the Mediterranean through the Turkish straits that was after all the cause of various coalitions throughout the 19th century and beyond- as well as a cause of alarm to the U.S., Britain and Turkey in 1945 (Yergin 1977: 117-118, 126, 130; Jamil 2011; Larson 1989).

Similar balancing coalitions were formed against Peter the Great's Russia when it expanded its sea power into Baltic waters (Mahan 1890: 30, 109). In many senses, Soviet pressure on Turkey in pursuit of augmenting its sea-based power projection capabilities marked the beginning of counter-balancing behaviour against the Soviet Union as well as the Cold War. This belies Levy and Thompson's Maritimity theory. Similar balancing considerations also came into play regarding possible Soviet domination of the Baltic sea (Naimark 2019: 26-33). If anything, Russian naval history strongly belies the notion that naval capabilities do not elicit counter-balancing behaviour.

It was the pursuit of access to the open seas that ironically led to Russian hegemony over Manchuria, and in 1958 a Soviet request for maritime cooperation with China led to Mao accusing the Soviet Union of hegemonism. Soviet access to the Cam Ranh Bay naval facilities in Vietnam and its sea power implications did not assure the U.S. and China for instance, but only heightened the strategic conflict and counter-balancing behaviour (Brzezinski to Carter 1979). For instance, Chinese strategists expected that in case of a Sino-Soviet war, the Soviet navy – at a minimum- would have the objectives of isolating China from the sea, engage the Chinese navy, make amphibious landings and warn the U.S. against intervention. Some of these operations would be reminiscent of Soviet use of sea power during the invasion of Manchuria in 1945. In other words, great Soviet naval power certainly posed a greater threat to Chinese territorial security since it complemented land power objectives (Weiss 1985). At present, the same could be said of Japan's perceptions of Chinese sea power (Glosserman 2020).

Naval capabilities of insular states do not threaten in the same way naval capabilities of continental states do. In assessing counter-balancing coalitions against the leading state in the trans maritime system, Levy and Thompson ignore the balancing choices of these very same states towards the sea power of continental states. This oversight could itself be a function of traditional European balance of power thinking whereby it is not expected of the leading state to engage in balancing behaviour.

The assumption that naval capabilities do not threaten – in the balancing sense – is conjoined with the notion that ground capabilities do, regardless of the political geography of a power. In other words, great powers would notice and balance against formidable aggregated

ground/land power and regardless of the geography of the possessor country. But as seen in this study, European powers did not feel threatened by U.S.' formidable ground capabilities in Europe. China consistently downgraded the threat it felt it faced from the U.S in the 1960s and that too in the middle of the Vietnam War when more than 500,000 American ground troops were fighting in Vietnam. In this case, neither concentration of ground forces nor a forward military presence led to China balancing against the U.S and in fact had already chosen by then to balance the Soviet Union instead.

This, along with European choices during the Cold War, demonstrate that Insular states do not threaten, in the balancing sense, even when it has continental sized ground forces and deploys the same in regions where great powers reside. Balancing is a function of geopolitical location in that sense (insularity) and not type of power (sea or land).

#### *Insularity as a barrier to invasion*

“The English Channel has provided some degree of protection for states on either side for many centuries, but it did not prevent numerous English invasions of France (most notably during the Hundred Years’ War) or successful invasions of the British Isles by various Celtic/German tribes, Romans, Vikings, Normans, and the Dutch (in 1688). The failure of Spain’s cross-channel invasion (the Armada of 1588) owed as much to bad weather and bad luck as to geography” (Levy & Thompson 2011: 198).

None of the instances provided in the above paragraph nullify the strong association between insularity and non-invasion. The problem occurs primarily from treating insularity as an absolute concept – to be nullified by referencing mere amphibious landings regardless of statehood, parity or the existence of an organised defence. For one, English invasions of France do not nullify insularity since it is Britain which is the insular state and not France. By this metric, American troop landing in Iraq is also seen as contradicting insularity.

The Celtic/German tribes, Romans, Vikings, Norman examples come from pre-modernity when Britain was not a unified modern state with an organised navy. It was divided into numerous tribes and kingdoms at the time of the Celtic, Roman and Viking invasions or raids. If an island is a collection of disorganised tribes, it hardly proves insularity meaningless if they get successfully invaded. For instance, North America before it was

colonised and invaded by European powers was the homeland of multiple warring tribes. Technically the North American continent was an island but it hardly was an insular state in the modern sense. Thus, a distinction needs to be made between a physical geographic island and an insular state.

The broad overview does suggest that insularity is not limited to the U.S and that it explains British strategic orientation and lack of counter-balancing towards Britain as well. Neither Napoleon nor Kaiser Wilhelm or Hitler could even attempt an invasion of Britain in the last two centuries despite achieving near hegemony in Europe and being capable of launching invasions of a much larger Russia. This non-attempt had not occurred to lack of will or aggregate military strength but solely because of the 26 miles that separated Europe from Britain and the British navy.

The only modern example that has been provided is that of the supposed Dutch invasion of Britain in 1688. This indeed is a very strong counter-example to the insularity thesis. If the Dutch were able to mount a successful invasion of Britain when it was a modern state with an organised navy and a self-consciousness regarding the advantages of being an insular power, then it does really make one more sceptical of claims that insular states are qualitatively much harder to invade. However, a closer study of the supposed Dutch 'invasion' of England shows that it can hardly be described as a military conquest of Britain (Annexure 1).

### **Insularity, self-help and Scope Conditions**

Furthermore, political insularity was neither perfect nor god-given in the case of Britain. It had to unify and co-opt Wales and Scotland into the Kingdom and even before that had to eliminate the neighbouring island kingdom of Ireland as a factor in great power politics. The existence of a strong and independent Scotland or Ireland ameliorates against British insularity. It is for this reason that through the power struggles between 17th century and the 20<sup>th</sup>, continental great powers opposed to British policy would attempt to recruit Irish nationalism in its cause and thereby try to open a second front for Britain. Part of the reason why the German Imperial staff thought British intervention in the Great war may not be

forthcoming was because the war coincided with an almost civil war-like condition in the Irish island.

The rest of this section aims to discuss four further clarifications with regard to the concept of insularity. *First*, insularity should be seen as a relational geopolitical concept instead of an absolute one that is devoid of politics. *Secondly*, insularity has variations in terms of implications and consequences based on size, resources and the balance of power. An insular state may decide to forsake its insular position to compensate for deficiencies on other fronts. *Thirdly*, the insular state's primary interest lies in maintaining the continental balance of power. And *finally*, Insular domination over the international system has historically been dependent on the principle of continental alliance frailty.

#### *Insularity as a geopolitical concept*

Much of the misunderstanding in the correspondence had occurred because Levy and Thompson had set up an absolutist version of the 'insularity' thesis. Insularity should not be seen as a purely geographical concept. Insularity comes about when a polity becomes self-conscious of its geographical advantage owing to it being geopolitically an island state. This consciousness had occurred to Venetians in the 9th century after the failed invasion by the Frankish King Pepin in 810. Similarly, historians have argued that Britain became conscious of its own insularity only towards the later 16th century after the repeated failures of the formidable Spanish fleets. This realization later necessitated the neutralization of Ireland and Scotland as independent strategic actors as they were much more capable of annulling English insularity than a European hegemon. It could be argued that England achieved almost perfect insularity with the union of Scotland and England in 1707. Even the U.S' insularity was not perfect and evolved only gradually throughout the 19th century with the withdrawal of British troops from Canada and the evolution of close relations with Canada and Mexico. Even when the U.S had fraught relations with Mexico throughout the 19th century and early 20th century it still did not undermine insularity since by itself Mexico could never compete with the U.S and the American commitment to the Monroe Doctrine deterred European powers from having bases in or sending troops over to Mexico. But just as the near civil war in England allowed one faction to invite troops to land in English territory, the American civil war compromised insularity to some degree. This

nullification allowed France to transport troops into Mexico and impose the Austrian prince Maximilian as the ruler of Mexico.

However, subsequent to the end of the civil war, this aberration and violation of the Monroe doctrine was swiftly reversed by the U.S. Theoretically, if France had been able to construct a strong independent state in Mexico which managed to deter or defend against American power then American insularity would have remained nullified. This would have led to the U.S. expending greater resources and strategic focus on its land border, entailing some neglect towards developing sea power and power projection capabilities.

*Degrees of insularity: Power, size and geography*

Another aspect of Insular policy is the enhancement of insularity. Insularity states routinely create limited defence perimeters in their contiguous continental regions. Examples include the Low Countries for Britain, Korea for Japan and Padua for Venice. These defence perimeters are usually regions from which a plausible invasion of the insular state could be launched. Hence occupying these regions or turning them into protectorates allows insular states to make a hypothetical invasion of their states even more unthinkable. Insular states take their continental defence perimeters very seriously and are willing to go to war in order to defend the status of the same. For instance, Napoleon the third had threatened to annex Belgium in the late 1860s. This alarmed the British establishment, which in turn partly explains Britain's attitude to France during the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 (Milza 2006: 45-48; Moose 1958: 261-268). Similarly, Japan decided to go to war with both China and Russia in 1895 and 1905 respectively over the issue of the status of Korea. In this regard, the U.S had an enormous advantage since the U.S is so distant from continental regions. This meant the U.S did not need continental defensive perimeters which both freed up forces and allowed for greater strategic flexibility.

Another key aspect of the defensive perimeter is that insular states may fall for the territory trap by virtue of its commitment to the defence of its defensive perimeters. Both Venice in the early 16th century and Japan after 1931 had decided to expand their defensive perimeters and for similar reasons. Both states had felt that their limited resource and population base impeded them from keeping rivals off-balance. In other words, such decisions were made

during periods of decline or perceptions of decline. Perceptions of a qualitative shift in power parity compelled these states to bargain for greater territorial possessions at the cost of their insular advantages (Thompson & Zuk 1986). When an insular state conquers large territories it both increases its defence burden on land as well as increases their vulnerability to neighbouring continental powers. Other states now have greater reasons to concern themselves with the power of the hitherto insular state – given the now territorial nature of their power aggregation. Thus, island states when they conquer large territories become balanceable by virtue of being both more threatening and more invadeable –since the mainland territory that had been conquered itself becomes vulnerable to invasion/conquest.

Thus, after Venice took over significant territories on the Italian mainland it provoked a remarkable counter-alliance (the first and only time in its history as a great power). The counter-alliance was known as the League of Cambrai (1508-1510) and consisted of the Papal States, France, Spain, Holy Roman Empire and the Duchy of Ferrara (Norwich, 2008: 390-410). Remarkably, as soon as Venetian land territories were annexed the league fell apart and fought long and costly wars with each other - again allowing Venice to adopt a policy of offshore balancing and playing off great powers against each other. Japan similarly provoked a counter-balancing alliance by uniting Chinese nationalist and communist forces, which were in turn aided and supplied by the U.S, The British Empire and the Soviet Union. Japan, which faced almost no counter-balancing alliance in the 1920s, found itself fighting against China, Soviet Union, the British Empire and the U.S. – a 20th Century League of Cambrai. Foreshadowing Japanese choices, John Julius Norwich describes Venice’s motivation in seeking continental territorial possessions,

“For Venice had seen her chance. Shorn suddenly of her commercial hegemony, bereft of friends or allies, under continual and increasing threat from the Turks in the East and the princes of Europe in the West, it seemed to her that her only long-term hope of survival lay in building up a broad mainland bulwark” (Norwich 1989: 443).

The relation between ‘continental vulnerability’, sea power, insular power, durability, land power, maritime expansion, balancing, parity is well summarized in the following paragraphs written by Ludwig Dehio and hence worth quoting in some length,

“Venice, with her insular position, was the forerunner of England. The durability and dominance of this brilliant city were based first and foremost on its island position, which deterred attempts to conquer the city even from the landward side and made possible the establishment of a secure commonwealth of far reaching local significance...Just as England later became the intermediary between the world overseas and Europe, Venice was the intermediary between Orient and Occident. So, of course, were her rivals on the Tyrrhenian coast. But these fell away one by one because, unlike Venice, they were not insular in character and suffered from continental vulnerability, as Portugal and Holland did later. And Venice’s rivals in the rock-and-island world of the Adriatic, though locally well protected, lacked a rich hinterland, as did the Norwegians, for instance, at a later date. So Venice was able to establish an empire, huge in relation to the size of the mother city, and to carry Italian expansion across the sea...On overseas expeditions, the lion of Venice, unlike the British lion later, came up against a superior world power. From the fourteenth century on, the Turks prevented the island empire from spreading into the eastern expanses of the world” (Dehio 1963: 25)

The above quote underscores the role of parity in determining insularity well. There are states that despite being island states never can achieve insularity due to their lack of a sufficient power base – size, population, wealth and technology. The Adriatic islands, Hawaii, Sri Lanka, Crete may serve as examples here. Then there are states which are island states or almost island states which to all intents and purposes due to their rough parity with other great powers as well as predominance in their regions (such as U.S in North America, England in the British Isles) count as insular states. Finally, there are states which had been insular until they had lost their insularity by virtue of losing even rough parity with a rival power. Venice since the 17th-century vis-à-vis Turkey and other European powers; Britain after 1945 serve as examples. In this manner, we may be able to formulate a framework that better clarifies the relation between island states, parity, insularity and strategic orientations and counter-balancing behaviour.

*Insular States’ primary Interest: The Balance of Power.*

Levy and Thompson argue that balance of power theorists such as Dehio and Morgenthau have long recognised that “Britain’s primary interests lay in expanding its markets and investment opportunities overseas. Its primary interests on the European continent lay not



in increasing its power and influence, but only in preventing any single state or combination of states from gaining control of a disproportionate amount of the resources on the continent, which could then provide a basis for challenging Britain's maritime dominance. This is the classic role of the offshore balancer, which many attribute to the United States with respect to both Europe and Asia in the contemporary system" (Levy and Thompson 2010: 18). However, this is a somewhat inaccurate reading of Dehio's central argument regarding British policy. According to Dehio, British interests were shaped by its insular character, described as "the gift of the gods called insularity", which allowed and encouraged it to expand its global trade (Dehio 1963: 29, 50, 71, 269-273). The L-T thesis omits the role of geography in paraphrasing Dehio's analysis. L-T are right in arguing that Britain's primary interest in the continent was not territorial aggrandisement but preventing an imbalance of power that would allow a state or a combination of states enough resources to challenge British interests. But what are these British 'primary interests'? LT argue that the core interest is maritime dominance whereas Dehio argues that it is security from a European hegemon that could invade Britain itself. If maritime dominance was the ultimate end in itself it would not explain Britain's willingness to cede maritime parity to the Dutch, French, the U.S and Japan at various times and in various regions throughout history. Britain was willing to sacrifice maritime dominance in the run-up to the Great War for the sake of preventing Germany hegemony in the continent. Thus, Dehio's geography-based analysis of British policy better explains the broad historical overview than does the LT thesis that instead emphasises the nature of state interests.

In other words, Britain sought to prevent the emergence of a hegemonic power in the continent because it is only such a power that would have both the resources and the pacified frontiers that would enable it to seriously consider a full-fledged invasion of the British Isles. One illustration of this logic lies in the fact that in 1690 the French fleet indeed managed to achieve sea control over the English Channel after the naval battle of Beachy Head. This allowed France a rare opportunity in history to be able to consider invading England by ferrying troops across the channel without fear of being intercepted by the English navy. France failed to exploit this opportunity however because an invasion of England with the English fleet out of the consideration was still a challenging task requiring overwhelming numerical preponderance. This preponderance, French leaders did not have

- owing to its simultaneous land engagements with the armies of Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, the Duchy of Savoy, The Swedish Empire and the Dutch Republic during the Nine-Years War. It is useful to speculate whether France would have considered an invasion if there was such an absence of continental conflagrations that it could have considered ferrying surplus troops without risking the security of French territory itself from continental rivals. It is in this manner that British insularity is tied in with a balance of power in the continent - in such a way that both cannot meaningfully exist without each other. A European hegemon compromises British insularity and compromises on British insularity, in turn, threatens the balance of power in the continent by depriving it of an offshore balancer of last resort.

Levy-Thompson's characterisation of the primary interest of Britain consisting of 'expanding its market and investment opportunities overseas' can be seen as another instance of a conflation of Long Cycles theory with balance of power theory.

#### *The Frailties of Continental Leagues*

Of all possible combinations of alliances, the most difficult and implausible alliance seems to be one between two large neighbouring continental states. German geo-politicians, diplomats and military officials had written extensively about the need for Germany and Russia to settle their differences and form an alliance aimed at the reigning world powers of the time – U.S. and Britain. During a war scare between Russia and Britain during the Dogger Bank incident, such an alliance was hinted at by Kaiser Wilhelm to Tsar Nicholas of Russia. The Kaiser invoked the prospect of a German-Russo-Mexican alliance to counter the Anglo-American alliance during war in 1917 (Stibbe 2001: 177). Similar ideas were explored during the inter-war years, finding some concrete form during the short-lived Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939-1941. During the cold war, the U.S. at times was concerned about the possibility of West Germany moving closer towards the Soviet Union, or forming an exclusive understanding with France. Also during the cold war, the Soviet and Chinese leaders regularly reminded each other of the need to enhance cooperation to face up to American imperialism, even as they moved towards arms racing across each other's border. Even Nicholas Spykman anticipated the formation of a 'voluntary' counter-balancing coalition of land powers (Germany, Russia and China) as a response to American-British-

Japanese coalition of sea powers subsequent to the Second World War (Spykman 1942: 459).

However, throughout the period studied (1865-1989) and arguably earlier as well – such a continental league aimed at pushing back against Anglo-American domination failed to establish. What is even worse, continental states turned out to be each other's primary threats and balancers – becoming indispensable to the insular power in balancing the other continental power. One might even see the principle of *Continental alliance frailty* as the key driver of Insular dominance in world politics. In comparison, insular states have been able to form various long-lasting, mutually beneficial and effective alliances. The Anglo-American understanding (1898-present), U.S.– France alliance (1917-1919; 1945-present), NATO (1949-present); the U.S.-Soviet alliance (1941-1945); U.S. –China alliance (1938-1949; 1972-1989) to name just a few. It is not merely owing to power that the U.S. as of today has over 50 treaty allies. It is both powerful in the first place and attracts various alliances owing to its insular geopolitical position. Even as China closes the economic gap (and arguably power gap) it still is left with almost no treaty ally. Meanwhile, the U.S. relationship with various auxiliary states has only been improving in response to China's rise – India, Vietnam, Japan, Australia and so on. As Colin Gray writes, while noting the tendency of weaker continental powers to serve as the 'rear-distractor continental ally',

“In Anglo- American perspective, the principal rear-continental distractor-ally has been, successively, Burgundy (against France), Austria (against France), Prussia (against France), Russia (against Germany), and, in the 1970s and 1980s, China (against Russia). In the future, the distractor-ally may be Russia (against Europe) or China (against a Greater Europe that includes Russia). The possibilities are not in short supply” (Gray 1994: 23-24).

It is equally plausible however to describe the insular power as the distractor-ally to the weaker continental state – since it is insular powers that have historically launched distracting diversionary raids or operations to assist the main continental ally. Spykman uses a similar description, “Britain has successively defeated Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and German sea power and has successfully used Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, and Prussia as allies” (Spykman 1942:103).

Regardless of the question of who is reliant upon whom more, such a recurring pattern of alliance-making (or failure at the same) is only explained by classical geopolitics as well as an insularity based balance of power theory. The unresolved question of the depth and strength of the present Russo-Chinese understanding (an ongoing dynamic process) is itself a test of this principle in the post-Cold War World.

At the end of this section, we can conclude that the existence of a water body between an insular state and its adjacent continent yields in a certain causal chain. Water bodies offer the insular state security from invasions, which in turn lead to a policy of non-expansionism, which lead to continental great powers not balancing the insular power.

If, however, the most powerful state in the continent manages to achieve hegemony for a sustained period it will find itself capable of amassing a navy and the required troops to attempt an invasion of the hitherto insular state. At this point, if not earlier, the insularity of the state is nullified by the effects of continental hegemony. Continental states think in terms of territorial security whereas insular states think in terms of securing insularity.

#### *The inter-insular Balance of Power*

It has always been a puzzle to continental thinkers and statesmen as to why a balance of power failed to occur in the Insular world in the same manner it did over land. Britain and the U.S not only avoided conflict despite being rival insular powers but also co-operated greatly in jointly balancing against continental threats. Japan allied with Britain in 1902 and seemed much more concerned with blunting the rise of continental powers such as China and Russia. By the end of the Second World War, the insular world strategically unified under American leadership whereas the continental world predictably moved towards ever greater division and dissension. Both the LT and Blagden theses deal extensively with the nature of the relationship between Insular states and continental states of different power equations but they do not address the subject of inter-insular power relations.

The general broad survey from 1865 to 1989 demonstrate that insular powers themselves tend to not balance against the stronger insular power themselves. One could argue that relations between Japan and the U.S from 1905 to 1941-45 resemble traditional balance of power politics with both sides arming themselves in view of the strength of the other. But

the curious part is that it was the much stronger U.S that balanced a weaker Japan than the other way around. Japan did nothing to limit American power in the Western hemisphere whereas the U.S in the same period since 1905 undertook various measures to limit Japanese power in its own region. Furthermore, Britain could have unloaded its weight on the Japanese scales to balance American power but decided to do the very opposite – thereby enhancing the imbalance of power within the insular world. What could be the reasons why balance of power politics does not occur among insular states? This study postulates the following reasons –

1. Insular states have little interest in conquering other insular states, provided they are at some distance.
2. Insular states find it more difficult to contemplate an invasion of and termination of war with another insular state compared to continental states.
3. The Shared knowledge that insular states both have little interest in and also find an invasion challenging leads to insular powers being disinclined towards balancing each other.
4. Historically, all three insular powers have been more concerned about maintaining the balance of power in Eurasia so as to prevent the rise of a continental hegemon that could threaten their advantaged insular position.

This further points towards the idea that the ‘balance of power’ idea is strictly a continental one – i.e. it is meant to be applied only to continental states in the Eurasian continent.

#### *Internal Balancing against Insular states*

Blagden agrees with LT regarding the fact that external balancing had not occurred against Insular states but he does discern internal balancing occurring against Insular powers. As examples, he mentions

“Even during the Napoleonic Wars, the Royal Navy’s dominance ended at the 3-mile limit to which French shore batteries could fire a cannon ball—and since then, the technological tide may well have been on the side of the sea deniers. Certainly, since the start of the

twentieth century, submarines, mines, land-based aircraft, fast attack craft, and—the particularly topical concern of Western navies—long-range, high-capability antiship missiles have progressively constrained the littoral operations of lead-power battle fleets for much less than the cost of building a competitive rival battle fleet.” (Blagden, 2011: 194).

The second example and more relevant example in terms of the contemporary context is that of China engaging in internal asymmetrical balancing against the U.S by building the capabilities to deny American power projection in its littoral region.

This is rejected as an instance of balancing by Levy and Thompson. As they write and it is worth quoting in length,

“The concept of the denial of sea control, however, naturally raises the question of ‘denial of control over what?’ If the aim is ‘denying the lead power sea control in the lesser power’s coastal waters,’ Blagden may be right that mines, submarines, and land-based aircraft are useful. If the aim, however, is protecting trade and sea lines of communication and avoiding the neutralization of one’s fleet by an enemy blockade, which can be the functional equivalent of defeat, then coastal and littoral defense capabilities have a limited impact...Defending against particular threats from particular adversaries is different from counterhegemonic balancing to prevent a single state from achieving such overwhelming capabilities that it is able to dominate all other states in the system. Coastal and littoral defenses serve the former function, not the latter, and they are not a useful measure of counter-hegemonic balancing” (Levy and Thompson, 2011: 201).

In other words, there is a disagreement regarding the definition of balancing or what class of actions count as balancing. Blagden’s understanding seems to be that as long as one can locate a military build-up and then link it to a certain threatening power, balancing behaviour has been located; or that a power is balanced when its domination is limited or is constrained by the capabilities and actions of other powers. Levy and Thompson and even Wohlforth and Brooks would disagree with this definition. Their definitions would require the particular build-up to aim at aggregate strength, or the source of the very problem – that is - a concentration of aggregate power that creates an imbalance in the system. China seeking to discourage the U.S from intervening in Chinese littoral regions and especially vis-à-vis its Taiwan policy does not count as balancing.

Levy and Thompson further clarify, “In the early nineteenth century, the United States made a strategic choice to build coastal defenses rather than a blue-water navy, not to balance against Britain but instead to lessen the likelihood of a Copenhagen-style preventive strike by the leading sea power of that era. Similarly, China’s current naval buildup, which many regard as designed to neutralize U.S. coercive capabilities on the Taiwan Strait issue rather than to project Chinese power on a global level, is better conceived in terms of rivalry dynamics rather than counter-hegemonic balancing” (Levy & Thompson 2011:201). The above description underscores the point that balancing is greater than a mere defensive policy/stance and is aimed at aggregate strength of a given state – and not merely policy change.

Levy and Thompson argue that it is possible for coalitions to form against ‘leading maritime or global powers’ if such powers engage in behaviour that ‘threaten the interests of other powers’. whereas in the case of dominant continental powers, they argue, such coalitions form even prior to display of aggressive and specific threatening intentions (Levy & Thompson 2010: 42).

Blagden on the other hand argues that mere capabilities of sea powers ‘could endanger concern’ and thus serve as sufficient cause for counter-balancing behaviour (Blagden 2011: 195). This author would argue that not every threat perception of security concern is the balancing kind or amenable to a solution by means of ‘balancing’. In this study, it has been found that great powers do worry more about U.S. intentions than capabilities. However, such concerns are relatively intermittent and pale in comparison to their concerns regarding continental powers. In the case of the later concerns can emanate even when present intentions are benign and capabilities are only latent.

Great powers respond to the ‘concerns’ they feel regarding U.S. capabilities by means other than balancing. They are more likely to engage in appeasement – as did Germany, Britain and Japan for most of the pre Second World War period. They may adopt policies that increase the costs of U.S. intervention into their regions/territories – as the Soviet Union did in terms of its strategic forces or China regarding Taiwan or the South China Sea. They may adopt policies that threaten to act as spoilers and thereby gain leverage vis-à-vis the U.S. – Russian intervention in Syria. They may pose as close allies of each other in order to either

reach a modus vivendi with the U.S. or simply enhance their leverage or even deter a U.S. attack on them - German- Japanese alliance (1940), Sino-Soviet alliance (1950-1961), France-Germany (1963), Russia-China (2014-2020). Such policies are aimed at changing American policy on specific issues or aim to cope with specific U.S. threats – in most instances, these policies are themselves responses to American balancing behaviour towards the respective great powers. Balancing, on the other hand, requires a much higher threshold and aims at power reduction. Success on any of the above policies has the effect of affecting U.S. interests negatively, but it does very little in terms of reducing U.S. aggregate power. There is still a long way to go (conceptually) from identifying threat perception (Blagden 2011) and then relating it to balancing behaviour.

#### *The Japan – Britain comparison*

Insular powers do not evoke counter-balancing coalitions. This is regardless of its international activism abroad, its display of offensive intentions or deployment of offensive capabilities. However, insular powers are not immune from counter-balancing behaviour if they compromise (or even forsake) their own insular character by seeking and absorbing territories on the Eurasian continental mainland. In this regard, Britain and Japan are not that dissimilar. Like Japan, even Britain sought and achieved a continental empire – India. Being unable to threaten the British homeland directly, Russia for most of the 19th century sought to influence British policy by developing the capabilities to threaten British India. Britain would have to rely on land battles to defend British extended territory if such a war had occurred.

Both Napoleon and Hitler, in fact, attempted to form continental alliances with Russia by tempting the latter to invade British India while France or Germany faced off Britain across the English Channel. Furthermore, British possessions in Africa also made Britain somewhat vulnerable (arguably) to European continental armies and thereby compromised its insularity. The scale, however, was different from that of Japan.

One difference however between Britain and Japan was that unlike the latter, Britain did not seek or achieve annexations in the European mainland itself. Even as Britain had a continental commitment to the security of Belgium, this was shared with other powers and



did not represent British territory or sovereignty in the European mainland. The second crucial difference is that Europe always consisted of multiple great powers – allowing Britain to play one off against the other in order to maintain the division of Europe and prevent one power from dominating the same. This also meant that whenever a new threat to the Balance of Power arose – Britain did not find itself alone in war and neither did it have to undertake the predominant burden of balancing such a power. In other words, British non-territoriality in Europe, as well as the existence of several great powers in the continent, allowed Britain to buck-pass balancing on European powers. This had the additional consequence of Britain not being perceived as a hegemonic or even a territorial threat to Europe.

These two crucial features were missing in the case of Japan – with tragic results for Japan and other great powers. When Japan overlook the Asian continental balance it saw none (Tadokoro 2007: 316, 321). China was unable to form a modern unified nation-state, and was overrun by European powers – most importantly Russia. Japan could neither play Russia against China during the 1895 war and nor could it play China against Russia in the 1905 war. Being less confident of the regional balance of power preventing Russian hegemony over the Far East and Korea, Japan had decided to become the predominant power in Korea ever since 1890 if not earlier and eventually decided to annex the same in 1910.

The annexation of Korea in a way represented the first and crucial step against Japanese insularity. With its possession, Japan had made the following processes and dynamics inevitable – It made Japan a territorial power in Asia, implying that other powers needed to be wary of its presence and the possibility of its expansion. This in turn made any Japan-China alliance that much more difficult into the future. Secondly, the annexation had led to a territory trap – further incentivising the takeover of Southern Manchuria as a Japanese sphere of influence in order to protect the advances towards Korea – and later North China. Thirdly, the takeover of Manchuria and Korea, in turn, precluded Japanese toleration of or co-existence with a revived Chinese nation-state under unified leadership. This is most clearly represented in the consequences that followed from the Northern Expedition and the

anxieties it caused in Tokyo – thereby leading to military conflict and eventually to the Second Sino-Japanese war.

Whereas Britain established a continental empire in the Indian subcontinent – far away from existing great powers, Japan chose to establish an empire to augment its resource base in Manchuria – lying between a rising China (albeit slowly) and the Soviet Union and also having as neighbours various European great power outposts. As such, British India served only as a limited strategic liability in terms of the Great game vis-a-vis Russia; but Japanese Manchuria and Korea would lead to the forming of coalitions that would eventually include China, the Soviet Union, the U.S., the British empire as well as the Netherlands. Needless to say, Japanese leaders did not anticipate such a counter-balancing response when they acquired Korea from China first and then Russia in 1905.

The thesis presented here states that insular powers do not elicit counter-balancing responses. To the degree that Japan acquired territoriality in the Asian mainland, it also lost its insularity - as key Japanese leaders were aware at the time. This example testifies to the thesis that insularity is neither only a geographical concept and nor is it only a political concept but instead is a geopolitical concept. Japan's decision was the decision, not a singular one, however, of an insular state to become a continental power.

### **Distance, unidirectionalism and the Hegemon as balancer paradox**

John Mearsheimer argues that the U.S. does not elicit counter-balancing behaviour because of two primary reasons – the stopping power of water as well as America's grand strategy of offshore balancing (Mearsheimer 2001). In this explanatory model, water makes power projection into distant masses of land across seas or oceans prohibitively costly – thereby making any world hegemonic bid futile and counter-productive.

Stephen Walt, in his balance of threat theory, argues that states do not balance only against power but a collection of four variables – aggregated power, offensive capabilities, offensive intentions and proximity (Walt 1987). However, he does not present these variables in any form of order, “However, one cannot say a priori which sources of threat will be most important in any given case, only that all of them are likely to play a role”

(Walt 1985: 13). In this section, however, we engage with the variable of proximity or distance and its role in causing counter-balancing behaviour.

Both arguments suffer from conceptual unidirectionalism. If the Atlantic Ocean prevented Germany, France and Britain from balancing American power then what explains American balancing of German, Soviet, Japanese and Chinese power? If other great powers were assured by the stopping power of water then why was the U.S. not assured by the same vis-à-vis the same powers? the same logic can be applied to Walt's variable of 'proximity'. If other powers did not balance the U.S. because it was not proximate, then why did the U.S. balance the same powers? Mearsheimer also argues that Britain was deterred from embarking of a bid for regional hegemony by the English Channel. This seems implausible given Japan's own attempted bid for regional hegemony despite the Sea of Japan separating it from the Asian mainland. A better argument for the lack of British and American attempts at achieving regional hegemony in Europe lies in the fact that such territorial conquests does not serve their interests and not because water in itself stops them.

These puzzles can be avoided if one identifies 'insularity' as the variable instead of the indigenous power of water to hinder force projection or distance. The U.S. balanced Germany because the achievement of continental hegemony would allow the latter to project power towards and possibly into North America. America's own existing capabilities to project power into Europe and the Asian mainland could not have inspired enough confidence in the stopping power of water.

It can be argued that Levy and Thompson commit the same conceptual error of unidirectionalism. Evidence of coalitional balancing against predominant sea powers in the international trans-maritime system may be wanting but evidence of counter-balancing being accelerated or intensified due to the acquisition of sea-based capabilities is not. More crucially, Levy and Thompson overlook the balancing choices of the system leading sea powers themselves. Both Britain and the U.S. have consistently been threatened by and driven towards balancing powers because of their naval capabilities. Imperial Germany, France on several occasions, Tsarist/Soviet Russia and present-day China have faced greater counter-balancing attention owing to their growing naval capabilities. This makes sense in a very microfoundational sense as well. If Prussia served as an attractive ally to William

Pitt the elder because it lacked a navy, France seemed all the more threatening because its naval power could possibly allow it to transport its large continental army both to overseas British colonies; but more crucially to the British homeland itself.

What had prevented German power projection into the U.S. was the balancing choices of other great powers (especially in Europe) which had both balanced German power as well as welcomed and facilitated American power into Europe. The same factor enabled the U.S. to dominate Europe politically during the cold war and after. Crucially, these balancing choices of the great powers are themselves determined by the geopolitics of insularity – since we have found that state preferences dictate the balancing of continental hegemonies and not insular hegemonies (potential or actual).

Furthermore, and again from a microfoundational perspective, the acquisition of greater naval capabilities (Imperial Germany) poses a threat to weaker continental states (France) as well to the degree that it neutralises the insular ally (Britain) of the weaker state. During the Cold War, China worried about Soviet naval power weakening NATO and neutralising U.S. support to China in a Sino-Soviet confrontation (Weiss 1985: 45-50). In today's context, greater Chinese naval capabilities is likely to make American assistance to its allies in Asia-Pacific riskier and costlier. As such, Vietnam, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea have as much reason, if not more, to be threatened by growing Chinese naval capabilities as the U.S. Seapower is non-threatening only when it is wedded to an insular state, not when it is wielded by a continental state. To the latter, it can merely act as a facilitator of exporting its continental army to faraway regions over sea – thereby reinforcing its land power. Such an observation is easily overlooked if one attempts to measure balancing tendencies by merely counting treaty alliances. This is because hegemonic continental states already provoke counter-balancing coalitions with or without naval capabilities. Thereby the association between continental state's sea power, threat-perception and counter-balancing behaviour remains buried and hidden under such a methodology as it is difficult – from a quantitative perspective – to determine whether the balancing has occurred due to a state's land power or its sea power.

*Stopping power of water versus insular power projection*

As Nicholas Spykman wrote while addressing the great debate on whether modern airpower negated the advantages of insularity and made the U.S. vulnerable, “In terms of present-day technology, transoceanic air power cannot be a serious threat unless it can count on friendly air bases on this side of the water ready to welcome and service the invader” (Spykman 1942: 391). Thus the U.S., due to or despite its insularity, could execute Operation Pointblank against Germany,<sup>10</sup> the latter having no choice but to suffer such campaigns in the wake of its own inability to fly similar raids against the U.S. mainland.

For very similar geopolitical reasons, Insular U.S could project power in and around the Soviet sphere of influence (and some would argue into). The waging of the cold war depended to a large degree on bases and lines of communication and these were provided to the U.S by its numerous allies around the world. In the post-cold war context, the U.S. is able to project power till Russia’s doorstep by putting troops in the Baltic states, Poland and through enhanced military co-operation with the Scandinavian states. The situation is not very different vis-à-vis China with the U.S fleet moving dangerously close to Chinese territories at times. As the strategic scholar Colin S. Gray notes,

“The sea is a great highway or a barrier, depending upon military relations in and over that environment. There has always been a strategic asymmetry favoring superior and insular sea power over superior and continental land power. The dominant sea power necessarily enjoys access to the territorial basis of the continental country's strength, while the dominant land power must either cross an uncommanded sea in order to enjoy reciprocal access, or somehow itself wrest maritime command in preparation for invasion” (Gray 1994: 21).

### *Hegemonic tolerance of Insular hegemons*

In the previous section, it was argued that what had sustained American presence in Europe during the cold war and still sustains it in the post-cold war world is the balancing choices of European states. To put it simply. France and Britain preferred a strong American politico-military presence in Europe to both help defeat German bid for hegemony as well

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<sup>10</sup> Operation Pointblank was the name of an allied Bomber offensive aimed at destroying the German fighter strength as well as the ‘destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened’ (Harris 1995).

as balance German power during peacetime. During the cold war, the same dynamic yielded in broad European support (not just France and Britain) for American presence and involvement in Europe. In this section, however, I argue that American sustenance in Europe since 1945 – something that various realists have expected to dissipate since its inception – is an outcome of both the support of weaker (and balancing) continental states as well as relative toleration of the potential hegemonic state.

The Soviet Union for instance seemed to prefer a reunited Germany within NATO rather than independent and outside of it. This decision shows a clear choice for greater American presence (over German influence) in Europe. Similarly, the Soviet Union tolerated American presence and political influence in Japan and at times even saw it benignly. The Soviets also started engaging in an arms race with neighbouring China in the 1960s and 70s and competed for allies and influence with it globally. The Soviet Union in fact seemed more concerned with Chinese power than American power during the same period or at the very least equally concerned despite the former being much weaker than latter. As chapter five has shown, the Soviet Union was also much more sensitive to growing German power and its direction.

Despite American involvement in the Great war, the German government was most keen on negotiating a peace with the U.S. instead of France or Britain. During the interwar years, Germany perceived the U.S. as a force for good in Europe and less threatening than France or the Soviet Union. What then explains such high tolerance of American power by potential hegemonic states?

#### *Continental Hegemons as security seeking balancers*

At this point, it is worth noting that the two bids for continental hegemony by Germany were themselves caused by typical balance of power concerns – in which Germany saw the European balance being gradually undermined by the awesome growth of Russian/Soviet power through its internal development based on rapid industrialisation. In other words, despite the grand scale of aggression pursued by Germany, its central aims were defensive and emanated from territorial insecurity. The U.S. by the very nature of its location (and thereby its interests) did not pose a mortal threat to Germany. This was confirmed by the

cold war itself as the almost century-long German aim of containing Soviet power became the U.S. objective as well.

By the same token almost, Russia or the Soviet Union had suffered three catastrophic preventive wars in the first half of the 20th century by neighbouring powers that were threatened by its industrial growth and concomitant military potential. These wars had cumulative costs that included - close to 30 million in overall Russian casualties, a bloody civil war (1918-21), loss of territory (Brest-Litovsk), the elimination of a three-hundred-year old monarchical regime (The Romanovs). Furthermore, the need to prepare for such preventive wars had caused the Soviet Union to embark upon rapid industrialisation in the interwar years, with all its human costs in the form of political repression and forced labour.

In comparison to its weaker nervous neighbours, the U.S. had been a great force for good for Russia's security – by helping negotiate an end to the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, by helping defeat Germany in 1918, by putting pressure on Japan to evacuate Siberia in 1921 and by serving as an ally to the Soviet Union vis-à-vis Germany and Japan during the Second World War. American balancing of the Soviet Union, despite all the alarm and panic, did not entail a serious consideration of a land-based territorial preventive war. Such a war could almost never be in American interest and lay beyond its capabilities. Hence, there is a crucial qualitative difference between American balancing of Russian power and German/Japanese balancing of the same. Owing to geographical location, the U.S. could both exercise greater forbearance towards the somewhat inevitable rise of Russian power.

Furthermore, American regional preponderance in Europe and Asia – despite the threat posed to the Soviet Union – also had the enormous benefit of pacifying and containing German and Japanese power. It may not be a coincidence that American preponderance since 1945 had also coincided with the most peaceful and secure period in Russian history. The same could possibly be said about American unipolarity and China's rise.

It is, however, difficult to estimate as to what extent China appreciates the American role in pacifying China's broader region and thereby allowing it to focus on its own internal growth since the last three or more decades. There are some indications that this may be the case (Foot 2006). As Andrew Erickson writes, "It is true that for the near term, at least, Beijing

continues to find value in U.S. leadership of the regional security order, if for no other reason than to restrain its allies in maritime disputes involving China” (Erickson 2015). This could be a crucial factor in shaping the American-Chinese strategic competition in the future.

Insularity translates into greater power projection by virtue of surplus power, alliances and hegemonic tolerance. Continental states usually have neither of these three factors. They usually suffer from counter-alliances. Their surplus power is very limited (a consequence of balancing) and hence they think primarily in terms of their own region rather than globally, unable to balance the Insular hegemon. As Spykman had described this dynamic, “We achieved our position of hegemony only because the states of that continent were never able to combine against us and because preoccupation with the balance of power at home prevented them from ever detaching more than a small part of their strength for action across the Atlantic” (Spykman 1942: 448-449).

And finally, the insular hegemon is usually intolerant of their power and seeks to balance against them. This cluster of the above three variables determine power projection and not absolute conditions such as water, land, sea power or land power.

This section has evaluated prevailing hypotheses that seek to explain the absence of balancing behaviour towards the U.S. in light of different stages of American ascendancy (1865-1989). It has been found that neither the maritimity of states nor power preponderance explains such an outcome. Maritimity does not elicit counter-balancing behaviour only when it is wedded to an insular state. The U.S. did not have counter-balancing behaviour even when it was not preponderant in the system (1865-1945). In contrast, the variable of ‘insularity’ seems to best explain such an absence of counter-balancing behaviour. Great powers (including other insular powers) have very little incentive (if any) to balance an insular power and even if they sought to, are frustrated by the geography of such a state from undertaking balancing actions. In contrast to David Blagden, this thesis also concludes that insular states do not elicit internal balancing either.

The rest of this chapter will discuss the incentives and the nature of grand strategies adopted by insular states in general and the U.S. in particular. It discusses the uniqueness of



American grand strategy post 1945, and its implications on Waltzian balance of power theory. It then seeks to place Chinese post cold war strategy towards the U.S. in the light of American grand strategy and concludes that China is not undertaking counter-balancing behaviour against the U.S. Subsequently, the chapter revisits scholarly disagreements pertaining to defining ‘balancing behaviour’ and reaffirms an understanding of the concept that leans towards setting up a relatively high threshold for policies and actions to be counted as ‘balancing’. In that sense, it reaffirms the definitions of scholars such as William Wohlforth, Stephen Brooks, Jack Levy and William Thompson. Finally, the chapter aims to present a new modified and insular balance of power theory. such a theory best explains great power balance of power politics in recent history, explains the lack of counter-balancing against the U.S. and also serves as a useful ‘act of transition’ from balance of power theory as an outcome to ‘balancing’ as a process.

### **American Grand Strategy and Present day China**

“There is a wide difference also, between military establishments in a country, seldom exposed by its situation to internal invasions, and in one which is often subject to them, and always apprehensive of them . . . The kingdom of Great Britain falls within the first description. An insular situation, and a powerful marine, guarding it in great measure against the possibility of foreign invasion, supercede the necessity of a numerous army within the kingdom . . . If, on the contrary, Britain had been situated on the continent, and had been compelled, as she would have been, by that situation, to make her military establishments at home co-extensive with those of the other great powers of Europe, she, like them, would in all probability, be at this day a victim to the absolute power of one man.”

- Alexander Hamilton, 1787 (Hamilton 2001: 44-46).

This thesis is a study of great power responses to different stages of growing American power. Although it is outside the primary concern of the study initially, to explain or assess American perceptions of and strategies towards other great powers, this research still elicits certain fundamental propositions about American grand strategy that make the overall analysis somewhat richer.

It has been observed that in many instances, great power behaviour towards the U.S. could only be meaningfully explained only by taking into account U.S. diplomacy towards the

same country. For instance, both Japan and Germany's decision to go to war against the U.S. in December 1941 was itself a function of their perception of U.S. intent to enter the war. Similarly, Stalin's blockade of West Berlin, Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum as well as the deployment of missiles in Cuba are decisions that were made in response to American strategy towards West Germany as well as its deployment of missiles in Europe and Turkey.

Traditional balance of power theory is predisposed towards attributing agency to the balancing power and general passivity towards the potential hegemon. After all, the balancing state 'balances' whereas the hegemonic state 'gets balanced'. In almost all the cases described in the study, it has been found that despite being the potential hegemon (and the stronger power) the U.S. undertook balancing of much weaker powers – Imperial Japan, Imperial Germany, Soviet Union, China and even the Federal Republic of Germany.

In classic balance of power theory, the causal chain occurs somewhat in the following way – A particular state acquires greater power- leading to a weaker state being threatened by the power accumulated – leading to the weaker state responding by balancing the stronger state – leading to the stronger state responding to the weaker state's balancing of itself. It can be further summarised as growth – threat – balancing – response to balancing.

In the case of U.S.' relations with various powers the same causal chain seems to hold but with the roles reversed between the strong and the weak. When Germany acquired great power through rearmament and annexations in the late 1930s (or the Soviet Union during the last year or two of the Second World War), the U.S. considered it to be a great power needed to be balanced. It responded by balancing German power by aiding Britain and the Soviet Union and eventually entering the European war. Germany responded to American balancing through a combination of appeasement and forming an alliance with Japan aimed at deterring American intervention. In this dyad, balancing occurred when the U.S. responded to German growing power and not when Germany responded to American balancing. The same causal chain holds vis-à-vis almost all other dyads - U.S. – Japan (1865-1945); U.S. – Germany (1898-1918, 1937-1945); U.S. – Soviet Union (1945-1989); U.S.-China (2008-2020?). This point regarding chronology and balancing circles back to definitional debates regarding balancing between Levy/Thompson and Blagden (2011).

### *Is China balancing the U.S.?*

This same model can in fact be applied in the present security competition between the U.S. and China, with the latter's economic growth leading to shifts in its policy in the region – thereby threatening neighbouring powers as well as spurring the U.S. to balance Chinese power in the present - in case its further aggregation causes it to upturn the Asian balance of power – thereby possibly emerging as a peer rival to the U.S. In this instance, China has greater incentive to delay a direct confrontation with the U.S. – given it will only grow stronger in the future. For the same reason, the U.S. is arguably operating from a closing window of opportunity and has more reasons to initiate a geo-strategic confrontation sooner rather than later.

This section will argue, on the basis of both the historical record as well as the understanding of 'balancing' as laid out in this thesis, that the present security competition between the U.S. and China can be best explained from a balance of power perspective – but one in which it is the U.S. that is balancing China. There are three fundamental reasons for discerning the same – initiative, sequential goals and coalition making. It has been observed that, historically, it is the balancing state that initiates confrontation/security competition whereas the balanced state seeks to delay such confrontation. Again, it is the balanced state that operates within a more constrained space in which it pursues a sequential hierarchy of goals – regional and then international. The balancing state (in this case the U.S.) on the other hand has as its primary (and both immediate and long term) goal of balancing the potential hegemon (China).

Finally, it is the balancing state that finds ready allies and partners in seeking to balance against the balanced state. The balanced state on the other hand finds itself relatively isolated and without meaningful alliances. This is so because the rising power of the balanced state causes concern and spurs into action not just the offshore/insular power but also states that lie in the region of the rising power. Hence, this allows the opportunity for the 'balancer' (or the holder of the balance) to come to the aid of the weak against the strong in order to tip the scales back towards an equilibrium. As the then Foreign Secretary Robert Castlereagh declared in Dec. 1813, "My Real and only object was to create a permanent counterpoise to the power of France, in peace as well as in war" (Webster 1921: 62).

Classical balance of power theorists have for long pointed out the special role a ‘balancer’ role plays in maintain the balance in a system/region (Morgenthau 1948, Dehio 1963, Maurseth 1964, Powell 1999; Sheehan 1989). Traditionally, England performed this special role vis-à-vis Europe since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and Venice vis-à-vis the Italian state system during its reign as an empire. The same role could be said to be performed by the U.S. in today’s world vis-à-vis Eurasia. Recounting the words of Francis Bacon, William Camden had, for instance, described the European balance of power in 1675 as such, “And true it is which one hath written, that France and Spain are as it were the Scales in the Balance of Europe, and England the Tongue or the Holder of the Balance” (Camden 1675: 223). In much similar terms, the U.S., despite being the strongest power in the system, stands today as the ‘holder of the balance’ between China and its neighbours.

The historical overview of great power politics in this study along with an analysis of conflict dyads between the U.S. and various rising potential continental hegemons (RPCHs from hereon) underscore the above description. The three features identified above (along with concrete policies pursued by both the U.S. as well as the RPCHs) consistently describe great power security competition between the U.S. and Germany (Imperial and Nazi), the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the U.S. and Japan. In all cases, the RPCHs sought to appease the U.S. (unsuccessfully) in order to encourage it to not intervene in their pursuit of regional security aims. In all cases, balancing the U.S. may have been a long term theoretical goal but their contemporary strategic context had the effect of tying them down to regional adversities and challenges – thereby ignoring (relatively) American power. In all cases, the RPCHs found themselves facing extensive coalitions counter-balancing their power and assisting American counter-balancing efforts.

This section discusses how the present U.S.-China competition fits neatly into the above balance of power framework.

### *Initiative*

The growing U.S.-India strategic understanding, continued reassurance to Japan, Korea and South East Asian countries, American force deployments and military posture aimed at China, pursuit of trade war and economic de-coupling all indicate classical balancing of

China by the U.S. By contrast, China has not (or been unable to) put in place any comparable set of measures aimed at the U.S. It does not operate military bases close to the U.S., nor does it have alliances with U.S.' neighbours or rivals. China does not have a policy to weaken American growth rates in order to curb its power. Finally, China does not project power close to American territory on a regular basis. The relationship, seen in a geopolitical perspective, is marred by significant asymmetries. The U.S. has been showing initiative to balance China's power because it is concerned that continued impressive economic growth rates (and technological advancements) will allow China to subdue its regional rivals in the near future – thus allowing it a much freer hand vis-à-vis the U.S. at some point of time in the future. This is a classic balancing objective and fits neatly with balance of power theory in general.

Working from the same assumptions, China understands that time is on its side and that it needs to tackle the U.S. sensitively while it is still growing. Theoretical innovations such as China's 'peaceful rise', a community of shared interest, and a new great power understanding are all aimed at assuring the U.S. and other actors that both balance of power as a process in international politics as well as 'balancing' as policy are redundant 'cold war relics' that are unsuited to the modern interdependent world. In other words, for perfectly realist reasons, China has been promoting a liberal internationalist view of international politics.

#### *Sequential ordering of goals*

Chinese foreign policy goals are sequential – and in a geographic sense. China cannot hope to balance the U.S. until it has achieved regional security/hegemony first – something that has eluded all continental great powers in the period reviewed in this study. Chinese resource and attention is being pulled away by its regional rivals such as India, Japan, Vietnam and so on. This is similar to how Germany could not balance the U.S. in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before it addressed its own regional security concerns. A meaningful counter-balancing coalition against the U.S., for instance, would have required China to radically improve relations with Japan and appease the same into forming an alliance aimed at the U.S. However, historical memory, territorial disputes, punitive economic actions and perennial concern over Japanese militarisation prohibits such a relationship from forming.

Similarly, despite best efforts to persuade India to join common cause with China over various international issues, China has seen India move closer and closer towards the U.S. and its allies. It also does not help that Chinese appeasement of India has coincided with belligerence on the common border as well as strengthening counterbalancing ties with India's regional adversary – Pakistan. As Yang Xiaoping, a senior research fellow at the National Institute of International Strategy within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, had put it, “India's concerns about China's encirclement are real, given China's enabling of Pakistan as well as competition for influence among small states in the region” (Xiaoping 2018).

China hopes to achieve the dual objectives of assuring India that there is no China threat to India and also to coerce India to not ally with the U.S. by using military threats and actions. Such contradictory policy has been the staple of continental politics. Echoing the same continental dilemma that prevailed between the Soviet Union and China in 1969 (whereby the Soviet Union first threatened China into border talks only to later reassure the same of its peaceful intent), a CIA assessment concluded, “But the Russians have a problem, inasmuch as the hard fact of their continuing build-up near the border is an ‘objective’ threat which they refuse to dissolve, the Chinese will not accept Moscow's dialectical logic which claims that this military threat is not a threat” (Directorate of Intelligence 1976). In fact, inability to project power towards the U.S. may frustrate and spur China to act more aggressively towards more proximate powers – thereby further exacerbating the regional security dilemma.

The U.S. on the other hand, does not have regional adversaries to speak of. It can freely and easily pursue a China-balancing strategy because it is not encumbered by territorial disputes, arms racing with its neighbours and so on. China will find it difficult to pursue a policy of balancing the U.S. until it subdues its regional conflicts. By the same token, the U.S. will undertake various efforts, including military efforts, to bolster and support China's regional adversaries so that they are left standing between itself and China.

*Coalitions and alliances*

Secondly, despite being weaker than the U.S., China's rising power has led to alliances and coalitions being gradually formed against it. This is again similar to what had occurred in previous dyads such as U.S.-Germany and U.S.-Japan and the U.S.-Soviet Union. Other great powers (including non-proximate European powers) seem much more concerned about and seek to balance China's power (economic, land based and naval) than they are about American power. This is so because these powers perceive that China's geopolitical context only incentivises it to pursue territorial expansion at the cost of its neighbours. Greater Chinese power may come at the cost of their territorial and political sovereignty in a way that American power simply has not. The U.S., owing to its insular security, will not be granted more secure by possessing the South China Sea, or the East China Sea or more territory across the Himalaya's. It is likely that even if territorial disputes were resolved, China's neighbours would worry about the implications of a still rising China – especially as a day may come when China demands that such powers abrogate their security treaties with offshore powers (U.S.) or lease territories, ports and bases to China for 'regional order and security'. It was, after all, such demands that in the past had led to balancing and conflict - when powers such as Germany and the Soviet Union sought to dominate and control their neighbouring powers for their security ends. In line with previous contests, it is the U.S. that is and will be organising balancing coalitions against China and not the other way around. As Andrew Erickson writes, "History demonstrates, after all, that the United States has successfully assembled coalitions to defeat aspirants to regional hegemony in Europe and Asia on multiple occasions" (Erickson 2015).

Hence, the present dynamic is best understood and explained by a balance of power perspective – but one in which it is the U.S., along with its allies and partners, that is balancing China. China, in turn, has been adopting strategies to offset or blunt such counterbalancing – but not amounting to balancing the U.S.

#### *Chinese capabilities and balancing*

It may be argued that the build-up and launch of certain Chinese capabilities do seem to be aimed at the U.S. For instance, the Chinese carrier-killers DF-21D and DF-26 missile (as well as multi-role fighter aircrafts and deployments of Surface to Air Missiles in the South China Sea) is aimed (ostensibly so) to deter or defeat American aircraft carriers in the

region. If so, does not the acquisition of such capabilities indicate balancing behaviour? This point has been somewhat addressed by Levy and Thompson. Balancing has to do with curbing aggregate power of a state that is seen as being too powerful. Chinese capabilities aimed at making an intervention by the U.S. in a regional dispute – such as vis-à-vis Taiwan – does not reflect such objectives. As Matthew Jamison writes, “China’s primary operational target is Taiwan, and its focus extends to the United States in as much as it may get involved in Taiwan’s defense” (Jamison 2020).

This does not mean that such capabilities are unimportant or non-threatening – it is just that they do not amount to and neither can they be seen as part of the toolkit that is needed to balance the U.S. Such capabilities are better described as ‘counter-intervention capabilities’ (Erickson 2015; Martinson 2020). This is arguably, somewhat similar to the Soviet Union’s strategic forces – since the latter was not aimed at reducing aggregate U.S. power but to deter any U.S. consideration of a first strike on the Soviet Union and also to make an American intervention in a European conflict *riskier* for the U.S.

Counter-intervention itself should be seen as a response to American balancing policy and efforts towards China. Sticking to the chronology, the U.S. in turn has been seeking to undo Chinese gains on this front – as represented by the ‘Regain the Advantage’ concept and passed as part of the U.S. defense bill in the form of the ‘Pacific Deterrence Initiative’ (PDI) (Inhoffe and Reed 2020). And yet, the American response to China’s response to American balancing can be expected to in turn lead to further Chinese responses; as predicted in the form of a warning in a Global Times editorial, “However, the US’ potential PDI military deployment will pose threats to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), especially on the South China Sea issue and Taiwan question. The PLA has to devise more robust weaponry as a response” (Zhongping 2020).

Chinese military build-up, weapons development programs, force posture and diplomacy and so on could rightly be termed as balancing when they are aimed at balancing American aggregate power – not when they simply aim to deter U.S. intervention in a regional conflict. As Chinese President Xi Jinping instructed the PLA in a 2014 speech, “make strategy planning and preparations for dealing with a powerful enemy’s military intervention” (Establishing Party Command 2014). A balancing China would, instead, make preparations



for dealing with a powerful enemy's power. In other words, China's preparation for war with the U.S. is a consequence of its assessment of the likelihood of an American intervention in a Chinese pursuit of security goals vis-à-vis regional powers. Hence, the targeting of American capabilities and platforms in the region is a subset of the larger aim of 'preventing Taiwanese independence' or 'unifying Taiwan' or other such regional goals. This is similar to Japan's predicament prior to Pearl Harbor – when it wanted to achieve regional goals (war against the Soviet Union) but also sought to prevent a U.S. intervention. The only difference however is that in the present context the U.S. has existing formalised treaty obligations with China's regional antagonists. This was not the case when Japan went to war with China in 1937 and planned a war with the Soviet Union (1933-1941).

China's power projection capabilities, meanwhile, has witnessed impressive improvements over the last decade. The recent launch of a long range strategic bomber (H-6N), the expansion and refitting of the Marine corps, the launch and induction of the Y-10 heavy transport aircraft, the gradual buildup of maritime replenishment capabilities, the construction of amphibious transport dock ships (the Type 075) all point towards the trend of China making significant inroads into the realm of power projection. As far as the objectives of such capabilities are concerned, these range from the protection of energy and trade routes, asserting claims in the South China Sea and most importantly, possible future military scenarios vis-à-vis Taiwan. China is still a long shot away from having the power projection capabilities to be able to balance the U.S. in its region. As most studies note, the greatest challenge to Chinese power projection lies in it not having allies and hence reliable overseas bases (Yung 2016; Rustici et al; Sbragia 2020; Peltier 2020; Kennedy 2019).

It can be observed that very often actions by a balanced state is classified or perceived as balancing merely because it is aimed at the strongest unit in the system (or merely at the stronger power). This misidentification occurs because of our a priori expectations emanating from Waltzian balance of power thinking – where insularity is not taken into account. There may exist a strong temptation to classify responses to U.S. balancing as balancing – emanating from the expectation that weaker powers balance against stronger powers. Power transition theory is possibly less biased towards such an expectation since it

is the still much stronger (but declining) state that is seen as exercising greater agency – to prevent hierarchical overtake.

### **American Grand strategy and the Balance of Power**

This section attempts to make the following key observations about American grand strategy from 1865 till the present.

1. The U.S. has always pursued a realist foreign policy
2. The U.S. understood from the beginning that the maintenance of a balance of power in Eurasia was key to American expansion, security as well as preserving American insularity.
3. The U.S. adopted an unprecedented strategy of triple containment in the post Second world war world – towards Germany, the Soviet Union and Japan
4. Its abundant security position, owing to its insularity, enables and persuades the U.S. to intervene in and shape the global balance of power from a position of opportunity rather than from a position of immediate necessity.

The U.S. has fought major wars (1898, 1914, 1941, 1945-1989) against powers that did not constitute a threat to American security in the foreseeable future. And yet, the U.S. would make the choice of initiating such wars in order to shape outcomes in the continent to maintain or enhance its geopolitical position vis-à-vis Eurasia. This peculiar American strategic advantage and opportunity was captured evocatively, for instance, by Henry R. Luce in Feb. 1941 in an essay for Time magazine,

“If the entire rest of the world came under the organized domination of evil tyrants, it is quite possible to imagine that this country could make itself such a tough nut to crack that not all the tyrants in the world would care to come against us. No man can say that that picture of America as an impregnable armed camp is false...We are in a war to defend and even to promote, encourage and incite so-called democratic principles throughout the world” (Luce 1941).

From this predicament of initiating wars (cold or hot) against unwilling weaker powers that are themselves surrounded by rival powers, arises a certain American strategic culture of

threat perception and reaction. Whereas the strategic elite and the government always understood the somewhat abstract balance of power argument for intervention, the wider citizenry always had a somewhat moralistic/idealistic view of international relations (Furniss 1952: 383-385). As such, President Roosevelt could hope for the balance of power argument for a European war to only go so far. Similarly, early cold warriors could not make the argument for a cold war on the basis of its future projection regarding future Soviet power and thereby relied on anti-communism and alleged communist designs of world domination. Even at present, it is far more common to couch the present souring of relations with China in terms of malign trade practices, disregard for the international order, abuse of human rights as well as a supposed return to Maoism in China. In each such case, the government would have to rely on Jacksonian arguments of wrongdoing, unit-level arguments concerning regime types or extreme threat inflation.

An illustrative statement from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in this regard, "I think you're seeing the entire world begin to unite around the central understanding that the Chinese Communist Party simply is going to refuse to compete in a fair, reciprocal and transparent way" (Pompeo 2020a). Also, "we have to keep in mind that the CCP regime is a Marxist-Leninist regime. General Secretary Xi Jinping is a true believer in a bankrupt totalitarian ideology. It's this ideology, it's this ideology that informs his decades-long desire for global hegemony of Chinese communism. America can no longer ignore the fundamental political and ideological differences between our countries, just as the CCP has never ignored them" (Pompeo 2020b).

The American Grand Strategy worldview consists of greater acceptance of insular powers over continental powers since it is only the latter that could potentially collect or harness sufficient aggregate strength. The U.S. perceived a complementarity of interest between itself and other insular powers facing the Eurasian continent – Britain and Japan. In Spykmanian terms, the U.S. also always sought to foster cooperative relationships with all continental powers that were weaker than the strongest continental power and threatened by the continental potential hegemon. In the post-war scenario, the U.S. considered it be in its interest to subdue and stifle Eurasian great power competition (not always consistently) in order to deter great powers from engaging in costly arms races or annexing each other's

territory. Such a social engineering project, in turn, required the construction of a wide set of norms (not adhered to consistently by the U.S.) that further bolstered such a system of great power politics. This system of norms included – delegitimising spheres of influence, free trade, encouragement of liberal democracies, open and global commercial and maritime commons, human rights, economic nationalism and promotion of strong civil societies in various countries. As such, liberal internationalism only reinforces American security objectives, defined according to its position in the global balance of power (Mearsheimer 2018; H-Diplo/ISSF 2019).

Furthermore, the basic tenets of such a strategy have been more or less clear to other great powers – thereby leading to certain comforting assurances regarding the wielding of such power in their regions or even within their countries. The bedrock of U.S. alliances with so many fellow great powers is after all based on a stable perception of commonality of interests. Japan, France, Britain, China, Russia, Germany and even India in different periods understood that the U.S. interest did not lie in annexing territory or achieving domination over them. As such, the stability of NATO, U.S.- UK strategic partnership, U.S.-China proxy alliance, U.S.- Japan alliance are not a product of coercion, or bandwagoning or institutional inertia. Something far more resilient undergirds these alliances, i.e. national interest. Similar perceptions did not hold between the same powers and the continental hegemon.

#### *American Grand Strategy anticipating Waltzian predictions*

Theorising the supposed delay in counterbalancing behaviour in the post-cold war world, Waltz noted in 2000, “The explanation for sluggish balancing is a simple one. In the aftermath of earlier great wars, the materials for constructing a new balance were readily at hand. Previous wars left a sufficient number of great powers standing to permit a new balance to be rather easily constructed” (Waltz, 2000: 54). This analysis suffers from two deficiencies. It ignores the fact there was no counter-balancing behaviour even in earlier periods when the U.S. was the strongest unit in the system and when (crucially), there was a ‘sufficient number of great powers standing’. Secondly, the cold war presented numerous occasions for states to emerge as potential great powers – either by rejecting American security assurances or allying closely with other powers. Various powers – Britain, France,

Japan, Germany – chose to enmesh themselves within the U.S. led security order because they chose security over great power status. After all, the same nations were not left very secure when they were great powers in the traditional sense prior to the cold war. Furthermore, it was a deliberate American strategy to prevent the emergence of new power blocs from emerging even as it sought to balance Soviet power. Owing to their power potential – confirmed by 20th-century history and the rapid economic recovery during the cold war – the U.S. could not accept the autonomous growth of German and Japanese power. If balance of power theory is modified to include the insular principle, the post-cold war outcome of great power deficiency in the system can itself be seen as the consequence of balance of power theory- rather than an anomaly for the same. This point may be useful in clarifying Neo-Realism’s primary assumptions regarding state behaviour. Do states pursue security or the attributes of a great power? Levy and Thompson’s analysis of British ‘primary interests’ lead to a similar confusion, “As balance of power theorists have long recognized, Britain’s primary interests lay in expanding its markets and investment opportunities Overseas” (Levy & Thompson 2010: 18). However, in the same paper, they also argue, “State’s highest priorities are to provide for their territorial and constitutional integrity” (Levy and Thompson 2010: 16). Incidentally, even the ‘balance of power theorist’ that they cite to underscore this point actually emphasises Britain’s insularity based continental policy as the primary interest, “England’s classic policy in recent centuries has consisted in creating a counterweight to the strongest Continental power of the day” (Dehio 1963: 39; 60; 78-79; 83). In fact, Dehio characterises Britain’s trading ‘intermediary role between two worlds’ as an enabler or a means towards upholding the continental balance, rather than the other way around (Dehio 1963: 39).<sup>11</sup>

Waltzian Balance of Power theory, in the end, has to rely more on the assumption of states being power-seekers rather than security seekers in order to anticipate counter-balancing behaviour against the U.S. Such an association is unfortunate since the ‘states as security

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<sup>11</sup> The second theorist cited also holds a position on the question of Britain’s insularity quite opposed to that of Levy and Thompson. On the role of geography and insularity Hans J. Morgenthau notes, “the separation of Great Britain from the European continent by a small body of water, the English Channel, is a factor which Julius Caesar could no more afford to overlook than William the Conqueror, Philip the Second, Napoleon, or Hitler. However much other factors may have altered its importance throughout the course of history, what was important two thousand years ago is still important today” (Morgenthau 1948: 80-81).

seekers' thesis is even more axiomatic and fundamental to Waltzian neo-realism than the balance of power theory that emanates from the same. In contrast, the assumption that during the cold war France, China and the Soviet Union were security seekers makes counter-balancing against the U.S. theoretically less plausible. The same can be said of all other cases dealt with in this thesis as well as post-cold war scenarios.

### *The Enigma of U.S. power*

The U.S. has sought to assure its partners and allies of its clear intention to defend them against external threats - nuclear and conventional – since the early cold war years. However, it did not seek to nor could provide similar assurances of strategic certainty prior to 1947. As such, great powers would have significant difficulty in anticipating American actions and policies. Neither Germany nor Japan would anticipate American intervention in the regional wars they would start or precipitate in 1939 and 1937. And even when Germany under Hitler would intermittently consider such an intervention likely, it still could not assess what effect such power would exert in the continent. This was the basis of the strategic uncertainty that may have contributed to major wars in the first half of the 20 century. The irony, and cause of the systemic uncertainty, lay in the paradox that great powers marched into wars without even seriously considering the likely actions the strongest power in the system could take as a response. Illustrating a militaristic disdain for American power German Gen. Erich Ludendorff opined in early 1917, “The United States does not bother me ...in the least; I look upon a declaration of war by the United States with indifference” (Herwig 1986:89). Such disregard of the variable of U.S. power only testifies to the lack of strategic attention the U.S. received in the period and despite its enormous power (albeit non-militarised) and can only be explained by its insular geopolitical position. For instance, even a much more active European power such as Britain received marginal attention from Germany prior to August 1914 – compared to France and Russia. Germany, at different times, thought either Britain would not intervene fully or its limited army would fail to play a crucial role in the war.

Such a cognitive lack of clarity vis-à-vis the scale and relevance of American power was captured nicely by Winston Churchill while recounting his memory upon hearing of the news of an attack on Pearl Harbor,

“Silly people – and there were many, not only in enemy countries – might discount the force of the United States. Some said they were soft, others that they would never be united. They would fool around at a distance. They would never come to grips. They would never stand blood-letting. Their democracy and system of recurrent elections would paralyze their war effort. They would be just a vague blur on the horizon to friend or foe...I thought of a remark which Edward Grey had made to me more than thirty years before – that the United States is like “a gigantic boiler. Once the fire is lighted under it there is no limit to the power it can generate.”

- Winston Churchill (Churchill 1950: 607-608)

Continental powers often assumed that, just as they were unconcerned about the U.S., the U.S., in turn, would also display similar disinterest to what occurs in continents thousands of miles away – also the reason why ‘proximity’ does not comprehensively explain balancing choices. However, owing to a shift in grand strategy - From offshore balancing to triple containment or deep engagement/primacy (Posen and Ross 1996) - great powers during the cold war could not and did not disregard American power. The U.S. was central to all dyads of strategic relations in the period. It was central to France’s Germany policy and vice versa. The same applied to Germany and the Soviet Union, Japan and China and China and the Soviet Union. The post-1945 world is unique in that it has been absent of both balancing wars (preventive wars initiated by weaker threatened powers) as well as hegemonic expansion. It may be possible to draw a correlation between insular ascendancy and Eurasian great-power peace and vice versa.

#### *Balance of power and historical memory*

Even apparent non-realist variables such as ‘historical memory’ that continue to plague relations between states decades after the event have a structural driver. Historical memory negatively affects German and Japanese relations with all of its neighbours (Duffield 2003; Kristof 1998). Chinese and Soviet perception of each other during the cold war was also ominously influenced by memories of conflict and betrayal. Rather than surviving just as an emotional hangover, such historical memories can also be seen as a product of continued realist concerns regarding the future trajectory of the said powers. Powers affected by this memory still exist as neighbours of past offenders and as such worry that the same ‘national

interest' that drove them to commit to wars and expansionism could yet again replay in the future. For instance, as the Soviet Union was thinking of withdrawing from Europe, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sought to persuade President Bush to think of the prospects of German dominance in Europe by invoking such a memory, "One had to remember that Germany was surrounded by countries most of which it had attacked or occupied on mainland Europe in the course of this century" (Thatcher 1993: 798). China, the Soviet Union and South Korea continued to be concerned about the direction of Japanese power during the cold war. In Europe, France, U.K., Poland and Russia continued to worry about a much weakened Germany throughout the cold war.

Significantly, neither Japan nor Germany suffered from the same historical memory vis-à-vis the U.S. and Britain despite the horrors of strategic bombing during the Second World war. Both powers transitioned, with relative ease, into becoming staunch U.S. allies during the cold war and continue to be so in the post-cold war world. In fact, both Germany and Japan do not enjoy (and never did) a more stable relationship with any other great power. To emphasise the point, the endurance and strength of these alliances are not a function of American soft power, or its benign institutionalised hegemony, or of American preponderance in the system or reliance on American guarantees of free and secure global commerce. They are a function of America's insular position and the synergy of common interests that such a geopolitical position creates. In fact, the above-mentioned variables are themselves a product of such insularity.

### **Insular Balance of Power Theory**

States form alliances or internally balance against continental potential hegemon in the Eurasian mainland. In pursuit of such a balance in the continent, several states invite or ally with the insular power. As such, states in the continent do not balance against insular powers because such a power does not threaten their core territorial and sovereignty related interests. Insular states themselves have an interest in a balance of power in the continent and pursue policies aiming at the same. Historically, a balance in the continent and the policy of the insular power to preserve such a balance has been a mutually reinforcing relationship – with an imbalance in the continent itself threatening the insularity of the insular state.



Insular states are also not balanced because they are difficult (qualitatively) to invade. Other states would have to dominate their regions, neutralise their continental rivals and subsequently channelise freed up resources into building a capable navy and power projection force to be able to realistically threaten or balance the insular power.

This theory contains three interdependent assertions on balancing behaviour. It asserts that balancing does not occur against insular states due to lack of will and capability. Secondly, it does not see either balancing or balance as outcome as inexorable traits of great power international system. Both balancing by great powers and a balance of power in the system are tied in with actions of insular powers to bring about or maintain a balance. Thirdly, the primary balancing factor (or the primary balancer) in world politics since 1945 has been the U.S. The following section discusses the centrality of American balancing strategies in the post-war world and its implication on balancing as a concept and balance of power theory.

In the post-war international system, the U.S. has been more than an offshore balancer. It has acted as the balancer of first resort instead of last. By opting to balance against all remaining great powers (either through traditional balancing or by security binding) the U.S. had sought to bring into creation a world rid of power politics and dangerous balancing related arms races and wars. Scholars writing in the post cold world were at times tempted to write off both balance of power theory and balancing as a concept because of a failure to find evidence of balancing against the U.S. But the point that is missed is that such balancing ought not to have been expected in the first place.

The primary balancing variable in the international system since 1945, therefore, has been American balancing – and against various other great powers. This point has significant implications for the thesis that non-balancing is caused by ‘proximity’, since the U.S. has been balancing powers that are not proximate to itself. American balancing, however, cannot be expected to resemble continental balancing modes and methods. What is peculiar about American balancing is the strong element of persuasion that is involved in the same. A National Security Council document, for instance, prepared under the Bush administration in 2002 tried to strike a similar note of dissuasion, “In pursuing advanced military capabilities that can threaten its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region, China is

following an outdated path that, in the end, will hamper its own pursuit of national greatness” (NSC 2002).

The U.S. had sought to balance great powers through both politico-military means as well as through engagement, reassurance and persuasion. As the Pentagon’s Defense Planning Guidance for Fiscal Years 1994-1999 had put it,

“We must account sufficiently for the interests of the large industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political or economic order...we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role” (“Excerpts from Pentagon's plan” 1992).

The American argument throughout the cold war towards the Soviet leadership was that it need not pursue its traditional means (expansionism) of achieving security for itself. The Soviet Union could cooperate with the U.S. even in containing German or Chinese or Japanese power and forsake the pursuit of power politics in turn. Similarly, in the post cold-war world, the U.S. sought to persuade Japan and Germany – for their own interests - to remain “within the orbit of an American-led security and economic system”, rather than become “great powers” (Layne 1993:7). Defying Waltz and other realists’ expectations (Waltz 1991; Layne 1993) the two mentioned powers seem to have chosen the U.S. led security system over great power aspiration.

Along similar lines, the U.S. also sought to engage with China after the rapprochement in order to help create the conditions for the setting up of a liberal Chinese state that would be content to remain within the U.S. led security order and prosper without having to convert economic power into military power.

The cold war itself was a testament to the thesis that great powers balance against the predominant continental/Eurasian hegemon and not the insular hegemon. As such the expectation ought to have been regarding the resurfacing of balancing behaviour against similarly placed rising great powers. IR scholars as such had ignored both the renewal of the U.S.-Japan alliance in 1996 as well as NATO expansion as instances of balancing behaviour in the post-cold war world. The great post cold-war alliance of varied countries

that was expected to form against the U.S. indeed seems to be forming – but against China, in the form of the Quad. Overt balancing has been somewhat hard to discern however in the two decades and a half following the end of the cold war. But this again can be explained by the fact that the strongest great powers in Eurasia adopted cooperative strategies and did not seem to strive for regional hegemony or expansionism. However, covert balancing continues to persist in the form of NATO expansion as well as The 1996 Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security.

Balancing has become more overt again with China's increased power, reinforced by its external behaviour. Balancing against Russia has also become sharper with its annexation of Crimea since 2014. Although, the greater imperative to balance against China can be expected to lead to a policy of accommodation towards Russia – similar to Anglo-American accommodation of the Soviet Union in 1941 despite its own invasions in Eastern Europe before the same.

If major powers such as Germany and Japan do not seem to be adopting traditional militarised balancing strategies during the cold war and post-cold war world, it is to a large degree owing to the variable of American balancing of their traditional regional rivals (Russia and China). The security community that has after all so successfully enmeshed major powers within them – and thereby containing them – is after all based on American military power and balancing of potential regional hegemonies. The lack of overt balancing by various powers (including Britain and France) therefore does not point to the redundancy of balancing as a concept or balance of power as a theory – Since the phenomenon itself is based on American balancing strategy and the workings of the insular balance of power under conditions of American preponderance.

#### *Implications for Balancing as a concept*

Critics of Wohlforth and Brooks assert that their definition of balancing is too restrictive since it does not include cases which clearly ought to be recognised as constituting balancing behaviour – most prominently the European ESDP and China (Art 2005). Along similar lines, T.V. Paul argues for a definition of balancing that seems tailor-fitted to allow the inclusion of French-German-Russian cooperation vis-à-vis the U.S. in the run-up to the Iraq

war. Stephen Walt, Christopher Layne, Barry Posen and others would like the definition to include behaviours that although may not really amount to concrete hard balancing but should be seen as constituting the ‘embryonic’ stages of balancing. This is a stage in which states lay the groundwork in terms of cooperation on relatively narrower issues so as to enable a greater and more meaningful form of cooperation vis-à-vis the hegemon over the long run. Robert Art considers the ESDP and Chinese acquisition of capabilities to prepare for a possible U.S. intervention in a China-Taiwan war as instances of balancing since the latter he defines as, “behavior designed to create a better range of outcomes for a state vis-a-vis another state or coalition of states by adding to the power assets at its disposal, in an attempt to offset or diminish the advantages enjoyed by that other state or coalition” (Brooks & Wohlforth et al 2005: 183-184).

This research and theoretical study tends to agree with Wohlforth and Brooks as well as Levy and Thompson on this point. Summing up Robert Art’s analysis of the prevalence of counter-balancing behaviour against the U.S. in the post cold war world, Brooks and Wohlforth write, “What he proposes instead is to revise the theory to encompass the evidence concerning those cases. The debate, therefore, is not really about the evidence regarding the cases themselves but rather the wisdom of redefining “balancing” to encompass them” (Brooks & Wohlforth et al 2005: 188). They also reject Robert Art’s definition of balancing as being too inclusive as well as unfalsifiable,

“The United States is, of course, building up its capabilities to ‘create a better range of outcomes,’ so it is balancing, too, by Art's definition. Who isn't? ...By his definition, any state's acquisition of any level of capabilities of any kind (including non-military) that enhances in any way its bargaining position vis-a-vis any other state in any policy area (including those unrelated to security affairs) constitutes balancing” (Brooks & Wohlforth et al 2005: 190).

Furthermore, it is the centrality of American balancing in the Post War world that has enabled scholars to see mere European interest and striving to have greater influence within the Trans-Atlantic alliance (or the Security Community) as evidence of balancing. Hypothetically speaking, even if Europe were to emerge as an independent pole it would still not amount to balancing – as the latter requires more than just mere independent

existence. As Brooks and Wohlforth write, “even the emergence of a less dependent EU, important as that is, would not be comparable to the major counterbalancing efforts of the past. It is likely only because the status quo is heavy European dependence on the United States that the ESDP is touted as such a major foreign policy departure” (Brooks, Wohlforth et al 2005: 187).

In order to undertake balancing against the U.S., Europe would have to direct its aggregated power - after becoming an independent pole - towards American power with the aim of balancing the same. But is there any understanding as to whom Europe would consider the target of its power aggregation during or after the build-up of such power? If the cold war is anything to go by, not a single European state is likely to see the U.S. as a power to be balanced. They are likely to worry more about hegemonic ambitions of France, or Germany and possible Russian adventurism in the Baltic states and Eastern Europe.

The survey presented here also discerns that Europe hardly acted as a unitary actor during the cold war, being a region that had various nation-states with differing strategic interests – tied together only by their common alliance with the U.S. As such, is there any evidence that French concerns vis-à-vis Germany have declined so significantly – despite greater German power today - ever since the end of the cold war that it now countenances an alliance with the same to balance American power? Is Britain now willing to reverse its policy of more than 400 years by helping to bring about a united Europe? – the very *raison d'être* of their foreign policy and major power wars since the 17th century.

The puzzle is that despite a wide range of significant developments since 1998 - Obama and Trumps’s weariness with NATO, the 2008 financial crisis and recession, the rise of relative isolationism in the U.S. and American focus on Indo-Pacific - Europe has not moved much, if any, from the position it had found itself in the early 2000s. In many ways, the movement has been in the opposite direction. The cooperation between France-Germany and Russia has not repeated itself since. Germany and Russia have locked horns over Crimea. France has joined NATO again since 2009 and moved towards a military intervention force that is aimed at bolstering French military operations in Africa. Europe meanwhile seems to be more fractured today than it was in the early 2000s with the Eurozone crisis, the migration

crisis, Brexit, rise of Eurosceptic parties. Recent announcements by President Trump regarding the reduction of U.S. troops in Germany has caused greater concern than relief.

Wohlforth and Brooks, however, conclude by stating, “In the end, there is no escaping that unipolarity is poor terrain for balance of power theory” (Brooks and Wohlforth et al 2005: 191). The theory presented here seeks to modify this into “insularity is poor terrain for balancing behavior”. Balance of power theory continues to explain international politics but only after China (and not the U.S.) is identified as the relevant and contemporary potential hegemon.

### *Insular Balance of Power theory in the post-cold war World*

Whereas the absence of counter-balancing behaviour is a puzzle for Waltzian Balance of power theory, such a state of affairs is entirely consistent with Insular BOP theory (IBOPT). Contrary to expectations of a growing strategic convergence between France, Germany and Russia there has only been growing rift amongst the three on a range of strategic issues. Contrary to expectations of a more independent Europe – centred on France’s efforts – Europe has remained a strong U.S. ally with leaders worrying more about American withdrawal from Europe. France has moreover re-joined NATO in 2009.

IBOPT would also predict Asian states to balance China as it rises and strengthen its alliances with the U.S. since China is presently the regional potential hegemon in Asia. The theory expects the U.S. to remain very interested in preventing a Chinese regional hegemony and as such sees any prospect of a G2 or a concert or a condominium between the U.S. and China as very unlikely to occur.

The theory also predicts Russia to worry increasingly about the rise of China and thus seek some form of alignment with the U.S. and other powers that are balancing China, such as Japan, Vietnam and India. As such, the theory would categorise present Russia-China relations to have many of the characteristics of previous continental leagues. The two power seek to improve their respective leverages vis-à-vis the U.S. in the short run, with the aim of eventually reaching a more ideal *modus vivendi* with the same – with the possible objective of balancing the other continental power. This motivation is likely to animate Russian behaviour more than China’s – analogous to how it motivated China more than the

Soviet Union during the cold war. The principle being that the weaker continental state is more interested in allying with the insular power to balance the stronger continental power.

Furthermore, the theory would also expect India to align more closely with the U.S. and other similar concerned powers such as Australia, Japan and Vietnam to seek to balance China. Both the evolution of the Indo-Pacific as a concept as well as the formation of the Quadrilateral alliance confirms the IBOPT and stand as a puzzle to Waltzian balance of power theory as well as preponderance theory. Contrary to Levy and Thompson, China's growing naval capabilities – as well as its pursuit of market and investment opportunities overseas – are only likely to strengthen balancing incentives. China faces counter-balancing behaviour by virtue of its geopolitical location and aggregated power; regardless of its choices or its strategic orientation with regard to land or sea-based capabilities.

### **Further Research Areas and scope of study**

Organski (1968) had argued that the introduction of ICBM's had made the protection afforded by oceans and water bodies completely meaningless. States after all, no longer needed to mobilise large numbers of troops and ships and sail them towards the enemy territory to threaten or destroy them. The same can be done simply by launching a missile from one's home territory to theirs.

What is the implication of such an analysis on balance of power theory? It is true that water bodies do not protect insular states from an incoming ICBM but balancing requires more than the ability to destroy the other side's cities and military assets – especially since such an attack was likely to result in a similar or more devastating counterstrike. At no point of time during the cold war did either the U.S. or Soviet Union come close to deciding to decamp their conventional weapons or their old fashioned alliances just because of the advent of nuclear ICBMs. French, British, German and Soviet traditional concerns pertaining to Germany remained potent despite all of them having nuclear weapons. Both sides actively and consistently trained and prepared for limited and large scale conventional warfare.

To balance a power is to reduce its overall power and its capability to threaten the territory and sovereignty of one's own state. Even at the height of U.S. nuclear supremacy over the

Soviet Union in 1949, a Joint Chiefs of Staff report found and concluded that the U.S. could not acquire much strategic benefit from a devastating first strike on the Soviet Union since the latter was likely to recover in a matter of years and still be left with enough power to take “selected areas” of Western Europe, the Middle East and the Far East. The report stated that even if operation TROJAN was carried out perfectly (targeting 75 Soviet cities with 133 atomic bombs), it would not in itself, “bring about capitulation, destroy the roots of Communism, or critically weaken the power of Soviet leadership to dominate the people” (Report by the Ad Hoc Committee 1949). Further research can however be carried out to provide a more rigorous analysis of the effect of nuclear ICBMs on balancing.

The above framework has been borne out a study of great power politics from 1865-1989. The theory can be tested against earlier time periods when there was a similar relationship between an insular power and a configuration of powers in a related continent. relationship with Europe from 1640 till 1945 comes to mind. The central puzzle of this study is intricately linked to the British puzzle as well – why did great powers not balance against Britain during its ascendancy in the 18th century and supremacy in the 19th. What was the nature of the British-Franco rivalry? Did the two powers balance against each other or merely compete for colonies and markets? How do the Napoleonic wars fit into the theory?

Furthermore, discussions of the long peace from 1945 to the present ignore the great long peace of the 19th century, when Britain and Russia competed for influence in various corners of Eurasia without stumbling into a major war. What caused such a long peace? How did Britain and Russia avoid a devastating war during their long reign of security competition when Germany and Russia engaged in two such wars in the first half of the last century? Could insularity possibly explain such an eventuality?

The above theory could also be tested against the relationship between Venice and the Italian States from roughly the 9th century up until the 16th century when Venice had already entered into decline. How did Venice escape invasions for almost 8 centuries when its neighbours in the peninsula suffered through dozens of them? Did Venice provoke counter-balancing alliances against itself?



## **ANNEXURE 1 – The Dutch ‘invasion’ of England**

Much of the disagreement between LT and B rests on the question of the invadeability of Insular powers and non-balancing against pre-eminent Sea powers throughout recent history. This section shall attempt to engage with the question regarding balancing against sea powers and the next section shall engage with the question of invadeability of insular powers.

William of Orange’s landing in Britain could hardly be described as an invasion. Britain was on the verge of a civil war, only a few decades subsequent to its last disastrous civil war. Protestant Britain was being ruled by an unpopular and despotic Catholic James the Second. The King was also sympathetic towards Britain’s arch-rival, Catholic France – receiving aid and subsidies from the same. There were fears amongst Parliamentarians that James intended to establish himself as an absolute ruler and undermine parliament. It was in this context that a group of Parliamentarians decided to conspire and invite William of Orange to make a landing and usurp the throne. William had good credentials for the job since the Dutch had already been opposing French hegemony in Europe, was himself married to James’ Protestant daughter, Mary of the house of Stuart. It was for these reasons that the Dutch navy and army went virtually unopposed. The authority of the state was weakened and public officers refused to follow orders thereby facilitating the usurpation willingly.

The massive Dutch fleet of 500 ships aimed to depose of England’s Catholic King and not its power – and after being invited by English noblemen (Schwoerer 1981: 107-111). In conditions of civil war, one section of the polity sought the assistance of a sympathetic foreign power to cross the channel and take over the reins of power. It was the result of a near civil war situation with the church, parliament and even the judiciary to some extent standing in opposition to James and preferring rule by Protestant William of Orange than by Catholic James the Second. It was moreover a bloodless affair since the English navy hesitated to intercept the Dutch fleet and the most important general John Churchill switching loyalty towards William.

Furthermore, there were intense negotiations after James's flight to France, with Parliamentarians preferring that William only serve as a regent or a temporary caretaker. William refused such a minimal role and threatened to return to the Netherlands if he was not made sovereign King – It being a rare occurrence for an invading power to threaten to return. Finally, the two sides compromised and reached an agreement whereby a dual monarchy was set up with William and Mary both sharing the monarchy. William made several assurances that he shall work in co-operation with Parliament and never defy it and also serve the interests of the English state, including its various interest groups. In other words, the English ruling elite and intelligentsia sought to co-opt William rather than be co-opted by him, thereby defeating the very purpose of inviting a foreign monarch. One of the lasting legacies of this contract between William and Parliament was the 'Bill of Rights' for instance.

To describe the entire affair as an act of invasion will be an extreme simplification. It will almost be analogous to describing the D-Day landings as an Anglo-American invasion of France, instead of an Anglo-American expeditionary operation against German rule over France. Lisa Jardine described the Dutch army's march into London on 18 December 1688 as a

“Carefully organized triumph, to be welcomed, this time, by cheering crowds of Londoners. In spite of miserable weather, people in coaches and on horseback, as well as on foot, lined the streets. Huygens reports with evident relief that many of them wore orange ribbons, while others had stuck oranges on sticks and waved them in the air” (Jardine 2010: 20).

This dovetails nicely with Levy's own earlier work which described the 'invasion' in the following way,

“After receiving an 'invitation' to sail to England from a small but influential group of English opposition, William embarked with his armada and army in December. The royal army deserted, James II fled to France, and William entered London without firing a shot. A convention parliament declared William and Mary king and queen of England in January 1689” (Levy 1999: 188).

A prominent aristocrat reported, with some concern, on 'universal discontent' in the country which had led people “to so desperate a passe as with utmost expressions even passionately

seem to long for and desire the landing of that Prince, whom they looked on as their deliverer from popish Tyrannies” (de Beer 1995: 600). It is worth noting that England had itself proposed a political confederation with the United Provinces back in 1651 – an offer rejected by the Dutch out of concerns that it will be the more dependent power in any such arrangement (Rowen 1978: 49-59; Wilson 1978: 47-73).

Furthermore, since the primary objective of the discussion is to determine the relation between insularity and balancing it is worth noting that the common imperative to balance against French power and expansionism is what greatly contributed to this Anglo-Dutch political revolution. Subsequently, England and the Netherlands would work closely against French interests (the continental potential hegemon) in Europe – with traditional English interests remaining intact and terms of the alliance being debated vigorously in Parliament. The decade previous to the glorious revolution had also witnessed a growing strategic alignment between Britain and Netherlands vis-à-vis France (Bruijn 1989). As such, the Dutch expedition needs to be understood in the full context of the European balance of power politics at the time (Dehio 1963: 74-82).

In fact, British insularity will find its more appropriate test in the subsequent year in 1690 when control of the English Channel fell into French hands after the battle of Beachy Head. However, France still could not countenance an invasion of England owing to its land army being tied to various continental engagements. In sum, the only plausible example of insularity being a non-factor in terms of protecting a state from invasion turns out to be an invalid since there was no ‘invasion’ in any meaningful sense of the term.

Furthermore, the state of Europe and Britain from Spring 1940 to summer 1941 (after the fall of France) provides a useful test case of the above thesis. The period demonstrates that despite the Low countries falling under German occupation, Britain still remained inaccessible to German power (See Chapter 3). British alliance with periphery countries as well as its overarching policy of maintaining a balance of power in Europe are, after all, supposed to be contributors to its primary interest – security from a land invasion. The British policy of setting up additional barriers for any European power that may have the will and capability to threaten the home territory of Britain does not negate the saliency of insularity but only testifies to the value conferred to it by its decision-makers. Similarly,

American intervention, arms races and wars in Europe and Asia do not negate the value of the security provided to it by the two oceans. On the contrary, such a policy vis-à-vis Eurasia is carried out in order to preserve and enhance the advantages accorded to it by insularity.

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