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德意志帝國與現代中國 – 理性或不理性的行為者？以守勢現實主義角度的外交政策分析

Imperial Germany and Contemporary China – Rational or Irrational Actors? A Foreign Policy Examination under Defensive Realism

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ABSTRACT

IMPERIAL GERMANY AND CONTEMPORARY CHINA – RATIONAL OR IRRATIONAL ACTORS? A FOREIGN POLICY EXAMINATION UNDER DEFENSIVE REALISM

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This paper examines the rationality of Imperial Germany's and post-Tiananmen China's foreign policy from a defensive realist perspective, since defensive realism is a prescription for rational behavior, while offensive realism isn't; other international relations theories might well be prescriptions for rational behavior, however, they fail to face the world as it is because of their bias towards idealism. A comparison between Imperial Germany and contemporary China matters because, comparing China to an actor – Wilhelmine Germany – which is commonly referred to as the paragon of an irrational actor, is not only unjust towards China, but also wrong, since Wilhelmine Germany wasn't an irrational actor in the sense that it is widely conceived as. I argue that Imperial Germany was not an irrational before 1905-1907, years after first bringing up *the* indicative term depicting Germany as an irrational actor: "Weltpolitik", an empty phrase which was not indicative of aggressive (enough) behavior because it wasn't Weltpolitik which caused the formation of the Franco-Russian, Anglo-French, and Anglo-Russian alliances. Taking the number one premise of realism – state security / chances of survival – as the decisive factor to indicate rational state behavior, I argue that Germany became an irrational actor because it failed to adapt to the redistribution of capabilities in the system, first after 1904, but surely after 1907. On China's part, we can say that it was an irrational actor from the early to mid-1990s. Starting in the late nineties, it followed a decade of representing a rational actor, resembling Bismarckian Germany so to say, only to go back to being an irrational actor again after 2008. Nationalism (rather nationalist ideology) played a role in interfering both on Germany's and on China's part with their Realpolitik approaches to their foreign policy.

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論文提要內容：

本文以守勢現實主義的角度去分析德意志帝國與天安門後中國外交政策的理性。守勢現實主義是一個理性政策的處方，攻勢不是。其他國際關係理論很可能是理性行為的處方，但是，他們無法解釋這個世界的現實層面並提供可行的政策建議，因為他們對理想主義的偏見。德意志帝國與當代中國的比較重要因為：平常，對威廉德國的普遍看法是，他是一個有極大國族主義的外交政策，不理性的，完全自己一個人造就了一戰的行為者。德意志帝國與當代中國的比較很受歡迎。我們要好好的調查：如果要做一個比較，我們到底要把中國跟什麼對象做比較。所謂的「世界政策」並沒有像在很多文獻裡註明的，造成了英國、法國、俄國之間的同盟結構。把守勢現實主義第一重要的前提視為定義理性行為的決定性因素，我陳述德國成為不理性的行為者是因為它無法適應國際體系裡面的重新權力分配結構。我的立場是，威廉德國成為不理性的行為者；最早在 1905 年，幾乎可以肯定在 1907 年也是，並在 1911 年確立一定是不理性的行為者。倒是中國的部分我們可以說，它從 1990 年初到年代中代表著不理性的行為者，接著後十年扮演著理性行為者的角色，卻在 2008 年後再度成為不理性的代表。在此兩個案例上，國族主義確實會干擾國家的現實政治外交政策。

Introduction

China's rise has been occupying scholars for more than two decades. With China becoming bigger and stronger by every metric, realism's predictions became true: first, the effect a new powerful challenger has on the state system; second, a newly powerful state attempting to get a bigger share in the distributions of capabilities in the international system. Paired with, at times, aggressive behavior from China's side, other states balance against the perceived threat China conveys, making a final prediction come true: that China perceives the balancing of other states as a means aimed at containing it, giving justification to enhancing its security through military build-up and modernization; a classic security dilemma.

Something that has received great popularity is comparing contemporary (in this paper, "contemporary" means post-Tiananmen) China's rise with Imperial Germany's (1871-1918) rise prior World War I (1914-1918). While sometimes China is being compared to Bismarckian Germany, because it has traditional balance-of-power views¹, it doesn't engage in a global race for strategic influence. Moreover, ideology, at least in economic matters, does not play a role. Furthermore, Beijing has no ambition to export its own political-economic system ("socialism with Chinese characteristics"), other than, e.g., the United States. When scholars entertain the comparison to Bismarckian Germany, they speak of China's foreign policy as being "accommodating"; "pragmatic"; "confident"; "cooperative"; and "proactive". At other times, China is being compared to Wilhelmine Germany; then, its foreign policy is attributed as being "assertive"; "difficult"; "combative"; "hyper-nationalistic"; "uncooperative"; "aggressive"; "confused"; and "uncertain".²

This paper is yet another take on China's behavior within the state system. It is different from other approaches in that it applies defensive realism to evaluate the following: was Bismarck's Germany as rational as it is generally depicted as? Was Wilhelmine Germany an irrational actor – if yes, when exactly and what caused it to become irrational? *If* at all, when was (or is it still?) China a resemblance of Bismarckian or Wilhelmine Germany and why? Last, I will evaluate if the comparison is a legitimate one at all.

Why is it important to conduct research on the basis of the example of Imperial Germany? Because compelling analogies from the past do in fact determine our thinking. Margaret MacMillan provides some attractive reasons for comparing Germany and China (although she means it in an even

1 Christensen 1996

2 David Shambaugh (2013), p. 72

broader sense, as in comparing today's world with that from 100 years ago, and of course, the discourse about China is a crucial part about today's international relations). She writes: "If we cannot determine how one of the most momentous conflicts in history happened, how can we hope to avoid another such catastrophe in the future?"³ But, to adopt and quickly reject a liberal-institutionalist view, isn't conflict, given the amount of economic interdependence, very improbable in today's world anyways? "[O]n the eve of World War I, Britain... and Germany... were each other's largest trading partners."⁴ Idealistic, non-realist mindsets, believing that everything will be dealt with automatically somehow, by mutual understanding and the fact that we have learned from the past can be harmful. Herfried Münkler⁵ stipulates: "It seems that, partially, yet again, one believes that the purity of dispositions, the kindheartedness of intentions, is the key to correct political conduct [...]. One can think of the First World War as a chain-linking of miscalculations, blunders, illusions and well-intended fallacies. [It is] a lesson and warning against a policy that believes that through genuineness, it'll be alright in the end."⁶ MacMillan further supports this, stating that "[t]he past cannot provide us with clear blueprints for how to act, for it offers such a multitude of lessons that it leaves us free to pick and choose among them to suit our own political and ideological inclinations."⁷ In short: one always learns from the past, but one can also learn the wrong thing.

Facing reality, applying realist logic to analyze things, being able to somewhat predict future developments on the basis of empirical facts (examples of certain power structures, or states acted in certain ways that created conflict in the past), but of course emphasizing cooperation and exercising restraint, is what needs to be done in order to diminish the chances of conflict (escalation).

Generally, Wilhelmine Germany is depicted as an irrational hyper-aggressive nationalistic state which almost single-handedly destroyed Europe's balance of power, because it aimed at achieving hegemony, therefore it started off World War I in the attempt of doing so; after all, in the Treaty of Versailles of 1918, Germany has been determined as having to burden the sole war guilt. On the basis of the latter, it is indeed convenient to illustrate Germany as the classic example of an overexpanding, irrational, and expansionist state. Comparing China to an actor like *that*, hence, implies that it is only a matter of time until Beijing shows its real face, overthrows the regional

3 Margaret MacMillan, "The Rhyme of History"

4 Ibid

5 Herfried Münkler is Professor for Political Science at Humboldt University, Berlin.

6 Herfried Münkler about World War I in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Jan 2014

7 Ibid

order and brings war upon the region. Thus, we have to do research that is *inconvenient*; I am stating the obvious when I say that convenience doesn't produce good results.

That being said, maybe we can debunk some of the "facts" that have been and are still being spread about Germany's alleged irrationality. I reckon that defensive realism is the perfect tool for doing that, since realism has not only predicted Asia's power-dynamics pretty much on point so far. Also, defensive realism is a prescription, a manual so to say, for rational behavior, for states to act according to; even John Mearsheimer, the most well-known proponent of offensive realism, who generally disagrees with defensive realism's explanations, acknowledges that the latter should be seen as a guide to rational behavior.⁸

It is not a secret that states sometimes don't act according to the guidelines of defensive realism, they sometimes act irrationally; else, there would be no war. Thus, I want to shed light on one factor: nationalism; the reason being, that nationalism is, and always has been, a force to be reckoned with. More particularly, I want to research if nationalism weakens a state's *realpolitik* approach in its foreign policy conduct. The reason for even bringing up this assumption stems from the fact that Germany under Wilhelm II, according to a number of scholars, turned into an irrational actor. The factor 'nationalism' has received great popularity in deeming Germany's foreign policy, starting in the late 1890s, as irrational. On the other hand, nationalism has always played a role in China's foreign policy, but even more after the Tiananmen disaster, when the Communist Party implemented its patriotic education campaign in order to legitimize its claim to a monopolistic hold onto power, after, in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union, communism wasn't able to fill that legitimizing role any longer. While Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening" (改革開放) as well as "Taoguang yanghui" (韬光養晦)-strategy are definite evidence of *realpolitik*, as it carried out policies that contravene the party's ideological foundation, but were of essential importance for the country in economic and political terms, and last but not least immensely contributed to the improvement of the Chinese people overall, however, in the early nineties, as well as since the global financial crisis 2009, we can witness a spike in nationalism that occur at the same time as China's relations with regional states and the US sour, which brings up the question "Do higher levels of nationalism make conducting *realpolitik* impossible or less probable?"

Having said this, I am not indicating that I will be mainly looking for nationalistic explanations for certain policies. Much more, I will research if Chinese assertive policies was and is driven by its *realpolitik* approach and the laws of realist theory, however, keeping in mind that 100 years ago, nationalism allegedly did contribute to turn a rational actor into an actor worth having a debate

⁸ John Mearsheimer, "Reckless States", p. 253

“rational or irrational?” about, to say the least.

Having explained the foundation, how am I going to search for the indicators that provide answers to the questions at hand? Generally speaking, examining closed cases is a lot more solid than looking at processes that are still in the making. Example: How did Germany act during the second Moroccan Crisis? How did China act during the Taiwan Crisis 1995/1996? Did Germany's / China's behavior match the behavioral guidelines that defined, e.g., Bismarck's realpolitik? If the examination through a realist-lens only leaves us to answer the latter question with “No”, *then*, it is worth taking the factor ‘nationalism’ into the equation. In short: defensive realism is the primary tool of analysis. If realism dubs a state's behavior as irrational, the secondary tool of analysis – nationalism – comes into play; maybe or maybe not, nationalism is the reason for a state deviating from its rational approach to foreign policy.

Part One will present the framework of analysis, debunking offensive realism's claim of the rational actor-assumption, and explain in how far nationalism is going to be used as a secondary tool of analysis.

Part Two will analyze Imperial Germany's handling of crises under a defensive realist framework; first of the Bismarck-era, second of the “notorious” Wilhelmin-era, setting the foundation for the comparison with China. Was Bismarckian Germany the paragon of a realpolitik (defensive realist) state, and Wilhelmine Germany the paragon of a hyper-aggressive nationalistic state that single-handedly upset Europe's balance of power? What role did nationalism play? The central task here is to find out: what are we actually comparing with, when we compare China to Imperial Germany?

Part Three will analyze contemporary China's behavior in regional policy issues. After the Soviet Union's demise, China had to adjust its policy which used to be targeted at dealing with global threats, to a regional policy; in doing so, it naturally went to some hardships. Does the much-praised realpolitik approach in the economic field translate into strategic matters, or does nationalism prevent China from being an overall rational actor?

Part Four will merge the results of Part Two and Three, classifying China into Bismarckian/Wilhelmine Germany, but also asking if employing the comparison is a worthy and useful thing to do in the first place.

Part I: Conceptual Framework



Realism and rationality

“The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system.”⁹

“The system, like a market in economics, is made by the actions and interactions of its units...”¹⁰

In this chapter, I am going to present the framework of analyzing Imperial Germany’s and contemporary China’s foreign policy. The theoretical fundament of making my point will be structural realism. Structural realism has multiple, so to say, branches: “defensive” – as represented by the “father” of structural realist theory, Kenneth Waltz (and other notable scholars like Stephen Walt¹¹ and Jack Snyder), and “offensive” – John Mearsheimer being the main representative of this branch (another notable offensive realist is e.g. Robert Gilpin).

Without wanting to spoil the analysis that follows, I think it is helpful to give a general idea of the main difference between defensive and offensive realism, without going into detail; Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhang's summary of the main difference between the two branches serves the purpose:

“it is a distinction with respect to whether states maximize security or power, that is to say, whether power is a means or an end. Some scholars contend that the primary goals that states seek to achieve are survival and security. For these scholars, power is a tool for achieving a goal, and not a goal in itself. Those holding this view are considered defensive realists. Another group of scholars, those that fall within the camp of offensive realism, assume that states seek power as both a means and as an end.”¹²

While it is true that John Mearsheimer today is the eponym of an offensive realist, however, it also has to be mentioned that several realist scholars before the publishing of Mearsheimer's “*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*” in 2001, already had characterized either more defensive, or offensive interpretations of (structural) realism. As early as 1991, Jack Snyder in his work “*Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*” gave his analysis of a defensive and an offensive form of realism (respectively incentives for states that usually motivate them to employ more aggressive strategies).¹³

9 Kenneth N. Waltz, “Theory of International Politics” (1979), p. 126

10 Ibid, p.118

11 Even more specific, the likes of a Stephen Walt and other realists, e.g. Stephen Van Evera, belong to neo-classical realism. As I will state further below, this shall not be of importance.

12 Liu, Zhang: “The Typologies of Realism”, Chinese Journal of International Politics, Vol. 1, 2006, 109–134. The authors also deserve credit for providing a comprehensive review about all kinds of realism, from Macchiavelli to Mearsheimer. For another detailed and lucid overview, especially about the defensive/offensive realism debate, see Steven E. Lobell: “Structural Realism / Offensive and Defensive Realism”, pp. 6651-6669, in: Robert A. Denmark (ed.): “The International Studies Encyclopedia”, Volume X, 2010

13 But even back then, Mearsheimer was already characterized as belonging to the offensive camp, so he really seems to be one of the first scholars becoming well-known for their “offensive” views of realism. Moreover, even if it

What this paper is not going to provide is a detailed differentiation between all the subcategories that emerged during the 1980s and 90s. I will also not particularly distinguish between neo-realism and neo-classical realism. I will merely distinguish between tenets of defensive and offensive forms of realism; whether an indicator of rationality according to defensive realism belongs to neo- or neo-classical realism is not of significance. A detailed and comprehensive differentiation between the different defensive/offensive, neo/neoclassical has already been contributed by Jeffrey Taliaferro's article "*Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited*" (2000/2001).¹⁴

Basic tenets of realist theory

Realist theory has received scrutiny for being pessimistic and promoting tension between states by overemphasizing deterrence, balance-of-power and generally drawing a dim picture of international politics. I do not agree with this judgment. My point of view is, realist theory is neither optimistic nor pessimistic; it does not promote war; it merely gives an analysis of the system by focusing on its composing structure. To be clearer: if the system presents certain conditions that have led to conflict in the past, then, realism holds that according to theory and history, the system the way it is composed at that certain point gives us reason to be alarmed, because in the past, when systems had those features, conflict arose. Realist theory is anti-idealistic.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on structural realism as first extensively developed by Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 seminal work "*Theory of International Politics*", a derivative of classical realist theory presented in Hans Morgenthau's "*Politics Among Nations*" (1948), as a reaction to the, until then, nothing less but disastrous 20th century with its two world wars and the idealistic approach world politics research was characterized by at that time, basically believing that the world has learned out of the mistakes made that led to World War I.

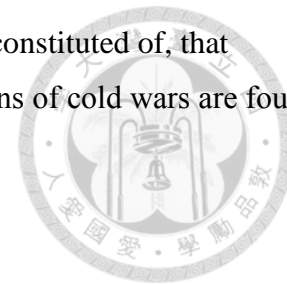
Realism aims to provide explanations for why great power politics produce the outcomes that we witness; a major part of that is explaining why wars emerge. Structural realism is a derivative of classical realism in so far as that it contends that international politics can be understood only if the effects of structure are added to the unit-level explanations of classical realism. "By emphasizing how structures" of the international system, that itself is created through the interactions of the system's major actors – states – again "affect actions and outcomes, structural realism rejects the

happens to be that Mearsheimer wasn't one of the first scholars representing offensive realism, however, it is safe to say that he presented his views more straightforward, some might even say "bluntly", than anyone else before.

Mearsheimer more than anyone else made a name for himself *exclusively* in the offensive branch, which is why I am going to refer to him as offensive realism's paragon in this paper.

¹⁴ I recommend the table on page 135

assumption that man's innate lust for power constitutes a sufficient cause of war in the absence of any other.”¹⁵ So above anything else, it is the structure that the system is constituted of, that explains outcomes: “The origins of hot wars lie in cold wars, and the origins of cold wars are found in the anarchic ordering of the international arena.”¹⁶



Defensive realism, offensive realism, and the distinction between them

Steven Lobell gives the best and most compact summaries the above mentioned;

1.) structural realism: "structural realism argues that the anarchic system and the distribution of capabilities are powerful constraints and inducements which produces "sameness" in the behavior of states.[...] [T]he structure of the international system or polarity varies based on the distribution of capabilities. The anarchic nature of the international system and the assumption that states "at a minimum, seek their own preservation" and are socialized to imitate each other, allows Waltz to explain recurring international patterns and outcomes such as balances of power, war proneness of different distributions of power, and recurrent alliance formation."¹⁷

2.) the fundamental distinctions between defensive and offensive realism are "whether the anarchic system encourages states to maximize security or power and influence"; "whether conquest and expansion pay"; and "whether states are primarily revisionist in their intentions...or whether [they] are primarily motivated by security-seeking behavior."¹⁸

3.) offensive realism: "For offensive realists, security is scarce. The anarchic nature of the international system compels states to maximize their share of world power and to seek superiority, rather than equality, in order to make themselves more secure and thereby increase their odds of survival. The ultimate goal of every major power is to become the hegemon. [...]all of the major powers adopt a worst-case scenario and therefore increase their power through expansion..."¹⁹

Defining "rationality"

After this basic outline, I will dive into the actual content of this chapter. It is not about realism as an end, but as a means; a tool to define rational behavior in its own terms. The idea here is not to define rational behavior *per sé*, because defining rational behavior in non-realist terms is very general, this makes it easy to present obvious indicators of rational behavior, but at the same time makes it a tough undertaking to take those general assumptions and match it to an individual case. Robert Mandel thinks that "the problem with [rationality] is that it is used with so many different

15 Waltz "Origins", p. 617

16 Ibid, p.620

17 Lobell, "Realism", p. 6651

18 Ibid, p. 6651

19 Ibid, p. 6652

interpretations that it has lost virtually all meaning.”²⁰

For example: for a decision-making process to deserve the attribute “rational”, everyone would agree that decisions are arrived at through a process of logical reasoning, and that the decisions made are the best ones given the choices available. Stating this feels like stating the obvious. But at the same time, how is it possible to measure and prove “logical thinking”, how can we prove that leaders were fully aware of all the choices available and carried out decisions after thoroughly considering outcomes and consequences? How can we know whether a decision-making process took four weeks, three days or just two hours? Adding Mandel's deliberations:

"Many implicitly express themselves in terms of deviation from some rational norm, others do not; most focus on process, others on outcomes; most concentrate on the way people do or do not behave, others on the way people should or should not behave; and some emphasize contextual criteria, while others simply examine the nature of arguments made and the way in which they are generated or expressed.”²¹

In short: cost and benefit may be interpreted very differently by actors A and B. Other factors that are popular in proving irrational decisions, e.g. that groupthink leads to subpar decisions, or which role factors like culture, norm and other dependent variables play, are not of importance for developing my point. What needs to be done in order to provide sound judgment on whether or not an actor acted in a rational way, is judging within the range of one single framework, everything that is outside of this framework shall not be of importance; the framework is structural realism *in its defensive form*.

Since there is an intra-structural realism debate about what is rational and what is irrational, we have to take a stance on either defensive realism (originally structural realism is rather defensive, so when I refer to structural realism without further commenting that I mean it in a more offensive way, structural realism will be equivalent to defensive realism; likewise, if I want to refer to the offensive form of structural realism, I will unmistakably write "offensive realism") or offensive realism, in other words: which branch has the edge on better defining rational behavior?

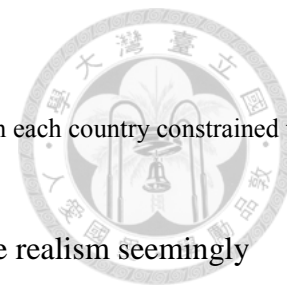
20 Robert Mandel, "The Desirability of Irrationality in Foreign Policy Making" (1984), p. 644

21 Ibid, p. 644-645

Rationality in realism: Taking a firm stand in favor of defensive realism

“...the theory requires no assumptions of rationality...”²²

“...rational behavior, given structural constraints, does not lead to the wanted results. With each country constrained to take care of itself, no one can take care of the system.”²³



Looking at these two quotes, some might just accept the fact that defensive realism seemingly bluntly rejects defining rational behavior, and conclude that “[t]he realm of reason within neorealism remains ambiguous. Under tight structural constraints of international competition and selection, the rationality of agents seems superfluous.”²⁴

Without wanting to get worked up over a debate about the meaning of self-interest (rationality is commonly referred to as acting according to one's self-interest only), however, in this section I will argue that defensive realism *does* in fact have clear thoughts and prescriptions towards rational behavior of actors in the system. It is true: Waltz does not openly formulate thoughts on rationality, he is not even shy to admit that he is not a fan of the word "rationality".²⁵ Nevertheless I think that there is compelling evidence that Waltz's theory *does* give indications about rational behavior, whether he admits it or not.

Defensive or an offensive realism's perspectives on rationality are very much contrary. While Waltz omits a rational-actor assumption, Mearsheimer adopts it. This, however, does not indicate that defensive realism does not define rational behavior, since defining/indicating rational behavior on the one, and assuming that states are rational actors on the other hand, are two different things. If we take Mearsheimer's words, it is hard to argue against defensive realism also viewing states as rational actors, as he writes that states “are aware of their external environment and they think intelligently about how to maximize their prospects for survival.”²⁶ I reckon that it is common sense to assume that states try to do their best to act in ways that are best for them, instead of acting in ways that would be harmful to their interests. Mearsheimer having to point this out in order to prove his point that Waltz' theory is flawed because it supposedly omits states being rational actors, makes Mearsheimer's attempt to prove a point appear overachieving, even twisted, from scratch. That being said, for Waltz it is simply not important to formulate a rational actor assumption²⁷,

22 Waltz, "Theory", p. 118

23 Ibid, p.109

24 Miles Kahler, "Rationality in International Relations", p. 925, in: *International Organization* 52, 4, Autumn 1998, pp. 919–941

25 Waltz at the September 2008 Aberystwyth conference: "I don't like the word rationality. I'll admit it.", cited in: Mearsheimer, "Reckless States", p. 241

26 Mearsheimer, "Reckless States", p.244

27 "The theory requires no assumptions of rationality or of constancy of will on the part of all of the actors." (Waltz,

because it doesn't change the outcome: states are limited in their actions through the constraints the structure of the system imposes upon them. In this frame, they have to implement ways to survive and strive. If they are by nature rational, is marginal.



Offensive realism on rationality

Mearsheimer's position is straightforward: states are rational actors, hence, everything they do has to have a rational mindset to it.²⁸ I will argue that Mearsheimer's theory *can* account for states' behavior on the international stage. However, his implementation of a rational-actor assumption is a serious constraint to bolstering his theory.

Mearsheimer's offensive realism states that accumulating power is the best way to enhancing a state's chances of survival; the more powerful a state is, the less likely other states would want to threaten it. Dubbing accumulating more and more power as rational is dangerous and severely flawed, as a look on the security-dilemma and balance-of-power theory shows.

Balance-of-power theory stipulates that states form alliances to balance a disequilibrium in the distribution of power within the system, caused by a state becoming more powerful than its neighbors, bearing the potential to put other, maybe less powerful, states' survival at risk. As a reaction to this imbalance, states enact in balancing behavior, to preserve or re-establish the balance of power in the system; this can be issued by internal measures like military build-up, and external measures through the formation of alliances against the "revisionist" state.²⁹ This is where the effects of the security-dilemma come into play: as a reaction to the balancing behavior of the other states, the powerful state (that caused the imbalance, sometimes merely by becoming powerful, not even by actively threatening other states, as I will explain in detail in the chapter about Germany) on its part, also further modernizes its military because it is suspicious about the intentions of the balancing states. The smaller states now interpret the actions of the powerful state as a confirmation of the need to balance or build-up; a vicious circle.

But what did spark this chain of events in the first place? The powerful state attempting to achieve the precious goal of security by means of overexpansion? In Jack Snyder's "*Myths of Empire*", this is the very myth he evolves his entire book around: that security can be achieved by aggressive policies, by "overexpansion". Namely, Snyder calls such behavior "perverse preferences", he explains that "[i]n this view, self-destructive expansionists have been rational in the sense that they

"Theory", p.118)

28 For an extensive take on rationality, see John Mearsheimer: "Reckless States and Realism", *International Relations* 2009; Vol. 23 (2); pp. 241-256

29 Waltz, "Theory", p. 117-123

were willing to jeopardize the state's security in a self-consciously risky attempt to achieve other aims.”³⁰

It is a state becoming so powerful, that it raises fear and suspicion in its neighboring states; it is not important if the fear is only perceived or if it based on hard evidence, e.g. verbal or non-verbal threats by the powerful state; the outcome is the same: fear has been manifested and states act according to it in ways that they think is best to ensure their survival. Conceptualized, the logic of events goes as follows: State A wants to maximize its chances of survival and heavily upgrades its military in quantity and/or quality. State A is now stronger than before, its enemies have become less, its chances of survival are higher than before. According to Mearsheimer’s theory, the chain of events ends here. If that would be the case, state A indeed acted in a rational way, because it has come closer to the realization of his number one goal: survival.

But as we know, state A’s behavior will not go unchecked. According to defensive realist logic, an alliance of states will form to protect themselves from the potential danger that arose; they “strive to maintain their autonomy. To this end, [they] maneuver, combine, and occasionally fight. Some states fight wars to prevent others from achieving an imbalance of power in their favor.”³¹ State A’s chances of survival have decreased again, just as they have increased before, maybe merely to the level before its decision to accumulate more power and pursue aggressive policies, but maybe even lower. Giving a “rational acting”-certificate is not as easy anymore. To be clear, aiming to maximize its chances of survival is a rational goal *per sé*, but really only that, because there is something in the way of achieving a noble goal just like that: reality. Statesmen know that overexpanding and wanting to change (the distribution of power in) the system is something that will not go unchecked, simply because they themselves would not let another state get a bigger piece of the cake without balancing against it either. Balancing is a natural process, a basic compiling feature of the structure of the system.

In short: State A carried out a strategy to achieve a *rational* goal by *irrational* means and it was fully aware of it (assumed we are talking about active overexpanding, and not just becoming an economically and demographically, maybe militarily, powerful state!). Does this mean that it is an irrational actor in general? Probably not. Is the rational actor assumption important for *explaining* international politics? No.

In the example presented above, Mearsheimer’s theory surely does provide us with an explanation about why state A acted the way it did. This would be fine, but there is his rational actor assumption

30 Snyder, "Myths", p. 12

31 Waltz, "Theory", p. 204

which waits to being implemented after every (maybe even correct) analysis; it feels like a third wheel. Mearsheimer is a myth-maker, since he defends the very “myth” that Snyder describes in his book.

Numerous times, Mearsheimer tries to deliver his argument by referring to extreme examples from the past and from theory. One of his arguments develops as follows: the fact that Waltz does not mention a rational actor assumption and that Waltz states that political leaders cannot always make “nicely calculated decisions” since “making foreign policy is such a complicated business”³², leads Mearsheimer to dub Waltz’s view of the international system as a system of irrational actors, or “reckless states”, a highly dangerous environment made up by states that, a lot of times, do not act according to the principles of rationality. The amount of arbitrariness making this conclusion is disturbing. However, in order to make my point that Mearsheimer’s argument about rational behavior is, to say it with one of his own favorite words, “foolish”, the following example serves well for this purpose: “A rational state operating in a system where there might be powerful but misguided adversaries runs the risk that one or more of those reckless adversaries might attack it, possibly with the aim of annihilating it. Even if no rival great power seems to fit that profile at the moment, a state can never be certain that will always be the case.”³³ Mearsheimer indicates that the international system is not a system of anarchy and self-help, but being in an actual war-like condition instead. I don’t exaggerate by saying that this is not the case. What is the point he is trying to make here?

1. a state is well-advised to become as powerful as it possibly can, so it is always prepared for an attack of “annihilating” magnitude, which can occur any time;
2. states should not rely on the principles of balance-of-power theory, because balancing a “reckless” state will not do, because an “annihilating” attack might occur at any given time; after all, no one state can ever be sure about the intentions of another state.

According to this logic, China, for example, would be well-advised to accumulate as much power as it can – regardless of the consequences – because maybe in a couple months already, “reckless” states like Japan and the United States (arbitrarily chosen, because according to Mearsheimer, states in Waltz’s model are not rational actors and therefore have strong potential to be “reckless”) come to invade the country. And even if we leave the realm of reckless states that Mearsheimer alleges Waltz’s theory to describe, and move to the realm he describes with his own theory, the interplay between realism and rationality does not get away any better.

32 Cited in: Mearsheimer, "Reckless", p.241

33 Ibid, p.251

Mearsheimer's take on rationality is more idealistic than it is realistic. He states: "The ideal situation for any great power is to be the only regional hegemon in the world."³⁴ The big problem here is that he idealizes this goal to such altitudes, that the means that have to be undertaken to achieve that goal becomes only secondary in defining "rational behavior". The fact that Mearsheimer even dares to say that in "Waltz's world", states are often led by individuals that pursue "reckless and dangerous" foreign policies, and not by "smart strategists"³⁵ is mind-boggling to the degree that it deserves being particularly cited here. In addition to that, by claiming the rational-actor assumption for his own theory, and that the world he describes is one consisting of rational actors, is even more twisted.

Let us take a look at this made up example consisting of Mearsheimer's theoretical bits, proving Mearsheimer wrong on his own ground in his own language: State A pursues an offensive, expanding, power-striving foreign policy; the goal: becoming as powerful as it can possibly get. It does so, because the more powerful it becomes, the less enemies there will be. The amount of states that might carry out an "annihilating" attack on the now powerful state has shrunk.

Question: who is the "reckless" state with a dangerous and aggressive foreign policy in this scenario? On point: it is the state that Mearsheimer uses as a perfect example of a rational actor because it strives for maximizing its chances of survival. That means, being reckless and aggressive on the one, and rational behavior on the other hand, are not contradictory in Mearsheimer's theory; why? Because states are rational actors. In Waltz's theory, however, reckless and aggressive states are the opposite of a rational actor – why? Because there is no rational-actor assumption in Waltz's theory. In Mearsheimer's theory, it looks as if every strategy that states undertake (if Mearsheimer can make up a line of argument showing that the ultimate goal was accumulating power) is rational, just because he *assumes* that they are rational actors; it doesn't matter how irrational a state's behavior would look like if we leave out the rational-actor assumption.

To the question "How can a state's behavior be rational, if it pursues power-maximization in order to elevate its chances of survival, but in the process of doing so, it achieves the opposite, because other states will perceive the powerful state as threatening, and therefore build alliances, putting the powerful state in a more dangerous position than it used to be in. Don't you think this is rather irrational behavior, since like you stated yourself, statesmen are strategical actors and know what the consequences of blind power-accumulating behavior are?", Mearsheimer would probably answer something along the lines of: "Beg my pardon, but what did you just say? You mean

34 Mearsheimer, "Tragedy", p.42

35 Mearsheimer, "Reckless", p.241

statesmen are not smart strategists that know exactly what they are doing? Are you saying that states are run by irrational reckless individuals??”

The point is clear: it is impossible to argue about with someone about rationality whose way of thinking is so prejudiced (even intoxicated) by a rational-actor assumption, and who thereby doesn't leave room for even a chance that, by striving for hegemony and power as an end (and not as a means), states are wrong-led most of the time. The fact that Mearsheimer can list a handful of examples of when expansionist strategies led to a state becoming nearly the undisputed hegemon of its region – and thus secure –, is not a strong foundation for supporting his argument.³⁶

There are two approaches to rationality here: the first is goal-oriented only, which is idealistic, and the other one is conducting rational policies under the influence of the constraints of the system. Failing to adapt to the structure, failing to understand how the system works, or understanding how the system and its constraints influence state-behavior, but not incorporating this knowledge into the strategy on how to achieve the maximization of chances of survival, cannot be characterized as rational behavior. While it is true that Mearsheimer *writes* of relative gains as the only viable means for states to self-help, since all states try to accumulate power and ultimately gains at the expense of others, his depiction of it still makes me think that according to him, “survival” and “security” is measured in absolute terms, just because of the apparent rigorousness with which states pursue these ends. In fact, Mearsheimer strictly expresses that his deliberations favor the accumulation of relative gains as compared to absolute gains, however, I find it problematic to see “offense is the best defense” and “the-more-powerful-the-better”-arguments under a lens of relative gains. Maybe that is just me. In contrast, defensive realism advocates accumulating the *right* amount of power and security - an insufficient amount of power is dangerous because it promotes easy conquest³⁷, too much (offensive) power is not advisable either³⁸, because of the reasons stated above. This illustrates that power is (or should be) a means, not an end, and that security should be measured in relative terms, not in absolute.

Defensive Realism and Rationality

After having dismantled offensive realism's rational-actor assumption, hence giving the edge of better defining rational state behavior to defensive realism, I will go on and put forward the indicators of rationality according to the very.

36 The examples are: "the Roman Empire in Europe (133 B.C. - 235 A.D.), the Mughal Dynasty on the South Asian subcontinent (1556-1707), and the Ch'ing Dynasty in Asia (1683-1839)", Mearsheimer, "Tragedy", p. 212

37 Stephen Van Evera: "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War", p. 1, *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring, 1998), pp. 5-43

38 Waltz "Origins of War", p. 616

Waltz puts it fittingly: “Where a number of states are in balance, the skillful foreign policy of a forward power is designed to gain an advantage without antagonizing other states and frightening them into united action.”³⁹

Mearsheimer is right in saying that “Waltz’s theory is best suited to serve as a set of prescriptions for how states should behave so as to maximize their prospects for survival.”⁴⁰ Seemingly without even noticing, Mearsheimer indirectly states that while Waltz's theory might not give sufficient explanation for the behavior of states, but he (Waltz) surely has a better understanding of what is rational, while his (Mearsheimer's) own theory appears lost regarding rational behavior. However the latter describes international politics quite realistically. The major difference, as already stated, is that Mearsheimer is unable to acknowledge that, states, from time to time, are simply wrong in determining the optimal strategy to realize their goals, because he gives them the seal of rationality before even starting to examine their behavior.

Waltz stipulates that the structure of the international system promotes, even rewards, rational behavior: “Out of the interactions of their parts they develop structures that reward or punish behavior that conforms more or less nearly to what is required of one who wishes to succeed in the system.”⁴¹ In this sense, rationality is defined as conforming to the unwritten rules of the system, understanding the structure, and its constraints, and act accordingly; in short: to be a status quo power, not a revisionist. By the same token, upsetting the structure, ignoring the constraints, is irrational behavior, since the system has a way of punishing non-conforming behavior – balance of power is the key term: “States...try in more or less sensible ways to use the means available in order to achieve the ends in view.”⁴² This supports the point previously made, that rationality, and goals in general, are to be measured in relative, not absolute terms.

If a state only sees the *goal* it wants to realize, and applies strategies to achieve it by upsetting the status quo, then it is using means that are in fact *unavailable*, since “available” means nothing else than “complying with the existing structure”.

Balance of Power

What is the root of balance-of-power politics? Waltz argues that striving to maintain the balance of power is constructed by fear of certain unwanted consequences. Consequences from what? Consequences derived from the inability to prevail in a self-help system, by either not helping

39 Ibid, p. 622

40 Mearsheimer "Reckless", p. 253

41 Waltz, "Theory", p. 92

42 Ibid, p. 118

oneself or by doing less effectively than other states.⁴³ The latter certainly comprises acting irrationally, e.g. causing fear in other states by pursuing aggressive foreign policies when the structure is indeed constraining such behavior – however, it depends on the level of aggressiveness. Waltz specifies and summarizes: “Balance-of-power politics prevail wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive.”⁴⁴ States that want to survive will try to uphold a balance-of-power status; what does that mean for the rational goals of states? It means that states, no matter how idealistic the goal may be, know: policies that disequilibrate the balance of power will be balanced by either one balancer or a whole coalition of states. They know it because of how they see themselves reacting in a similar scenario where *they* are facing a potential threat. In simpler terms: pursuing power as an end, and not using it as a means in order to e.g. balancing a state with potential hegemonic ambitions, conducting aggressive foreign policies in order to become very powerful, is ill-fated, may the goal – achieving maximum security – be as noble-sounding as it can be.

Jack Snyder agrees in stating that “[c]ounterproductive aggressive policies are caused most directly by the idea that the state's security can be safeguarded...through expansion.”⁴⁵ So, most of the time, a state's security cannot be safeguarded by aggressive (overexpanding) policies, because the safeguarding has to be evaluated in the light of a cost-benefit approach.

Robert Gilpin states: “Once an equilibrium between the costs and benefits of further change and expansion is reached, the tendency is for the economic costs of maintaining the status quo to rise faster than the economic capacity to support the status quo.”⁴⁶ Such a distinguished approach to discussing and measuring “security” is far more appropriate and realistic than Mearsheimer's one-dimensional concept of “power equals security”.

Pursuing a goal without paying attention to upholding the status quo of the system, ignoring balance-of-power politics, does not comply with the characteristics of realpolitik. Stephen Van Evera even stipulates that “all international change is...dangerous. Events that tip the balance of resources in any direction trigger thoughts of war among states that face relative decline.”⁴⁷

Balance-of-power-politics is not a theoretical assumption that realist scholars came up with. Rather, it is a natural outcome, or how Waltz puts it: “The system...is made by the actions and interaction

43 Ibid, p. 118

44 Ibid, p. 121

45 Snyder, “Myths of Empire“, p. 1

46 Robert Gilpin, “War and Change in World Politics“, p. 156. Generally though, Gilpin's views give good reason to categorize him as a representative of offensive realism

47 Van Evera, “Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War“, p. 9

of its units, and the theory is based on assumptions about their behavior.”⁴⁸

Interim result

By now it is clear that scholars belonging to the defensive realism camp generally agree that overexpanding is self-defeating and does not pay off. Even John Mearsheimer states that overexpanding is irrational, however, his definition of expanding and overexpanding is a lot broader than those of defensive realist scholars.

Now, despite the fact that overexpanding generally falls under the category of irrational behavior, we nevertheless could witness countless overexpanding states in history. Were they all irrational? Wouldn't that be naive to assume? Those are legitimate questions and Mearsheimer gives it his best to rationalize overexpansion by worshipping the maximum goal of security. However, he fails in doing so, because he sets the standard so that striving for hegemony *per sé* is a rational undertaking, and this is idealizing a goal by definition.

Mearsheimer makes it clear: "states quickly understand that the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system."⁴⁹ To quickly remind us: it is in no way Mearsheimer's observation, description and analysis of international politics that is wrong, rather the contrary: it feels like his theory is unfalsifiable and can explain some (according to defensive realism irrational) behaviors of states very well! It is only his rational-actor assumption that is completely out of place. And it just so happens to be the case that having a clear coherent argument about rational state-behavior is crucial for this this paper, since we want to determine contemporary China as a rational or irrational actor, not merely explaining why it acted the way it did and does. The value of this thesis is also defined by its normativity.

Gilpin and his theory of systemic change and hegemonic rule

Mearsheimer is not the only one predicting states to implement rather aggressive strategies, however, he surely is the one who uses the bluntest, most straightforward, language to demonstrate his argument. For the latter, he deserves appreciation, because his argument, no matter if approving or disapproving of it, is unequivocal. But, by putting his head above the parapet, he also has to prepare for intense scrutiny (of course he knows that).

That being said, I want to comment on another early realist scholar, who made a name for himself in the field, and has been characterized to represent a more offensive approach to realist theory:

Robert Gilpin. In his 1981 published "*War and Change in World Politics*", states are said to have

48 Waltz, "Theory", p. 118

49 Mearsheimer, "Tragedy", p. 33

incentives to change the international order, if benefits outweigh the costs of doing so, implying that given the right circumstances, breaking the balance of power is legitimate.⁵⁰ He stipulates that a state achieving hegemony does not necessarily testify of zero-sum politics, because the hegemon might (or even has to?) provide public goods, making more actors than just himself gaining benefits from the system change that has occurred, in order to legitimize its *de facto* rule. He delivers the United Kingdom in the 19th and the United States in the second half of the 20th century as examples of hegemons that the state community accepted because they provided public goods (e.g. security, and of course only after having imposed their will onto the other states).⁵¹

The picture Gilpin describes is a lot more positive than the rather dim picture Mearsheimer sketches. It makes sense: if a state has the means to bring about systemic change, bolstering the legitimacy of its hegemonic status by providing public goods, goods that other states consider more valuable than the benefits they gain by maintaining the distribution of power in the current system (the status quo, balance of power, peace, or whatever), then, and only *then*, the incentives for the rising state to challenge the international order is rewarding, simply because other states won't put up fight, since the public goods the hegemon provides are more valuable; in Waltz's words: "Crises are produced by the determination of a state to resist a change that another state tries to make."⁵² I say this very clear: this sounds too easy to be true, or: idealistic and unrealistic. I doubt that during the process of achieving hegemony, a rising state can convince other states to accept the re-distribution of power. Other states have no way to know if the result of a systemic change will provide them with more benefits than the status quo. Because of that, a rising state will always face the dynamics of balance-of-power-politics. Of course this is all theory; no theory can account for everything and particularities, and Waltz openly admits this (in fact, I doubt that there is any scholar out there who claims universal perfection for his/her own approach). Using the fact that the United States enjoy undisputed hegemonic status in the western hemisphere as an example of failed balance-of-power-dynamics is something that has to be treated with caution. Was it really that the United States felt strong enough, hence reckoned that the time for challenging the system had finally arrived? Then, at the same time, other states saw the potential public goods provided by the US and decided to not balance against it? Unlikely. The United States themselves were part of the very balancing coalition that brought an end to states aiming for hegemony: Wilhelmine Germany⁵³, Hitler's Germany, imperial Japan; proving balance-of-power dynamics' validity. Claiming that

50 Gilpin, "War and Change", p. 10

51 Ibid, p. 144

52 Waltz, "Origins of War", p. 622

53 If it did actually aim for hegemony will be the subject of analysis in the next chapter. However since it is seemingly commonly accepted wisdom that it did, I adopt it for the purpose of the example, for now.

balance-of-power-politics “don't work” because a hegemon emerged after WWII, by referring to *the very* paragon for balance-of-power-politics – the US as part of the Allied Forces against expanding states – is a contradiction in itself. I view the fact that the US emerged as the hegemon of the western hemisphere after WWII not as a US-strategy of reaching for hegemony, but as a chain of events that just happened to lead to this outcome. Only at *this point* in the chronology of events, Gilpin's point about a hegemon providing public goods (security and democracy) to the other states in its hemisphere, finds validity.

Jack Snyder putting things into perspective

Moving on, Jack Snyder nicely provides examples of popular incentives that motivate aggressive strategies, but adds a dimension to it that Gilpin and especially Mearsheimer leave out: putting these justifications for implementing expansionist strategies into perspective. True, rather in a general sense, and not by referring to case studies, but still.

He writes: "Even when hindsight shows that a bid for security through expansion turned out to be a costly failure, Realists could-and do argue that the attempt was a rational response to international circumstances. Given the information available, they argue, it may have been reasonable to take a risk on achieving security through expansion, if statesmen had good reason to believe retrenchment would have been even riskier."⁵⁴ He goes on to present examples that are popular in making a point to support decisions for an aggressive strategy, the first being an *offensive advantage*, in the sense that “strong offensive military capabilities would allow states to capitalize on surprise and exploit the advantages of the attacker to compensate for weakness. They would have strong first-strike incentives to destroy opponents' military forces and seize their war-making capacity before others did the same to them.”

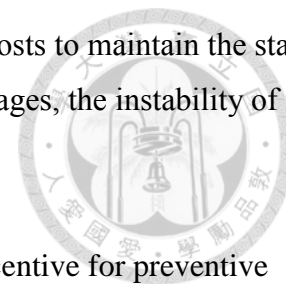
Snyder does not agree with making things sound so easy by putting forward the argument that “the attacker normally finds that the diplomatic onus of aggression outweighs its fleeting operational benefits. Most theorists argue, moreover, that the nuclear stalemate aids the side that is defending the status quo, since the threat to use nuclear force in defense of vital interests is more credible than its use in conquest.”

Snyder admits that “technological conditions aiding the attacker may exist in isolated instances and therefore may help explain some cases of expansionist strategies”, however, nuances the point stipulating: “Overall, however, they have not been common enough to account for the more general inclination toward such strategies.” Snyder finally backs up his point by referring to Richard Betts' "*Conventional Deterrence: Predictive Uncertainty and Policy Confidence*" which “has shown...that surprise gives the attacker significant advantages at the outset of a military campaign. In all of his cases..., however, surprise proved to be a wasting asset-that is, the attacker ultimately lost the war, especially as a result

54 Snyder, "Myths", p. 21-22

of balancing behavior that the aggressor's victories provoked.”⁵⁵ ⁵⁶

Snyder finishes his remarks on “offensive advantage” by referring to the costs to maintain the status quo after having expanded⁵⁷: “Even if the defender enjoys military advantages, the instability of the political status quo may make a positional defense impossible.”⁵⁸ ⁵⁹



The next point – “*shifts in relative power*” – states that “[a] state has an incentive for preventive aggression whenever its relative power is expected to decline”, but only if “the chances of success in a defensive war later would be lower”. This seems reasonable and it is one of the points waiting to be examined in the next chapter about Germany when talking about the so-called “entanglement”, since offensive realists argue that, for Germany, going on the offensive was the more reasonable way to ensure survival than carrying out a defensive strategy.⁶⁰ The argument Snyder makes, goes exactly against the so often mentioned phrase “there was no other choice”, a popular representation of a *fait-accompli* policy-style, which is often cited as a subpar negotiation / decision-making strategy in the specific literature on that topic.⁶¹ In the eyes of advocates for aggressive strategies, weighing aggressive policies “against the diplomatic and operational disadvantages of being the attacker”, as well as “the alternative strategy of appeasing the rising power”⁶², do not appear to present considerable, worthy strategies.

Snyder's final point is about *multipolarity*: “In multipolarity, an expansionist power may be able to defeat its opponents piecemeal if they fail to unite because they cannot agree on who should bear the costs of resistance.”⁶³ This is what German leaders tried to build on before WWI.⁶⁴

It is no question that defensive realism cannot account for the incentives that motivated the decision-making processes before the two world wars – from the aggressor's point of view –, and it doesn't claim to do so. In explaining why Germany acted the way it did, offensive realism seems to

55 Ibid, p. 23

56 Van Evera argues the exact opposite, stating that “the incentive to strike first is larger because a successful surprise attack provides larger rewards and averts greater dangers”, however only if conquest is easy, in: “Offense, Defense...”, p. 9. If conquest is not easy, that is, the defensive is stronger or equal to the offense, the incentives for striking first are not given. If we stick to defensive realism's view that states (should) pursue an appropriate amount of military capabilities, we can infer that, in today's world, incentives for first-strikes between great powers are very rare, also and particularly because of the factor of nuclear weapons.

57 A point originally made by Robert Gilpin, see subchapter “Balance of Power”

58 Snyder, “Myths”, p. 24

59 I will skip the second point “*Cumulative resources*”, since I already presented the content of it in foot note 26

60 Mearsheimer, “Tragedy”, p. 211

61 Van Evera also considers *fait accompli* policies as a dangerous way of making politics, see “Offense, Defense,...”, p. 10

62 Snyder, “Myths”, p. 25

63 Ibid, p. 26

64 For a better understanding of this point, see “Schlieffen Plan”. Basically: the Schlieffen-Plan aimed at taking out France at the beginning of the war in a sort of Blitzkrieg, in order to avoid giving the Anglo-Franco-Russian alliance to tighten and more importantly organize.

have the edge, because the theory does provide explanations for it. To remember: I do not doubt offensive realism's explanatory power; I merely doubt its rational-actor assumption. Again, defensive realism presents itself as a prescriptive theory for rational acting – just like Mearsheimer himself put it –, by providing strong explanatory power about the *outcomes*: Germany's "[bid] for autarky" failed, "snuffed out by the balancing reaction of the other powers[. This] shows that [the] incentive [for expansionist strategies] must be weighed against other factors that affect its probability of success.⁶⁵

What do all these points prove? They show that prematurely categorizing aggressive policies under "rational state-behavior" won't bolster the argument that expansionist strategies indeed *are* rational. In my eyes, the defensive alternatives Snyder provides, earn the certificate of rationality more convincingly than their offensive counterpart.

Why is it important to make this point? Simply because – and this is very important – every theory that claims to have the rational-actor assumption might be used as a potential guide to state behavior. Rational behavior, in the long run and in a significantly higher number of cases, should be beneficial for an actor, because acting rationally means complying with the structure of the system. The point can even be made that acting rationally does mean nothing less than "playing by the rules", and we can assume that no one state wants to get accused to *not* play by the rules, since that would justify other actors to implement strategies that punish the rule-breaking state. In other words: the case of e.g. Nazi-Germany does not fulfill the role of a shocking example if we name its actions rational. If Hitler's Germany was a rational actor (from a systemic, not moral, point of view), and states generally want to present themselves as rational actors – because being known as a rational state is indeed better than to be known as an irrational one –, and the majority accepts the judgment by John Mearsheimer that aggressive states are rational actors *because they reach for hegemony*, then states could employ aggressive strategies and see where it takes them from there (maybe they are lucky and succeed), without risking their reputation of being a rational actor. This is dangerous – we should conduct very careful research before calling something "rational", Jack Snyder does so in an exemplary.

Summary - Indicators of rational behavior

After having identified indicators of rational behavior from the original source of structural realism, I will go on and use a manual especially for defensive realist states' behavior, that is to say, behaviors that states *should* apply in order to being able to get characterized as acting according to

65 Snyder, "Myths", p. 26

the principles of defensive realism, or in other words: how states should act so that we can define them as rational actors within a defensive realist frame. For this purpose I will use the framework developed by Tang Shiping in “*A Theory of Security Strategy for our Time: Defensive Realism*” (2010), in particular Chapter 4 (pp. 99-129). What makes it so interesting to illustrate defensive realism’s guiding principle instead of offensive realism’s guiding principles is informed by the fact that the possible options and strategies that can be applied to a number of situations, are manifold⁶⁶; offensive realism’s guiding principles aren’t. The latter basically only stressed coercion, damaging others for the sake of the own benefits; cooperation is an illusion, war cannot be avoided, and peace is merely an intermediate state between wars.⁶⁷

I will quickly summarize Tang’s main prescription for how defensive realist states should ideally act in bullet form, and evaluate which of the following eleven points are actually useful for determining a state as rational.

1. *(In a conflict scenario) understanding the nature of the conflict of interest, genuineness of the conflict of interest and compatibility of the conflict of interest, as well as the causes of the conflict of interest.* This point is very vaguely formulated, and there is no metric to prove whether a state understands the nature of a conflict; the language is abstract and rather not useful for a case-study, since of course every party involved thinks that it understands the nature of the conflict, while others maybe don’t (or do, but aren’t willing to make concessions...). Thus, this point is not useful for applying to the case of Imperial Germany and contemporary China; it will not find further application in this paper.
2. *Refraining from actions that may exacerbate the spiral between itself and the other side, but it must also take some precautionary measures.* The first part of this point is useful in applying to specific cases, while the latter part seems superfluous, since every state maintains some kind of defensive military capabilities, I therefore don’t see the need to particularly emphasize it again. To the former point, it appears very doable to identify actions that exacerbate the spiral between the one and the other state, it is therefore well suited in determining irrational behavior.
3. *Maintaining a robust deterrence and defense posture; at the same time signal its own benign intentions to the other side.* Signaling benign intentions doesn’t matter if it is inconsistent with the actions and strategies a state undertakes. Signaling benign intentions while conducting aggressive policies won’t contribute to slow down

66 Tang, p. 127

67 Ibid, p. 99-106

exacerbation between states. This point is not helpful and will not find further usage in this paper.

4. *Differentiating states into two categories: offensive realist states versus defensive realist states, then act according to it; failing to categorize properly leads to erroneous strategies on how to engage a potential threat or to overcome conflict.* This seems more like a theoretical prescription, since the strategies decision-makers chose to employ derive from a natural understanding of the other state's/states' intentions. I think one does not need to undertake the suggested categorization; if a state has benign or belligerent intentions, leaders will probably know. If in doubt, leaders will probably decide the other state to be an offensive realist state, simply because of the security dilemma and the fact that the rational one is always oneself only, the other state is the irrational one.
5. *Understanding that states cannot escape from the security dilemma simply by accumulating more and more power, and that states can only try to alleviate the security dilemma through moderation and cooperation.* Goes hand in hand with point 2. It seems well doable to characterize a state's actions as aimed at escaping the security dilemma by accumulating hard power, instead of focusing on defensive military capabilities and emphasizing moderation and direct cooperation. Hence, this point is helpful.
6. *Understanding that the prevalence of balancing behavior means that aggressive actions usually promote counterbalancing and leads to a decrease of security.* Really just a continuation of point 5. It is helpful and will be thrown together with point 5 in the further application of these points in later chapters.
7. *Exercising self-restraint and be willing to be constrained.* Good point, especially the will to being constrained appeals to me, as it shows that "pride" is not *the* force to determine a state's decision-making process.
8. *(In the face of a threat) strive to form an alliance (not necessarily with like-minded defensive realist states) to defensively balance the threat.* Immensely important, since not balancing a threat is the epitome of irrational behavior, since not balancing indicates that that particular state does not consider its security the highest end to achieve.
9. *Employing a military strategy of deterrence and defense, and not consider preventive war an option, unless under extreme circumstances.* Tang does not further define "extreme circumstances". Same as in points 3 and 4, since it "strategy of deterrence" is subject to subjective judgment by state leaders. So-called "strategies of deterrence" might be perceived as strategies of offensive aggression by other states; it is therefore not useful in determining a state's rationality.

10. *Generally adopt a strategy between engagement and passive containment.* This could mean anything; it is not specific enough for being a helpful tool for analysis.
11. *Taking arms races as a means toward an eventual peaceful resolution of a conflict of interest, without actually resorting to actual conflict, however, not retreat when an offensive realist state keeps pressing on with its expansionist goals.* This point really depends on how we categorize the particular states. I'm not sure what "taking an arms race as a means toward peaceful resolution of conflict" means, or if that can even be a case in any scenario. Thus, I don't see how this point can be useful in determining defensive realist states.

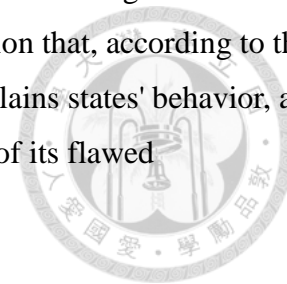
From the eleven points that I took out of Tang's work that indicate defensive realist states' behavior, I only consider points 2; 5; 6; 7; and 8. Points 2 and 7 will be merged into one point, as well as points 5 and 6, adding up to a total number of three points to identify a state's resemblance of a defensive realist, thus rational, state. In practice:

- 1 *Refraining from actions that may exacerbate the spiral between itself and the other side. Exercising self-restraint and be willing to be constrained.*
- 2 *Understanding that states cannot escape from the security dilemma by accumulating power, and that alleviating the security dilemma through moderation and cooperation is a valid means of self-help. Realizing and acting according to the premise that the prevalence of balancing behavior means that aggressive actions usually promote counterbalancing and leads to a decrease of security.*
- 3 *(In the face of a threat) striving to form an alliance to defensively balance the threat.*

Offensive realism's indicators of rational behavior?

I don't claim for myself to have a perfect understanding of rationality, I can merely deliver arguments that seem obvious to me through reading the literature of the respective branches of theory, and give opinions in all conscience. However though, maybe there are readers who would call my scope on things too narrow, and I am open for constructive criticism. I mean this especially with regard to the last paragraphs of the previous subchapter. Maybe someone sees offensive realism's rational-actor assumption not as the very variable that creates the "reckless" state-system Mearsheimer accuses Waltz to create by omitting a rational-actor assumption. That being said, I shall not compose an extra sections for those indicators, since basically, these indicators have already been mentioned by Jack Snyder, but will, when necessary, include indicators of rational behavior in offensive realists' eyes when I define the behavior of imperial Germany and

contemporary China from defensive realism's perspective. The reason for not making an extra section for offensive realism's indicators of rationality lies within the opinion that, according to this paper, offensive realism does not account for rational behavior, it only explains states' behavior, and tries to see irrational behavior through glasses of rationality by the means of its flawed implementation of the rational-actor assumption.⁶⁸



To stop scrutinizing Mearsheimer (for now), I conclude this section by quoting Liu Feng and Zhang Ruizhang: "It is sufficient to say that [Mearsheimer's] theory is logically consistent, regardless of whether it is appropriate."⁶⁹

After Realism

We know two things now: first, how structural realism defines rational and irrational behavior of states, and second, that states do act in irrational ways from time to time. There may be a lot of reasons that contribute to state leaders abandoning a realpolitik-approach in their foreign policy conduct.

The factor I want to shed light on, is nationalism. With realism as the primary tool of analysis, nationalism will be the secondary. That is to say, if a state does not act according to defensive realism's behavioral manual for rational behavior, when it abandons realpolitik, this paper is going to look for answers why. I am going to check if nationalism can be a contrary force to realpolitik. Waltz defines realpolitik as "... calculation based on...necessities...that will best serve a state's interests; success is the ultimate test of policy, and success is defined as preserving and strengthening the state. Ever since Macchiavelli, interest and necessity – and *raison d'état*, the phrase that comprehends them – have remained the key concepts of Realpolitik."⁷⁰

I want to make this very clear: nationalism and realpolitik do not appear to be two mutually exclusive forces; a state in which nationalist feelings are high, can still be a rational actor, even conduct foreign policy that is thoroughly defined by a realpolitik approach. Lei Guang coined the term "*realpolitik nationalism*" in China's foreign policy, the main argument being that Chinese nationalism is fueled by its realpolitik approach in foreign affairs, furthermore stipulating that "[nationalism], in the 1990s...rode on the back of realism to once again become a focal concept for analyzing Chinese politics."⁷¹ Whatever saying that the one thing rides on the back of the other

68 Tang delivers extensive deliberations and prescriptions on offensive realist state behavior in Chapter 4 Particularly convenient are figures 4.1 and 4.2 (pp. 104, 105), as well as table 4.1 (p. 111) and 4.2 (p. 126)

69 Liu, Zhang: "Typologies of Realism", p. 125

70 Waltz, "Theory", p. 117

71 Lei Guang, "*Realpolitik Nationalism: International Sources of Chinese Nationalism*", p. 491 in: *Modern China*, Vol. 31, No. 4, Oct. 2005, pp.487-514

exactly means, it shows us that there in fact can be a connection between nationalism and rational behavior; nationalism does not exclude acting rationally.

Thomas Christensen makes it even less ambiguous by characterizing that “China may well be the high church of realpolitik in the post-Cold War world.”⁷² Stating this in the light of the fact that Chinese nationalism undoubtedly received a strong boost after the demise of the Soviet Union and communism, in order to (re-)legitimize the party’s rule after Tiananmen and the above mentioned, tells us very clearly that realpolitik and nationalism *can* work together.⁷³

But: looking at the policy turn that Germany experienced from Bismarck to Wilhelm II, and from China pre-to post-global financial crisis 2009, it seems that nationalism could have the power to interfere in a state’s realistic foreign policy conduct, considering the fact that German nationalism peaked before the outbreak of the two world wars.

Put differently: can pursuing a foreign policy that is motivated by nationalist emotion provide enough incentives for a state to disregard the constraining structure the international system that lies upon them so that they abandon “playing by the rules” and therefore, according to realist theory, turn their back on rational behavior on the international stage? Nationalism as a tool of analysis will only come to use if the primary tool – structural realism – could not give satisfying explanation to why a state acted in ways that contradict rational behavior.

72 Thomas Christensen, "Chinese realpolitik", *Foreign Affairs* 75, 5, 1996

73 For another take on nationalism and foreign policy, respectively nationalism and realism, also see: Christopher Hughes, "Reclassifying Chinese nationalism", as well as: Mearsheimer, "Kissing Cousins, Nationalism and Realism"

Part II:

Imperial Germany – from saturation to global power aspirations (?)



First things first

My aim is not to explain the outbreak of the First World War with realist theory. What I am going to do is to use defensive realism as an analysis tool in determining Imperial Germany as a rational or an irrational actor. This is important for the popular comparison of contemporary China with pre-WWI Germany. This chapter will analyze German foreign policy from 1871 to 1914 in two big parts: Bismarck's reign (1871-1890), and Emperor (*Kaiser*) Wilhelm II's (hereafter only referred to as Wilhelm) reign (1890-1918).

The main question is: was Wilhelmine Germany an irrational actor? If yes – why did it turn irrational? The opinions on this question differ, especially between defensive and offensive realist scholars. As I have already demonstrated in the previous chapter, offensive realism is not suited to serve as a tool to answering questions about rationality; it serves well to provide theoretical explanation as to why some things happen. Hence, the tool to be applied for attempting to answer the questions of “rational actor – yes or no?”, is defensive realism. However, defensive realism eventually hits the wall sometimes, too; meaning: if it can't account for a particular behavior of a state, it basically means that that particular state did not act rationally. If so, I am going to look for motives derived from nationalism to account for abandoning realpolitik and acting irrationally. Doing so is important because the contemporary China-Imperial Germany comparison is a popular one. Put straightforward: if the research in this paper concludes that Wilhelmine Germany was an irrational actor, and if the research further concludes that contemporary China *does* resemble Wilhelmine Germany, then that's bad news and we should be worried because – according to theory – it will break East-Asia's balance of power and subordinate the status quo of the system to its own selfish interests, and eventually lead to war. We see: saying that China is a resemblance of Wilhelmine Germany is somewhat of a big deal, therefore we have to conduct careful research on this topic.

Having raised interest in knowing more and better about Wilhelmine Germany, what about Bismarck's Germany? What does research on Bismarckian Germany provide for this paper that we don't already know? Ideally, the result of analyzing Germany's foreign policy under the leadership of Bismarck would reveal that Germany's primary approach to make foreign policy was realpolitik, free from nationalist sentiment and ideological influences. Furthermore it understood balance-of-power dynamics and translated the theoretical prescriptions structural realism recommends states to

apply in order to maximize their odds of survival into practice, hence being a rational actor. Saying it like this almost sounds too neat to be true, so in a sense, while not wanting to damage structural realism's paragon of a rational actor – Bismarckian Germany –, however, blindly accepting this ideal description would not be fair either. In other words: accepting without doubting things that may be widely perceived to be true is too convenient, and something I starkly criticized in the previous chapter. It is also fair to say that – unless I will come across compelling evidence that the above mentioned shortcut is incomplete or even wrong – I will argue in favor of the description above. In the chapter about Bismarck's reign, we have to look at two, possibly three, main events: the German decision to annex the French Alsace-Lorraine, and whether or not German policy paved the way to motivate the start of Franco-Russian negotiations in 1892, which resulted in a fully-fledged alliance in 1894. Moreover, the founding of the very *Reich* (empire) has to be subject to research, because more than anything that followed, it was the very founding of the German nation in 1871, which upset the balance of power in Europe; this alone justifies asking the question whether or not Germany, at the very beginning of its existence, was already an irrational actor by definition.

In this large chapter, I will apply a very certain approach of chaining my argument. First, I will go with the, what seems to me, common understanding of Germany prior to WWI, that is: under Bismarck it was a rational actor, it did not overexpand, it understood, and acted according to, balance-of-power-dynamics. Then, under Wilhelm, Germany was not satisfied anymore with its international status, it was not saturated anymore. It engaged in *Weltpolitik*, building a large navy which Britain perceived as a direct challenge; in short: in the years from Bismarck's dismissal to the outbreak of WWI, Germany caused its own encirclement because it was too offensive, it is therefore, according to defensive realism, an irrational actor.

After bringing about the above named convenient chain of arguments, I will present factors that put more emphasis on world-political developments that played a major role in how the major powers, especially Britain and Russia, perceived the status quo within the European system. I will argue that it was not Germany's allegedly irrational behavior that caused its encirclement, and was therefore not an irrational actor. However, Germany contributed to causing its encirclement by failing to enact in rapprochement policies with the European powers. At last, we will see in how far Tang's defensive realism's indicators of rational behavior are actually useful in being applied to a particular case, as opposed to in a theoretical construct, and shed light on the factor 'nationalism'.

Bismarck's reign, 1871-1890

After “(t)he founding of the new Empire in the midst of a war on foreign soil, the victory over France that had just taken a liberal turn [...], the victory over republican France after Napoleon’s abdication in early September 1870, together with the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine... “⁷⁴ In the light of those formulations, it is nearly impossible to argue against nationalist spirit⁷⁵ that flamed up among the German people, after not only Prussia’s defeat of France in 1870, but also of Austria in 1866 and against Denmark in 1864⁷⁶; we can hold that nationalism in the new established German empire was high. How did Bismarck react to this? He did not let nationalism get out of control, he knew it had to be harnessed in order to not interfere with what was desperately needed at that time: a “policy of relative self-denial”; “achieving balance through the controlled usage of power political rivalries and keeping peace by fostering international tension”.⁷⁷ Apparently, Bismarck firmly believed that nationalism certainly *can* interfere with realpolitik. However, it is Hans-Ulrich Wehler, who points that while it is true that the empire's legitimacy had its foundation within "dazzling military successes“, it is also true that “[w]ith the advent of the depression in 1873, the big events between 1866 and 1871 faded out. The nationalistic heat made way for a dull and indifferent overcoming of pressing problems of everyday life.”⁷⁸

Bismarck's foreign policy is widely referred to as a perfect example of realpolitik. While other powers, namely Russia and Austria-Hungary engaged in a growing competition of interests in the Balkans, while Britain was busy building a global empire of colonial possessions alongside France, “Bismarck reduced the risk of British alienation by staying out of the rush for colonial possessions in Africa and the Pacific. He maintained a posture of scrupulous disinterest in Balkan affairs. When Russia's war on the Ottoman Empire in 1877-8 triggered a major international crisis, by mediating in the conflict over post-war territorial settlement without seeking any direct reward for Germany, the chancellor aimed to demonstrate that European peace and German security were in effect one and the same thing.”⁷⁹

The most unequivocal source of motives of German foreign policy during the Bismarck-era can be Bismarck's “Kissinger Diktat”, in which he, in 1877, states that the main goal should be anchoring Germany politically firm at the center of Europe and appease neighboring countries' fears. Bismarck did not aim at acquiring territories, but creating a situation in which every country

74 Immanuel Geiss 1976, p. 25

75 Wolfgang Kruse (2012): “Nation und Nationalismus”

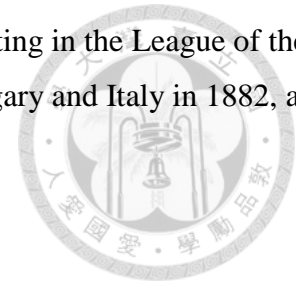
76 Charles Kupchan (1994), p. 362-363

77 See Jost Dülffer as well as Klaus Hildebrand's works, cited in: Bernd Ulrich (2012): “Außenpolitik und Imperialismus”

78 Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “German History of Society“, pp. 946 ff.

79 Clark, p. 125

but France, needed Germany in one way or another, and based on their relations to one another get discouraged from forming coalitions against Germany⁸⁰, mounting in the League of the Three Emperors Treaty (*Dreikaiserbund*) between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy in 1882, as well as the Reassurance Treaty with Russia in 1887.



The German decision to annex Alsace-Lorraine and its consequences

Especially one event of the Bismarck-era is of decisive importance, or rather threatening danger (?), for the afore-mentioned prototype of a rational actor according to structural realism: the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. Wehler lays it on the line and calls the annexation a “dilemma” which “ultimately determined the permanent state of war between Germany and France.”⁸¹ By the same token, Helmuth von Moltke, chief of the German General Staff from 1906-1914, boiled it down to an essence: “the temptation for France to even ally with czarist autocracy was irresistibly large.”⁸² Of course, the German ruling class was aware of this, and even after France and Russia became allies, it had no intentions to lowering their sights and try to prevent greater disaster by returning Alsace-Lorraine to France. During the crisis of 1887, Bismarck himself recognized that “probably in the not too distant future...subject to human foresight...we have to survive a war against France and Russia simultaneously.” Seventeen years after the annexation and 27 years before the outbreak of WWI, Bismarck foresighted the fatal consequences of the 1870/71 decision to annex Alsace-Lorraine.⁸³ Christopher Clark, who generally opposes the view that Germany's encirclement was primarily her own fault, acknowledges that it became “the holy grail of the French cult of *revanche*”.⁸⁴ How do we call something that a group of decision-makers has knowledge, or at least high anticipation of, but fail to prevent it from happening? Unless the anticipated thing happening is the decision-makers' will, behavior like that is what is mostly referred to as "irrational". There is no good reason to believe that a simultaneous war with France and Russia was in Germany's national interest by any means.

It is a tougher question how structural realism views this. In a realist view, it does not matter if one country holds a grudge against another country, if that doesn't tangibly worsen the security situation of the country that is being held a grudge against. If we look at the outcome only, and accept the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine as stark reason for the Franco-Russian alliance and Germany's defeat in WWI as true, then, the annexation would fall into the category of "overexpanding", seeking too

80 Bismarck, “Kissinger Diktat“

81 Wehler, p. 971; Kupchan agrees that "France's defeat and its loss of Alsace and Lorraine indeed left a legacy of ill will toward Germany.", "Vulnerability“, p. 363

82 Moltke, cited in: Wehler, "German History“, p. 971

83 Wehler, "German History“, p. 972

84 Clark, p. 124

much power – it would be irrational behavior. However, Clark also states that “the lost provinces were never the sole driving force behind French policy.” Rather, the major issue was the very founding of the German Empire itself.⁸⁵ It makes sense: balancing behavior is not a result of annexations and what not; it can be, but that is not the most important point. Balancing is targeted at a disequilibrium in the distribution of capabilities. After the founding of the German Empire in 1871, Europe’s balance of power was demolished, or rather re-written. Only a couple weeks after the founding of the *Reich*, the British statesman Benjamin Disraeli put it fittingly in saying that the “Franco-Prussian war was no common war. The balance of power has been entirely destroyed...”⁸⁶ This alone was reason enough for France, that was isolated by Bismarck’s policy for a good twenty years, to search for every possible opportunity to somehow balance against its mighty neighbor. Moreover, it is even questionable if the supposed triggering event – the annexation – causes an outcome – the Franco-Russian alliance – 21 years later (or if we take it further, Germany’s initial situation at the eve of WWI 43 years later), can still be dubbed a “triggering event“. At some point, the distance between two events has become so big that interpreting a causal relationship into the two events is really merely an interpretation by the person researching, trying to find reasons why it happened the way it happened. I think it is irrefutable that two events with 200 years between them lost the “right“ of being described as trigger-consequence, and 5 years between two events can very well be trigger and consequence. Thus, I am not saying that 20 years between two events belong in either the one for the other category. But, just looking at the time period, it is at least questionable whether a causal relationship exists.

While it is unquestionable that Alsace-Lorraine was the splinter in Franco-German relations that caused both countries to be in a “permanent state of belligerence“, however, from a structural realist point of view, a so-called permanent state of whatever you want to call it, if it doesn’t find manifestation in a solid anti-German alliance, is unimportant. With that being said, if the establishment of the Franco-Russian alliance was not for the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, what other events could have caused it?

“Economic war“ against Russia (?)

This point deserves mention since according to some scholars, it contributed to Germany's encirclement prior to WWI. Looking at the intentions of the economic policy that Bismarck conducted toward Russia from 1887 on, the term “power politics“, in the interpretation of scholars that represent this view, indeed seems to be appropriate. Why else would Wehler characterize: the

85 Ibid, p. 124

86 Ibid, p. 136

decisions of “1887 set the course for 1914“⁸⁷

According to Wehler, a heavy proponent of the assumption that it was mainly Germany’s own fault finding herself encircled time after time, Bismarck wanted to “curb the allegedly bellicose Pan-Slavism, hit the Francophile groups in St. Petersburg, show Russia the unreplaceable worth of good relations with Germany, and demotivate Russia’s expansive anti-Austrian Balkan-policy.“⁸⁸

The key word is agrarian-protectionism. Wehler points that the export of agricultural products was one of *the* most important piles of Russian modernization, as it accounted for 20% of Russia’s total export. The details of the protectionist policy unfold as simple as they are immense: 1885 Germany tripled customs tariff, followed by another doubling in 1887.⁸⁹

To Wehler, the motives of the Bismarck administration were not of economic nature whatsoever; instead it was power politics *par excellence*. Did the plans listed above develop into the intended outcomes? They did not; more so, rather the opposite was the case. With its industrial modernization threatened by the German decisions, Russia was now given every reason to ally with France – balance-of-power politics in full play: two weaker states ally in the face of a perceived threat by a potential hegemon. Now, if balance-of-power-dynamics target an expanding state, according to theory this means that the powerful state has overexpanded; overexpansion is defined as irrational, because the alliance that will emerge to balance the powerful state, will lower its chances of survival, maybe even to a level *lower* than before it made the decision to engage in aggressive policies.

Was Germany’s decision at the end of the 1890s overexpanding behavior? Did Germany turn into an irrational actor during Bismarck’s last years, setting the cornerstone for the start of her encirclement, namely the Franco-Russian alliance? According to Wehler’s characterization, Germany did not overexpand in the way that the term is usually used as, since it did not threaten its neighbors militarily; conquer; or use aggressive rhetoric. However, it did overplay its cards. Although Germany was very well aware of the grudge France naturally held against it, it did not manage to act according to what was already anticipated: a two-front war against France and Russia; “aggressive foreign policy“ isn’t limited to conquest, building a threatening arsenal of offensive military weapons, and straightforward threats. If so, then states nowadays that only possess defensive military capabilities, but are economically strong, could never employ irrational strategies according to structural realism. That would mean that states like today’s Germany would be unable to enact in aggressive behavior internationally by definition. Sure, this is only an

87 Wehler, p. 977

88 Ibid, p. 976

89 Ibid, p. 975

example, but it shows that aggressive strategies and especially the term "overexpansion" can be misleading, because it suggests *actual* overexpansion in a physical, strategic sense. Although it is somewhat troublesome to call economic policies "overexpanding", they sure can fall under the category of "overplaying one's cards". Moreover, physical, geographical expansion, overexpansion in the most unambiguous sense as in military threats, is really just one stage of "expansion". Maybe it helps to view "expansion" as two-dimensional, the first dimension being possessing a strong economy, with only the second dimension being *actual* expansion; stage two cannot be realized without having successfully "completed" stage one. A look at how other states might perceive an aggressive economic policy helps making the point clearer⁹⁰: Germany attempted to starve the Russian industrial modernization and be the one in charge to dictate the rules of their economic relationship. There is reason to believe that Russia perceived this as the first step of the just-mentioned two-steps-strategy to suppress (maybe destroy?) it; first economically. After a while, this would translate into aggravated conditions to finance and maintain a strong military on Russia's side; conquest would be easier for Germany. If not conquest, then at least the ability of Germany to dictate the terms of German-Russian relations, not only in the economic sphere, but also in more geo-political / power-political spheres, for example pressing interests in the Balkans, seemingly a field of core-interest for the Russians.

Generally, overexpanding has to be understood in the sense of what it causes, not what the endeavor first looks like. A state can act as aggressive as we can possibly imagine; however, if that doesn't cause others states to balance against it, hence diminishing the aggressive state's security, its actions are not irrational. The best example are the wars Prussia engaged in, in the 1860s: 1864 against Denmark; against Austria 1866; against France 1870-71. Not only did other states not interfere against rising Prussian power; more so, the unification of Prussia and other German states to the German Reich in 1871 went unbalanced. We can see: aggressive policies are not *always* equal to irrational behavior. By the same token though, less aggressive behavior that causes the formation of a balancing alliance against oneself, *is* irrational behavior.

Now let us put the above conducted analysis and the judgement that went with it, namely that Bismarck's economic policy towards Russia caused Germany's security situation to decrease, thereby being an irrational actor in that particular case, into perspective.

⁹⁰ At this point I arguing from a perspective of scholars that search for active actions in Germany's foreign policy that caused the Franco-Russian alliance. It is *not* my personal view.

Not economic war, but systemic obstacles instead

First and foremost, Germany and Russia agreed to the Reinsurance Treaty in 1887, when the “economic war“, as Wehler puts it, was in full swing. There is no plausible reason to believe that the effects the so-called economic war supposedly had on Russo-German relations, was nearly as tremendous as Wehler argues. In addition to that, just thinking that issues in economic affairs between two states can lead to one state committing to a fully-fledged alliance with another country seems unreasonable, too.

Second, Clark says that Russo-German relations were, in fact, “good“. True, he admits that there were “[p]eriodic tensions between them, most importantly over the question of German tariffs on Russian grain imports”, however though, “little in the way of direct clashes of interest.” Rather, “Russia’s arguments with Berlin arose for the most part from the Balkan rivalry with Vienna.”⁹¹ Having said this, why would Russia seek an alliance with France? To be sure: for the French, an alliance with any European major power made sense, simply from a balance-of-power perspective, since it had been isolated since its defeat against Prussia in 1870/1. But for Russia, which had good relations with Germany, why would it commit to a coalition that would unmistakably be widely perceived as anti-German? Clark: “German neutrality was...potentially more useful to Russia than French support. The Russians had long recognized this – *this is why they had chosen to base their continental security policy on pacts with Germany in the first place.*”⁹² (emphasis added)

A point that definitely can be made, something where Germany should have acted smarter, was to not abandon the renewal of the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia in 1890. Clark explains that this, in big parts, was caused by an anti-Bismarck coalition that had emerged during Bismarck's last years, “[a]sking why Germany should undertake to protect Austria against Russia and vice-versa”⁹³, since “[no] other power behaved like this”, so “why should Germany always be hedging and balancing, why should it alone among the great powers be denied the right to an independent policy founded upon its own interests?”⁹⁴ I think it doesn't need scholarly expertise to see that Germany should rather have renewed the Reinsurance Treaty, because by letting it expire, the door for rapprochement between France and Russia, from a treaty-perspective, had been opened. Germany should have avoided that, and it was unwise. But in no way can we dub refusing to resign a treaty as overexpanding, let alone aggressive, behavior; also and *because* refusing to renew the treaty was not motivated by hegemonic ambitions whatsoever. But did it contribute to Germany's increasing

91 Clark 2013, p. 128

92 Ibid, p. 128

93 Protecting Russia through the Reassurance Treaty; protecting Austria-Hungary through the Triple-Alliance

94 Clark 2013, p. 127

isolation in the 1890's? Of course.

There is a number of factors that might have contributed to Russia looking out for new partners, e.g. Germany declining to renew the Reinsurance Treaty, Germany's modest military buildup, and also Bismarck's departure.⁹⁵ From a realist point of view, however, another factor is even more crucial: Anglo-German rapprochement, which had its heyday in the early 1890s. In clearer terms: Russia feared Britain would join the *Triple-Alliance* (between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy). When Emperor Wilhelm visited London in the summer of 1891, several British newspapers proclaimed loudly that Britain had basically joined the Triple-Alliance, and that British naval and German military forces combined would drastically change the balance of power in Europe, yet again (after Germany had already rewritten the “rules of the game” in 1871).⁹⁶ It is important to mention that Britain and Russia were fierce rivals in Central Asia and in the Far East. Hence, Russia's paranoia of Britain gaining allies to support its claims against Russia in places outside of Europe, was what really informed the Russian decision to put itself into a better position vis-a-vis Britain.

But wouldn't Russia know how an alliance with France would be perceived by German leaders? There is no doubt that it could not. Despite of that, Clark still thinks that “the formation of the Franco-Russian alliance did not in itself make a clash with Germany inevitable, or even likely.”, and adds the words of Vladimir Lamzdorf, chief assistant to the Russian foreign minister, when, in 1895, he said that “the purpose of the alliance was to consolidate Russia's independence of action and to guarantee France's survival, while at the same time restraining her anti-German ambitions.”⁹⁷

The reason for explaining this in such detail, is motivated by what I perceive as a fundamental misunderstanding in the meaning and goals of the alliances prior to WWI: I think a lot of people get deceived by Germany's geographic position. The Franco-Russian alliance is widely understood as anti-German because of the fact that France and Russia becoming allies, means Germany is geographically encircled. But that doesn't mean that the alliance is anti-German by nature. People's perspectives are narrow-minded as they have trouble thinking of any other reasons that the Franco-Russian alliance could possibly be informed by. It is, what I already mentioned and will continue to mention in this paper, proneness to convenience in making arguments. Of course it is convenient to interpret the Franco-Russian alliance as anti-German, and not as anti-British, especially when we think of how things went immediately before, and during, WWI. Clark points out that, since Britain not only had colliding interests with Russia in Central Asia and the Far East, but moreover, France, too, was a rival for colonial possessions in Africa; London perceived the Franco-Russian alliance as

95 Ibid, p. 129

96 Ibid, p. 129

97 Ibid, p. 131

anti-British indeed.⁹⁸

What if Britain would be in Germany's geographic position – would the Franco-Russian alliance still be deemed “anti-German”? Very unlikely. Dubbing this alliance as anti-German can only be the result of a German-centric view. The fact that Germany just happens to be between France and Russia geographically motivates scholars to search for reasons that account for the formation of this alliance from a German-centered perspective only. The chance that other states might have more important reasons than containing Germany, let alone *before* 1897 (the start of “Weltpolitik”), does not cross the mind of those that continuously convict Germany for causing its encirclement. Else, how could Wehler possibly make the economic problems between Germany and Russia a determining reason for Russia’s decision to join an alliance against Germany, even in light of Russo-German relations not being bad whatsoever?! The point is obvious: from a defensive realist point-of-view, Germany was not an irrational actor in how it acted prior to the formation of the Franco-Russian alliance. I am not alone with this opinion, since Charles A. Kuplan, a defender of the perspective that Germany *was* an overexpander, however only *after* 1897, acknowledges that between 1871 and 1897, “Germany did not expand relentlessly”.⁹⁹

David Calleo summarizes Bismarck's exceptional strategic endeavors on point:

“...Bismarck's celebrated foreign policy consisted of a complex set of agreements meant to keep all the other powers perpetually off balance. Austria, Italy, and Russia were embraced in German alliances, thus denying their support to French plans for revenge and containing their own rivalries with each other. The rivalry of Russia and Austria-Hungary was to be contained by their mutual alliance with Germany, the Dreikaiserbund, while the tensions between Italy and Austria-Hungary were to be controlled by Germany within the Triple Alliance. Meanwhile, the French were encouraged in those colonial ambitions that guaranteed friction with Britain and Italy. Finally, Bismarck sought to maneuver the British into a certain dependence by encouraging them to guarantee Turkey against Russia and France. Russia, thus restrained in Eastern Europe by Germany's diplomatic embrace, and in the Near East by Britain's Turkish guarantee, was supposed to expand further in Asia, where conflict with Britain and its later ally, Japan, became probable. Britain, thus menaced by the extra-European ambitions of both France and Russia, was expected to look to Germany for support. As a result of all these complex constructions, Germany was to be Europe's diplomatic arbiter. Conflict would be directed away from Europe so as not to disturb its local equilibrium and force Germany into dangerous choices.”¹⁰⁰

98 Ibid, p. 138

99 Cited in Richard Rosecrance, "Review Vulnerability of Empire", p. 152

100 David Calleo, "The German Problem Reconsidered"(1978), p. 10

Wilhelm's reign, 1890-1918

"...historians naturally want to find a rational explanation of the reasons that led the world to the First World War. They cannot accept [David] Lloyd George's¹⁰¹ simplistic and actually not far from the truth explanation of the causes of the war: "The nations *slithered* over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war without any trace of apprehension or dismay... The nations backed their machines over the precipice... not one of them wanted war; certainly not on this scale..."¹⁰²

"German imperialism (undisguisedly aggressive on the one hand, inconsistent and constantly in flux on the other) has been, and remains today, a controversial subject among historians. At first sight, the 'Weltpolitik' of the 1890s would seem to have been a direct descendant of the belligerent German nationalism that had emerged during the nineteenth century and that had finally found such powerful embodiment in the German Reich. But this view really only replaces one metaphor with another..."¹⁰³

Before diving into the main parts of this chapter, I want to say some things about the July Crisis of 1914, before I will put some more attention to it in the final part of this chapter, when talking about nationalism. While the July Crisis shall not be examined too thoroughly, however, it is important to take a stance on one side of the discussion whether or not Germany, at least by 1914, did or did not want hegemony in Europe. If yes, then everything what Germany does before 1914 has a completely different taste to it, as compared to if we say Germany did not strive for hegemony. If it is the former, then even attempting to rationalize Germany's behavior since Wilhelm's assumption of power, has something insincere to it, it would feel like rationalizing Hitler-Germany's actions. If, however, we say that Germany did not provoke a war in 1914 with the aim of hegemony in mind, then there is room for searching and applying a framework to the developments prior to 1914 that examine whether or not Germany was a rational actor. While doing so, at the same time, it still leaves room for dubbing Germany's actions as irrational.

One of the most renowned German historians, Heinrich August Winkler, as late as of 2007, reaffirmed the position he has had in his entire academic career on the very issue, stating: "The goal, that the German elite had, when they went to war, was hegemony in Europe and rise to world power."¹⁰⁴

Personally, I hold Herfried Münkler's take on the situation against it. He explains that in 1914, the German General Staff demanded the import of large amounts of Chilean niter, because they needed it for the production of ammunition, and if a war breaks out, it is likely that Britain would build a sea-blockade, basically cutting Germany off from overseas imports. The German chancellor

101 British Liberal Politician and Statesman, among others Prime Minister of the United Kingdom between 1916-1922

102 The Montreal Review, January 2010; in "The Sleepwalkers", as the name already suggests, Christopher Clark also makes the point that no party actually wanted a war of *that* scale, however, reason could not control the sequence of events that were coming thick and fast

103 Wolfgang Mommsen, "Imperial Germany" (1996), p. 76

104 Winkler 2007, pp. 52-59

Bethmann-Hollweg refuses to import the niter, because “that would look like war preparations!” In short: if the German Empire wanted to go to war, it was abysmally bad prepared for it. Supplies were low, men not enough, and certainly not for a promising execution of the famous *Schlieffenplan* from 1905.¹⁰⁵ The argument that because of the mere existence of plans for preventive war, we can deduce readiness for war, let alone reaching for hegemony (!), is inaccurate. Münkler states: “From today’s perspective, [the existence of preventive war-plans] may sound aggressive, however, back then it belonged to the natural options of any one state.”, and that furthermore, “out of the three most important men in command: Kaiser (Wilhelm), chief of the general staff (Moltke), and chancellor (Bethmann-Hollweg), by summer 1914, only one of them, Moltke, favored war, and only in the sense that *if* war was unavoidable, then better now than later.”¹⁰⁶ By the same token, in one of his last speeches in front of the German parliament, Moltke said that “war has to be avoided by all means, woe betide anyone who puts hands on the powder kegs.” The indicators are clear: Germany did not want or plan to go to war *with the goal of hegemony*.¹⁰⁷

Of course, the ever lingering question about why Germany backed Austria-Hungary’s invasion plans of Serbia to the fullest, thereby putting itself into a position that it couldn’t escape from anymore, still exists. So maybe, by August 1914, Germany wanted war, and maybe not. The Germans probably also had a greater responsibility for making the war turn into a war of that scale, by keeping it not located to one geographic area.¹⁰⁸ But this is not the point. The point is that the decision for war, *if* Germany actually wanted war, came very quick and rather unexpected, even for German leaders themselves. There are no events that indicate German leaders wanting to provoke war or strive for hegemony before the summer of 1914. So we can freely analyze the alliance structure and international crises before 1914, without tryharding to avoid seeing it under a shadow of hegemony-pursuing behavior, since there were no plans of achieving hegemony before 1914. If there would have been, Germany would have taken her chances around the year of 1905.

Mearsheimer, although not in the way he intends to, can score here: “Germany had an excellent opportunity to gain hegemony in Europe in the summer of 1905. Not only was it a potential hegemon, but Russia was reeling from its defeat in the Far East and was in no position to defend itself against Germany. Also, the United Kingdom was not yet allied with France and Russia. So France stood virtually alone against the mighty Germans.”¹⁰⁹ Mearsheimer is right in his analysis, but wrong in his interpretation that it was “an anomaly”.¹¹⁰

105 Münkler in a talk with Peter Voß

106 Münkler 2013, Huffington Post

107 Münkler in a speech about WWI, August 2014

108 Münkler, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

109 Mearsheimer, "Tragedy“, p. 216

110 Ibid

If we want to avoid double-standard contending, then we have to draw the most obvious conclusion: Germany did not reach for hegemony, because it did not foster hegemonic ambitions. German leaders understood that reaching for hegemony is detrimental to its security situation. Germany did not act according to offensive realism's guideline. Germany, by the summer of 1905, was a defensive realist state.

I earlier wrote that nationalism is the secondary tool of analysis; this is still the case. However, I believe that when talking about Wilhelmine Germany, it is useful to put forward some assumptions about nationalism in its foreign policy first, and then examine them under a realist framework. The reason for doing so lies in the fact that, apparently, nationalism and Wilhelmine Germany are inextricably connected, at least this is a definite consensus in the literature about this topic. Not only on part of the *German* nation, but in all of the important players in pre-WWI Europe; the following quotes provide us some indication of this:

"the Germans, like most of the European nations, allowed to be deluded for decades by a boasting national propaganda that unnoticeably had turned from a tool for management of domestic policy into a real foreign policy."¹¹¹

"I would make great sacrifices to preserve peace. I conceive that nothing would justify a disturbance of international good will except questions of the greatest national moment. But if a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won by centuries of heroism and achievement, by allowing Britain to be treated where her interests were vitally affected as if she were of no account in the Cabinet of nations, then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure."¹¹²

I think it would be unnatural to leave the immense nationalist sentiment out of the equation when analyzing Wilhelmine Germany. It isn't something that has priority over realism as the analysis tool, we just have to keep in mind that nationalism was a factor, in whichever way. Whether or not it influenced German foreign policy in a way that made it become irrational is only secondary, and as I have stated before, nationalism does not indicate irrationality by definition.

In this chapter, Germany's seemingly aggressive policy turn will be the topic of analysis. After a general outlook on Germany's strategic behavior after Kaiser Wilhelm's assumption of power, particular focus will be put on foreign diplomatic crises leading up to WWI, namely the emergence of Weltpolitik (world policy) in 1897, the 1904 Entente Cordiale (Franco-British alliance), the 1905-06 Tangier (First Moroccan) Crisis, the 1907 Anglo-Russian alliance and the thusly resulting Triple-Entente between Britain, France, Russia, followed by the 1911 Agadir (Second Moroccan)

111 The Montreal Review

112 David Lloyd George in his customary annual address of the British chancellor of the exchequer on July 21, 1911, at the Mansion House in London.

Crisis. The July Crisis in 1914 will not be subject to examination, because it is not important for the argument. However, I will refer to it in the final part of this chapter; nationalism seemed to have had a strong influence here. To quickly remind us: the purpose of this chapter is to build a solid foundation for the comparison with contemporary China. I don't see how analyzing the July Crisis serves that purpose. Also, there is no consensus on "who is guilty?". Moreover, China doesn't find itself at the threshold of a war, which makes taking the July Crisis into account a bit superfluous. In contrast, of determining importance are the crises prior to 1914, since they can be examined through a realist lens and already give enough information about whether or not Wilhelmine Germany was an irrational actor. It doesn't need an explanation of who caused the war to determine ir-/rationality under a defensive realism-framework.

It is important to emphasize this starkly: we must not apply an isolated view onto Germany. Doing so, the result would be clear: Germany acted aggressive, that caused other powers to balance against it, which ultimately was Germany's death sentence. The crucial question is whether Germany's alleged aggressiveness was justified. That is to say, a reaction to certain events and larger developments; or if German supposedly aggressive behavior was the spark that ignited a chain of events. The latter assumption is so compelling because it is convenient: the weirdness of Kaiser Wilhelm II and German nationalism pre-WWI, and the fact that, in the Treaty of Versailles, the sole responsibility for WWI was Germany's (and her allies') to burden, support creating a convenient argument. Herfried Münkler stipulates that the determination of Germany as being the one guilty state for WWI, did not derive from historical facts, but rather out of alliance-political reasons.¹¹³ Therefore, there are stronger incentives to attempting to develop arguments around this historical "fact" of Germany's sole war guilt; at least that has been the case in large parts of the literature in the first part of the 20th century.¹¹⁴

I will proceed in the same way I proceeded in the section about Bismarck: first putting forward the, what I perceive as, common (narrow-minded, Germany-centered) analysis of developments,

113 Münkler, 3sat interview

114 When it was still "fresher", and I suppose that a "let it be"-attitude towards the thematic, especially from German historians, also played a role. It is justified that questions about Germany's war-guilt and rationality can be asked, however, I feel like the analyses on this topic, especially by renowned German scholars like Hans-Ulich Wehler, Heinrich August Winkler, as well as Fritz Fischer, are fairly prejudiced. It is curious that more often than not, it are *German* scholars who illustrate Wilhelmine Germany's supposedly irrational behavior, and that it are *non-German* scholars, like Christopher Clark and also David Calleo, that apparently have a more objective approach. I think the aftermath of WWII plays a role here, in the sense that everything that came close to, not even justifying, but merely *explaining* why WWI happened, that did not give the full war-guilt to the Germans, received heavy scrutiny. This sort of self-flagellation is something typical for post-WWII Germany and should not be underestimated.

followed by, what I think of as, a more fitting characterization of things.

Weltpolitik

What is the meaning of Weltpolitik? Wasn't every major European power getting involved in global affairs? If so, why is it that the name Weltpolitik became a symbol for an aggressive Germany?

Winkler writes that "to pursue world policy...meant to desire to compete with England on an equal basis, a goal inconceivable without a strong navy"¹¹⁵, and further states that under the influence of an economic upswing between 1895 and 1900, "[c]onscious of their economic strength, the political leaders of Germany issued demands that aimed at a dramatic change in the international balance of power."¹¹⁶ But he also states that Germany's "actions were no different from the imperialism of other great powers..."¹¹⁷. Anyways, to stay within the line of argument, Winkler makes it even clearer by arguing how other powers perceived Germany's actions, delivering a perfect example of two main tenets of the international system according to realist theory, namely that intentions are unclear and that there is a security dilemma; he sums it up like this:

"For France, a colonial empire was *also* a compensation for the losses in power and prestige the country had experienced in 1870-1...For Germany, already semi-hegemonic on the Continent by virtue of the founding of the Reich, the decision to pursue a 'world policy' could only mean that it was no longer satisfied with its Continental status, that it intended to become a sea power as strong as British...- that it sought, in other words, to advance from semi- to outright hegemony."¹¹⁸

It can be argued about whether or not interpreting Germany's intentions exactly like this, and if the British, French and Russian reactions altogether were reasonable, is right or wrong. However, the one point is that, *according to this approach of analysis that makes Germany the center of all political developments*, other powers *did* perceive Germany's intentions in a hostile way. That is why, to Winkler, Germany's actions were of overexpanding sort, maybe not (or maybe yes) because they were overexpanding *per sé*, but more importantly because of the reaction it triggered among her main adversaries. The incoherency of Winkler's argument becomes apparent when he concludes his argument stating that "*the increased power German Weltpolitik had generated was nothing more than appearance*. In reality, Germany was more vulnerable twelve years after Bismarck's dismissal than it had ever been before, and it had only itself to blame."¹¹⁹ Arguing from a realist perspective that advocates Winkler's analysis, we have to say that, yes, Germany's military power was higher than ever before, which, according to Mearsheimer would mean that she was more secure, since he sees power as an end. The truth though, is that we have to evaluate the relative gains: alliance

115 Winkler, "Germany's long road west", p. 245

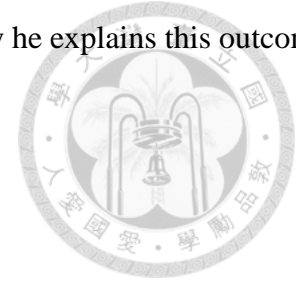
116 Ibid, p. 247

117 Ibid, p. 247

118 Ibid, p. 247

119 Ibid, p. 248

structures against¹²⁰ Germany formed, meaning it was *less* secure than before. Later we will see that while Winkler's judgment of the outcome is correct, however, the way he explains this outcome is inaccurate.



The Construction of the German battle fleet

“From 1900 on, the first battle ship amendment demanded the progression towards maritime world power status. ...England was plainly directly targeted.”¹²¹

A popular reason that is often brought up by defenders of the assumption that the construction of the German navy played a crucial role in provoking the alliances against Germany, and ultimately also WWI, is that the German navy plans were directly aimed at Britain. So does Ulrich Wehler refer to a memorandum Admiral v. Tirpitz's to Kaiser Wilhelm in 1897, expressing that “[f]or Germany, the most dangerous naval enemy at the present time is England” and that its main mission is the “combat mission” against rivalling states, a not defensive goals, and that furthermore “the military situation against England require[d] battleships, as many as possible.”¹²² However, Wehler's argument, again, is inconsistent, as he also acknowledges that battleship construction was an international trend. The United States, Japan, Russia, England, and Germany, too, were keen on acquiring a strong battle fleet, Wehler even awarding Germany to having entered the “mainstream” of modern battleship construction.¹²³ If it was mainstream, how could it possibly raise fear and suspicion in other states, would that not be hypocritical on part of those other states? Why did France's naval program not evoke the same reactions in England, than Germany's actions did?

Clark admits: “Of course, there can be no doubt about the anti-English orientation of the [battle fleet]. ...But there [is] nothing surprising about this: armaments programs usually measure themselves against the most formidable opponent”. Interestingly enough, however, Clark unveils: “until the signing of the Entente Cordiale in 1904, the programmatic documents of the French naval strategists...had envisioned the systematic use – in the event of war – of fast, well-armed cruisers to attack commercial shipping and force the British Isles into starvation and submission. As late as 1898, this prospect had seemed real enough in British naval circles to generate panic over the need for extra cruisers and the consolidation of domestic food supplies.”¹²⁴

Clark concludes: “It was not the building of German ships after 1898 that propelled Britain into closer relations with France and Russia. The decision to enter into an Entente with France and to seek an arrangement with Russia came about primarily as a consequence of pressures on the imperial periphery.”¹²⁵

120 For the purpose of the argument. Will be put into perspective later.

121 Wehler, p. 1133

122 Ibid, p. 1130 ff.

123 Ibid, p. 1133

124 Clark, p. 149

125 Ibid, p. 149; also Mearsheimer (2001), p. 215

Let us assume, first, that the construction of the battle fleet alone did not cause Britain to seek an alliance with France, and later Russia. Especially Mearsheimer's balance-of-power-argument on why Britain would engage in a land-war against the far superior German army makes sense, and cannot be disputed at this point. Why is this important? It is important because if Germany's naval construction plans had a causal connection to driving Britain into an alliance with Europe's other two major powers which Germany was not allied with (!), this would immediately prove the point that Germany was an irrational actor, given the nothing less but fatal consequences of the Triple-Entente for Germany. It does not mean, however, that Germany's naval construction is an uncontroversial topic, but: it seems like the naval plans itself is not a strong enough foundation to build a judgment of irrationality upon. We have to look for other events and proofs that indicate the irrationality of Wilhelmine Germany (presumed it *was* an irrational actor).

Offensive Realism and Wilhelmine Germany

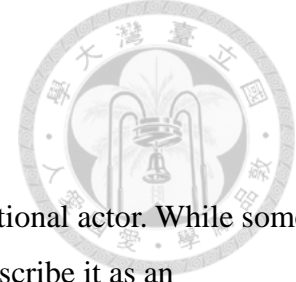
“The main problem with this “moderation is good“-perspective is that it mistakenly equates irrational expansion with military defeat. After a war is over, ... scholars often assume that the outcome was obvious from the start; hindsight is 20-20.”¹²⁶

It is no secret that offensive realism has a thing for aggressive strategies. It is also not a secret that, among offensive realists, John Mearsheimer has a way of putting things the most straightforward way. However, presenting and defending assumptions about pre-1897 is not what gives offensive realism such a controversial reputation. What really causes people to view Mearsheimer's theory under a light that differs between admiration for providing a solid theoretical framework for explaining great power politics and the two world wars – from the aggressor's point of view¹²⁷ - and rejection because it interprets the concept of rationality in a somewhat absurd way, is his rationalization of the actions Germany undertook *after* 1897. That is not even because Mearsheimer is a fan of aggressive behavior (although he is). The problem is that he presents not only reasons, but justifications, for Germany's aggressive policy. Time and time again, he states that Germany's policy was a reaction to the formation of the Franco-Russian, later Triple-Entente, which was in turn motivated by Germany's rising economic and military power, and not – what contrarily seems to be kind of the consensus in large parts of the other literature on this topic – by a supposedly

126 Ibid, p. 211

127 defensive realism cannot account for the outbreak of the two world wars from the aggressor's point of view, because it views aggressive states' actions as irrational behavior and believes that the international system's constraining structure provides states with strong enough incentives to defend the status quo instead of breaking it, defensive realism cannot fit pre-WWI and WWII-Germany's *intentions* into the theory; it can only provide explanation about the results of such misled behavior from a balance-of-power-theoretical perspective

aggressive and overbearing Germany foreign policy in the first place.¹²⁸ Could Mearsheimer be right after all?



Differing Opinions

Opinions differ about the question if Germany did actually become an irrational actor. While some describe Germany's foreign policy as "chaotic and irrational"¹²⁹, others describe it as an unavoidable strategy to ensure survival, therefore rational.¹³⁰ And others interpret her intentions of employing the strategies it employed wrongly and mix it with false facts: "Wilhelmine Germany...not only sought to dominate Europe, but also wanted to become a world power. This ambitious scheme, known as Weltpolitik, included the acquisition of a large colonial empire in Africa."¹³¹ We already know that the former, at least immediately before the summer of 1914, was not the case, looking at how badly prepared it was for such a big of an undertaking as "dominating Europe". It is also not true that Germany had large colonial empires in Africa, when putting "large" into perspective by looking at the empires Britain and France had.¹³² If we still dub it as large, and therefore consider the term Weltpolitik as legitimate, then other states pursued Weltpolitik in even more impressive ways, and if everyone pursues Weltpolitik, then no one pursues it.

Opinions outside of realist theory seemingly agree that a lot of Germany's supposedly irrational behavior had its roots in domestic reasons and that Wilhelm's personal rule also played a big role. Approaches that search for proofs of irrational behavior in Wilhelm's persona himself, point out "the Kaiser's personal unreliability[;] his unwillingness to square alternatives and to choose between them[;] his combination of recklessness and touchiness, of arrogance and self-pity".¹³³ Immanuel Geiss even goes as far as to assume that even with another emperor, more rational and cautious, it still remains doubtful whether the development of the years leading up to WWI could have been avoided, meaning that a continuously cautious policy would probably have angered the ruling class and the public and led to the Kaiser's resignation.¹³⁴

All those might be valid reasons. So far so good. For the purpose of this study though, they don't matter. To realists, personal preferences in decision-making do not matter; if the endeavor and outcome is a rational one, it is irrelevant if the emperor or his counsels or his wife had a

128 Mearsheimer 2001, p. 218

129 The Montreal Review

130 Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 213 ff.

131 Ibid, p. 183

132 <http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/map02af.htm>

133 Immanuel Geiss, "German Foreign Policy", p. 62

134 Ibid, p. 63

“preoccupation with the military”¹³⁵, a “fetish for big ships”¹³⁶, sent a provoking telegram – the ‘Kruger telegram’¹³⁷ –, or had an all-or-nothing-approach in foreign policy matters.¹³⁸ The only thing that matters is if the state overexpanded, broke the balance of power, subordinated maintaining the status quo to national interests, and ultimately self-responsibly maneuvered itself into a position in which its security and chances of survival experienced a setback, because it didn’t treat security as the highest end. To remind us: even if structural realism cannot account for the motives why Germany after 1897 acted the way it did – which is equal to acting irrationally, since structural realism (also) is a prescription for rational behavior –, then I will turn to nationalism as an analysis tool; the above-mentioned features that fall under “personal rule” will not be object to examination.

The larger picture

As I have already implied previously, some authors put stronger emphasis on evaluating Germany’s action before the background of a bigger picture of systemic changes and world-political developments, while others see German aggression as initiated by Germany herself only. To the former belong John Mearsheimer (although with reservation), David Calleo (“The German Problem Reconsidered”, 1978), as well as Christopher Clark (“The Sleepwalkers”, 2013) and Herfried Münkler.

Now, maybe some readers might ask what seeing Wilhelmine Germany in an either broader or narrower scope has to do with whether or not structural realism views Wilhelmine Germany as rational or irrational? Could I not just say “Germany’s action caused its security situation to deteriorate, therefore it is irrational.”? That would surely be convenient. But convenience rarely delivers good results. Therefore we have to extend our scope. If Germany’s actions were indeed a result of systemic changes that left Germany as the “unlucky one”, and German policy was aimed at breaking this spiral, then, her actions cannot be interpreted as overexpanding, but rather as employing strategies to tackle the problem of being disadvantaged by systemic and world-political developments. If that is the case, we cannot dub Germany’s actions as irrational that easily, no matter how odd and seemingly irrational its leaders appear to be at first sight (on a personal level,

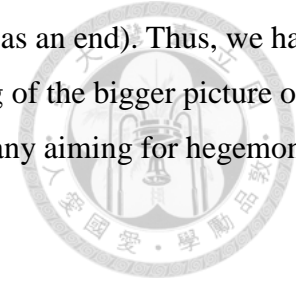
135 Ibid, p. 66

136 Clark 2013, p. 147

137 Ibid, p. 146 to Paul Kruger, president of the Transvaal Republic, in response to a completely failed British attack on the Transvaal, “[wishing] the president a happy new year, and [congratulating] him on having defended ‘the independence of his country against external attack’...”

138 As expressed in Admiral von Müller’s 1896 memorandum which became sort of a basis for ‘Weltpolitik’, Geiss, p.82

especially when referring to Wilhelm). If that is the case, Germany tried to increase her chances of survival for a good reason, and not out of aiming for hegemony (or power as an end). Thus, we have to put forward arguments by authors that provide us with an understanding of the bigger picture of the system, in order to being able to judge what was first, so to say: Germany aiming for hegemony, or systemic changes that disadvantage Germany's international stand.



Germany's navy construction revised

“[W]hile the new international system that emerged from 1907 chiefly disadvantaged Germany, we should not assume that this outcome faithfully reflected the designs that brought it about. Only in the case of France can one speak of a policy that consistently assigned a high priority to containing Germany. This array of agreements rather the European consequence of world-historical transitions – the Sino-Japanese War and the emergence of Japan as a regional power, the fiscal burdens imposed by African conflicts and the Great Game in Central Asia, the retreat of Ottoman power in Africa and south-western Europe, and the rise of the China-Question, meaning not just the great-power competition there but also the high levels of Chinese domestic turbulence that resulted.”¹³⁹

Clark does not mention Germany’s naval construction plans as a cause of the outcome of 1907 (formation of the Triple Entente), but lists France’s anti-German antagonism as well as events that took place outside of Europe, but whose consequences affected the intra-European balance of power to Germany’s disadvantage, as reasons that disrupted the balance of power on the European continent. Clark characterizes the British reaction to the naval program as overblown, linking it to their self-perception as a great power, unable to make concessions. Clark’s opinion on the matter is that Germany’s “new naval program was neither an outrageous nor an unwarranted move.”, highlighting that “[t]he Germans had ample reason to believe that they would not be taken seriously unless they acquired a credible naval weapon.”, furthermore attributing the British to being “accustomed to using a rather masterful tone in their communications with the Germans”,

139 Clark, p. 158; The reason for making Clark’s work one of the main sources of this thesis is not because I have a strong bias for pro-Germany arguments (Germans generally don’t feel a whole lot for their country, neither in a good nor in a bad way). I think that Clark fits the profile which I consider as a reliable source. Older authors, like Gerhard Ritter (born 1888), might be biased towards defending Germany and searching maybe not just for explanations for the emergence of Hitler, but maybe even for justifications (though not implying that Ritter actually did so). However, if we look at the authors Hans-Ulrich Wehler (born 1931) and Heinrich August Winkler (born 1938), we are looking at a generation of historians that might be biased towards over-scrutinizing Germany, because they grew up in post-WWII Germany, in which contention with the NS-period and reprocessing of German war crimes during WWII occupied the undisputed lion’s share of historical science research. Before the backdrop of that, any line of argumentation that diminishes the German guilt for the emergence of Hitler (WWI is the definite pre-requirement for the Nazis to emerge), so I imagine, would encounter heavy scrutiny. In large parts, this is a phenomenon that we can still witness today. Then, as time went by, the distance to WWI – not to WWII! - became larger, and things could be evaluated more objectively, I would say, because, no matter what results modern day research produces about WWI, we have long arrived at a point where no one would make a diminishing war-guilt of Germany for WWI an excuse for what happened during WWII. Therefore, and also because of the undeniable fact that later scholars simply have a wider array of sources about the time pre-WWI, than did scholars from the 1960s-80s, later works on this topic have, what I claim, a stronger legitimacy to objective judgment.

delivering the example of a conversation between a British and a German official about German interests in South Africa, the British bluntly stating that “[s]hould the Germans lay so much as a finger on the Transvaal,...the British government would not stop at any step, ‘even the ultimate’..., to ‘repel any German intervention’. ...the annihilation of German commerce on the high seas would be child's play for the English fleet.”¹⁴⁰

Clark goes on and addresses the allegedly aggressive and fiendish attitude of the Germans vis-à-vis the rest of Europe; else, the argument that Germany is an irrational hegemony-pursuing actor had no foundation. He states that it was France who schemed against Britain, trying to make Germany to commit to an anti-British coalition at the turn of the century, when there was a kind-of Franco-German rapprochement. Germany did not commit to an anti-British alliance, contributing to establishing a stark “discrepancy between the Kaiser’s anti-English verbal outbursts and the hesitant course of his foreign policy.”¹⁴¹

Before I will get to the First Moroccan Crisis in 1905-06, there is one last crucial point that needs to be discussed; the second out of the altogether three so-called anti-German alliances: the Franco-British alliance (Entente Cordiale). Clark writes it straightforward: "The Entente Cordiale...was...not primarily an anti-German agreement...but one that was intended to mute colonial tensions with France, while at the same time generating some measure of indirect leverage on Russia." It is naïve to believe that the German naval program wasn't something that, at least to some degree, contributed to the Franco-British alliance. However, it is also naïve to believe that the former was *the* triggering effect for the latter. Only in a German-centered view can this assumption exist; not however, within the frame of a larger world-political picture. As we already know, Britain had serious colliding interests with Russia and France, in the global pursue of national interests. But other than Germany, which was immensely unwise in retrospective, other powers managed to counteract encirclement by searching for ways to appease the other powers. The Franco-British alliance was Britain's chance of getting closer to Russia, as we can see by Clark saying that “France said that if an Entente were to come into being, France would exercise a restraining influence on Russia. There was this good reason to hope, that a good understanding with France would not improbably be the precursor of a better understanding with Russia.”¹⁴²

Why Germany failed to balance against the Franco-Russian alliance is not obvious, but can still be accounted for: given the conflicts that Britain had with both Russia and France, what would

140 Clark, p. 149

141 Ibid, p. 133

142 Ibid, p. 139

Germany gain from an alliance with a country that doesn't even have geographical presence on the continent, whose navy, in an actual war-scenario, would be of little help against a two-front war against France and Russia, "[w]hat could the British offer the Germans that would offset the heightened French and Russian enmity that a German alliance with Britain would inevitably bring in its wake?"¹⁴³.

Why Germany failed to ally with either Russia or France can also be explained rationally. Despite the afore-mentioned kind-of Franco-German rapprochement 1899-1900, France would not have agreed to a Russo-German alliance after the occurrence of a, what Clark calls, "deal-breaker": when France and Germany engaged in anti-British coalition negotiations, the German pre-requirement for a continuation of negotiations caused France to re-adjust her strategy. Germany's pre-condition was to decide a 'guarantee the status quo as it affected their European possessions', unequivocally a request by the German side to make France affirm Germany's sovereignty in Alsace and Lorraine. A crucial mistake from German leaders, as in the aftermath of this, France came to the conclusion that cooperation with Britain would be most beneficial to her interests.¹⁴⁴ The cornerstone for the Entente cordiale had been set.

France's decision to seize the international treaty-protected Morocco, and German discontent about it, caused the First Moroccan Crisis which lasted from March 1905 until May 1906.

Tangier-Crisis

The first stout crisis in which Germany overplayed her hand was the First Moroccan (Tangier-) Crisis between 1905 and 1906. By that time, the Anglo-French alliance was already a reality.

Here, we have to go back a little earlier. Starting in 1900, France aimed at widening and securing its influence in Morocco. Access to Morocco had been arranged in the Madrid Convention in 1880, which Germany was a signatory power of, hence it had the right to have a say in alterations of the treaty.¹⁴⁵ It is worth mentioning that although German (economic) interests in the region were marginal, pressures from nationalist groups (the All-Germans), touted for German involvement in North Africa.¹⁴⁶ Still, as late as 1904, Wilhelm opposed to assert territorial ambitions in Morocco and merely adhered to freedom of commerce.¹⁴⁷ As already indicated before, the Russian defeat

143 Ibid, p. 143

144 Clark, p. 133, 134

145 For a more in-depth view of the subject, see F.V. Parsons, "The Origins of the Morocco Question 1880–1900, London 1976"

146 Jost Dülffer, Martin Kröger, Rolf-Harald Wippich, "Vermiedene Kriege. Deeskalation von Konflikten der Großmächte zwischen Krimkrieg und Erstem Weltkrieg"

147 Pierre Guillen, 1967

against Japan, as well as the (resulting) Entente Cordiale changed the balance-of-power in Europe dramatically. Not least the perception among German leaders to finally take steps against the encirclement that had become manifest, but up until here, in fact *not* as a result of German allegedly aggressive behavior. The actual crisis began in 1905, when Germany decided to assert its economic interests in Morocco, followed by Wilhelm's visit to Tangier.

“[A]s part of the Entente Cordiale, Britain agreed to recognize France's rule over Morocco, and French had agreed to Egypt belonging to Britain. But the French foreign minister chose to endow the policy with a pointedly anti-German spin. While potential disagreements with Spain, England and Italy had been dealt with through the exchange of territories, the German were offered nothing.”¹⁴⁸ Germany opposed to this handling of things (like every other country in her position would have in the same case), and saw a chance to weaken the still fresh Entente Cordiale. Russia's defeat against Japan in the Far East played a key role here. The opportunities to taking a leap towards breaking out of the encirclement that was taking shape to Germany's disadvantage, with France and Russia already allies since 1894, and Britain and France newly allied since 1904 only, appeared compelling: Russia effectively lost all of its power to influence European affairs and was looking at a not so short time to recover from the smashing defeat against Japan.

Where did it act irrational, how did it overplay its hand? Germany, first, got what it wanted: an international conference about the settlement of the Moroccan question. The outcome of that conference was not what Germany had wished for, in fact it was a “disaster”¹⁴⁹, as the internationalization of Moroccan police and financial institutions received no support of any other major power, as they were all supportive of France's position, as the latter had already managed to take care of certain economic and territorial interests of Britain, Spain, Italy, and also Russia.¹⁵⁰; Germany was internationally isolated. It overplayed her hand by pursuing a per sé rational goal – testing the strength of the Entente – by an irrational means: risking a strengthening of the Entente by doing so.¹⁵¹ This is not what the term *realpolitik* suggests. Instead of taking active steps to directly improving its relations with Britain, Russia, or even with France *somehow*, in the light of the fact that if Germany wouldn't make concessions somewhere, the encirclement could become even severer, German leaders applied a complicated logic to influence the British commitment to its alliance with France through a matter that was not directly linked to Britain, since Britain was not involved in Morocco anymore. German leaders gambled. There is no way they could have counted in the possibility that the attempt of driving a wedge between Britain and France could not have

148 Clark, p. 155

149 Mommsen, p. 92

150 Clark, p. 157

151 Ibid, p. 156

backfired in any way. I firmly believe that this option was discussed in the process of determining a strategy regarding Morocco's status, and unless the odds of the mentioned strategy succeeding were very high, there is no argument that can justify the potential loss that might settle in: decreased national security!

In some cases, even after a strategy has already proved to be unsuccessful, one might still argue that, pretending one doesn't know the outcome, the strategy looks promising on paper. Hence, the means to achieve it can still be understood as rational, even though the outcome is not what one had hoped for. Here however, just by looking at the strategy, I do not see a "great plan". I see an alright plan, which makes accepting the possible consequences of failure truly appear somewhat irrational. In the end Germany experienced "a tightening of the alliance system that refocused firmly peripheral tensions on to the continent of Europe and drastically reduced Germany's freedom of movement."¹⁵²

We can see a clear departure from *realpolitik* here, as the protection of interests in Morocco weren't about actual present interests, but about "possible future...interests"¹⁵³. Safeguarding crucial (very debatable, since as I already mentioned, German economic interests were marginal at best) future interests is not irrational. What *is* irrational, however, is using something as vague as possible future interests as a tool to test the strength of the Anglo-French alliance. Would the field of interests be at least of core-interest for the country, then the judgment might be different. Trading security for the sake of safeguarding possible future interests can only be characterized as irrational. In this sense, Germany, for the first time since 1871, actually overexpanded. But still, we have to be fair and note that the end that Germany pursued wasn't hegemony, although, according to Mearsheimer, it was in a position to reach for hegemony by 1905.

Triple Entente

Shortly after the Tangier Crisis, the last of the three alliance-milestones before 1914 took shape: Britain allies with Russia, de facto forming the Triple Entente between the two and France. The implications for Germany, of course, were nothing less but fatal. Did Germany's actions during the Tangier Crisis cause Britain to ally with Russia? If yes, it was irrational, given the implications for Germany's security situation. Mearsheimer writes that "the main factor behind the United Kingdom's decision to form the Triple Entente was Russia's devastating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. The Moroccan Crisis alone would not have been enough to form an alliance against

152 Ibid, p. 153

153 Mommsen, p. 92

Germany.¹⁵⁴ Now, we might ask: how can we possibly know that? Of course we can't be 100% sure. The only thing we can do is asking ourselves: if Germany would have taken France's seizure of Morocco without interference, if Germany would not have built a large navy and if her leaders would have used a more assuring and benign rhetoric, would that have avoided Britain from seeking an alliance with Russia? Or would Germany's mere economic, military and demographic size, paired with Russia basically being a non-factor in balance-of-power-affairs on the European continent after its defeat in the Far East, have been incentive enough for Britain to make Russia its ally? I tend to the latter explanation. Isn't that what balance-of-power-politics is all about? Weaker states that fear their demise or simply being at a disadvantage vis-a-vis a powerful state, especially those who used to be great powers back in the day, build a coalition against a stronger state who almost has hegemonic power through its mere hard power alone. Isn't it naive to believe that being, how Clark calls it, "a diplomatic irritant rather than an existential threat"¹⁵⁵, could be a more substantial factor in driving another state into seeking an alliance, than the mere existence of a security dilemma and balance-of-power-dynamics? The former is a one-dimensional small factor, as opposed to the latter: the entire political (and industrial) structure of the system that imposes its weight upon the decision-making processes in the leading centers of the actors within the system. Only if we believe that relinquishing naval construction programs in the case of Germany (for the sake of this argument, we have to consider this as realistic, when in fact it isn't realistic whatsoever, given that the other major powers France and Russia also had big naval programs) and benign rhetoric alone can have a greater influence on other countries' decision-makers than the very existence of power-structures and fears about demise vis-à-vis a powerful state, then, and only then, can we dub Germany as an irrational actor. That realists don't believe the former, goes without saying.

Second Moroccan Crisis, nationalism setting in?

"[A]s in other examples of Wilhelmine Weltpolitik, the Second Moroccan Crisis was a case of prestige above interest."¹⁵⁶

By the time the Second Moroccan Crisis took place, the alliance system between the great powers in Europe which excluded Germany (it was still in a coalition with Austria-Hungary and de facto Italy, although the latter fought against Germany during WWI, and the former was nowhere near as powerful as either of the states constituting the Triple Entente) had become reality, although it

154 Mearsheimer, "Tragedy", p. 215; see also Paul Kennedy: "The Rise of Anglo-German antagonism", Ch. 16, 20

155 Clark, p. 141

156 Winkler, "Long Road West", p. 282

wasn't necessarily, as already stated, an anti-German coalition. However, the consequences for the balance of power in Europe for Germany were, of course, grave. From a defensive realist perspective, one would expect Germany to not further engage in risky strategies to drive a wedge between the great powers, which would then eventually result in a tightening of the coalition aimed to weaken, as we could witness during the First Moroccan Crisis. It seems like, the only reasonable way to deal with the situation Germany found herself in before the Second Moroccan Crisis, would be to seek for cooperation and further look out for at least allying with one of either France (although the least promising possibility), Britain, or Russia.

What happened? As a response to disturbances in Morocco, France occupied Fez and Rabat in spring 1911. As a response, Germany demanded France to yield large colonial possessions in the Congo to Germany. In order to reinforce the demands, Wilhelm ordered to dispatch the gunboat *Panther* to the port of Agadir, however, on the pretext of alarmed German companies in the face of the above-mentioned disturbances in the Agadir area. This note, or pretext, was sent to London and Paris. There, officials immediately noticed that it was a fake; there were no German companies around Agadir, since Agadir was a 'closed' port, meaning that foreigners were forbidden to participate in any sort of trade and commerce. This made France and Britain wonder what it is, that Germany wants. Did the arrival of the German gunboat indicate German plans to establish a naval base?¹⁵⁷

“By July 22 it was clear that France would have the backing of Britain in the case of armed conflict with Germany. On 4 November 1911, after Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Italy had told their respective allies that they did not consider war for Morocco to constitute a threat to their mutual defense agreements, Germany and France negotiated an end to the conflict. Germany renounced all forms of political influence in Morocco (which became a French protectorate in 1912) and contented itself with the assurance of most-favoured-nation treatment. France ceded (not especially valuable) parts of its Congo territory to Germany, which granted France a strip of land in Togo in exchange.”¹⁵⁸

The abandoning of Realpolitik as the First Moroccan Crisis already revealed to some degree, appears even clearer during the Second Crisis. During the Second Crisis, Realpolitik would have been *not* to bend under the “untamable German Right”¹⁵⁹, and pursue interests that are not of importance for Germany. If we look at Germany, we can ascertain that “Germany was economically far stronger than France”. In addition, “[u]nlike its neighbor to the west, it did not need colonies and protectorates to compensate for the trauma of military defeat and the attendant territorial losses.” There is no doubt about the fact that Germany, for its overall economic performance, did not need

157 Gerd Fesser, "Panther's leap to Agadir"

158 Winkler, "Long Road", p. 279

159 Fesser

to extend its sphere of influence in Morocco. What is curious, though, is the clear bias of Heinrich August Winkler in his judgment about German ir-/rationality. While he describes German motives as irrational and prestige-driven, he also states that France needed large colonial possessions out of the need to compensate for the trauma of military defeat, hence rationalizing what a policy approach which cannot be categorized as Realpolitik. It does not have any significance for the judgment about Germany in this case, however, it shows that Winkler's arguments are better to be treated with caution. Back to topic, Winkler writes that "[t]he German economy was not far from overtaking that of Britain, the motherland of the Industrial Revolution and imperialism. The German share of world exports was continually rising, the British share just as continually sinking. Yet all this was not enough for the political right. It was not enough that Germany should remain a mere 'great power'; it had to become the leading power of the world."¹⁶⁰ While the latter is a subjective judgment by Winkler, however, the facts presented about Germany's industry cannot be doubted, and that is what matters making the point here. In short: Germany did not need Morocco, but crumbled under nationalist groups pressuring for their own narrow interests. But not only hyper-nationalist groups like the All-German League and economic lobby groups expressed their anger about German timidity in international affairs. The voices of the German bourgeoisie, too, became louder in the face of the ruling class seemingly failing to defend Germany's prestige and shortcomings in the competition for international markets.¹⁶¹ But Germany (and France) were not the only nations that were driven by prestige. Although not directly connected to the Agadir Crisis, however helpful to relativize the argument that Germany strived for prestige, Gerhard Ritter writes that, "[w]orld wide, Britain's credibility as a global power, was inextricably linked to her naval supremacy. Touching on that [like Germany's naval program supposedly did], meant hitting the country's vital nerve."¹⁶² Making the connection to Britain's and France's policy during the two Moroccan crises, it is obvious: France knew that it was backed by Britain (and Russia!), which put it into a position in which provocative strategies towards Germany remained basically without consequence. Britain knew that it had to back France, if it didn't want France to get overrun by Germany in a war-scenario; "Precisely to avoid this power shift, keeping France on her own side under all circumstances, was what motivated the British entente-policy of 1905/6"¹⁶³, and not least 1907 and 1911.

Does that decrease Germany's irrational actions in 1911? This time, it really doesn't.

160 Winkler, "Long Road", p. 282

161 Ibid, p. 281

162 Ritter, p. 85

163 Ibid

July Crisis 1914; Nationalism

Examining the July-Crisis of 1914 under a realism scope is nearly impossible, since it is object to subjective judgment. The one say, Germany provoked and intensified the escalation of the crisis and that Germany aimed for hegemony (Winkler), others say it did not intensify the crisis but aimed for hegemony (Mearsheimer), yet others say that it was a reaction to a betrayal of confidence on the side of the British (Calleo; Münkler)¹⁶⁴, and that, given this betrayal, war was unavoidable, and surely more winnable in 1914 than it would have been a couple years later (Moltke), which means that it was a rational decision because it was the only way to break out of the encirclement and avoid a long exhaustion war that, given the alliance structures, Germany was more likely to lose (Moltke, Münkler). Of course it is questionable if, in spite of the severe betrayal of trust by the British, war was the only alternative; I guess it was not. However, the decision to, a) fully support Austria-Hungary in a war scenario without being concerned (enough) of the possible consequences, and the following invasion of France, and more importantly, b) to keep the war going, even when it was already more or less clear that the outcome probably would never turn into the initially hoped outcome, that is, a quick and decisive victory, is highly debatable. Germany in its actions *before* the formation of the Franco-Russian, Entente Cordiale, and Triple Entente, can be attributed *at least* the benefit of the doubt, meaning that its actions, although probably not smart (inconsistent policy, naval program, sometimes overbearing rhetoric), however, lastly don't deserve being characterized as alliance-provoking irrational behavior. If we want to avoid double-standard arguing, in *this* case, we have to take away the benefit of the doubt for Germany, and say that her actions were, while understandable from a narrower point-of-view, in the end irrational.

Here, nationalism comes into play. The influence of nationalist pressure groups, including the military itself, is undeniable. I want to keep this short, since the evidence is clear and compelling

164 Concerning this, Münkler: During the first two Balkan Crises in 1912 and 1913, German chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg in correspondence with Britain, cooperate to mediate between the conflict parties, Britain tamed Russia, and Germany tamed Austria-Hungary. The question is, why did Bethmann-Hollweg during the, so to say, third crisis in the Balkans, after the assassination of the Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand in Serbia's Sarajevo, refuse to broker between conflict parties? Instead he gave full support for any actions that Austria-Hungary might undertake against Serbia, which on her part, had the full support of Russia, which on her part had the full support of France, which on her part had the full support of Britain. (This enumeration is to show that it was not only Germany who sort of acted "mindless" before the outbreak of the war. Every party contributed their part to escalate the situation.) The reason for Bethmann-Hollweg, a strong opponent of war (see page 11), to refuse to hold back no more, was that, before the crisis, information about Anglo-Russian talks about a maritime convention against Germany reached him. Germany had a spy in the Russian embassy in London. That, as Münkler asserts, was not the main problem though, since an amphibian attack through the East Sea at Germany's north coast could have been defended by simply mining up the entire sea at the shore. The problem was a lot more sincere: when being asked about the talks with Russia, British foreign minister, Sir Edward Grey, lied, saying that they had no talks with Russia. However, Germany knew better because of the spy. Against this backdrop, war was only a question of time; the sooner war happened, the better for Germany.

that nationalism (or nationalist pressure groups) interfered badly with Germany's Realpolitik approach, which it steadily lost over the years, but which really only came apparent during the Moroccan Crises (not so much the first, second more so), and became simply undisguised at the outbreak and during the war.

During a conversation with a parliamentarian, in February 1918, only shortly after he had resigned as chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg admitted that “[I]n a sense, it was a preventive war. But when war is almost upon us, and it would have become even more dangerous and unavoidable after two years, and the military officers claim that, now, it is still possible to win, in two years it won't be...Well, the military brass.”¹⁶⁵ Herfried Münkler, too, answers on being asked why after either partial successes during the war, or after – quite some time (years) *in* already – the tremendous losses on all of the involved countries, it wasn't considered a realistic option on part of the Germans to end it through negotiated peace? Even if we substitute “Germany“ with another country, it makes no difference, as German nationalistic pressure groups (and probably also other countries' nationalistic groups, however the point is most valid when used on Germany, since it was Germany that actively started the war; why would the attacked one propose peace negotiations?) had basically taken over, things had long gotten out of control, politics were “out of the game“ and after having already lost millions of life, the only difference that was still tangible was either losing face, or keeping it.¹⁶⁶

Here, we can determine a total and absolute abandoning of Realpolitik. And nationalism seems to have been a crucial factor.

Tang's guidelines of defensive realist state behavior

I will start off the final section of this chapter by first plainly applying Tang's indicators of a defensive realist state to Germany's behavior during the discussed crises. Thereby, we can not only see if Germany, according to Tang, is a defensive realist (hence rational) state, but also evaluate whether Tang's manual is actually useful. We have to keep in mind defensive realism's highest goal for states: security (and that is very relative given the larger context of situations, as we have learned).

Refraining from actions that may exacerbate the spiral between itself and the other side. Exercising self-restraint and be willing to be constrained.

Definitely guilty of exacerbating the spiral during the July Crisis and after the outbreak of the war;

165 Fesser

166 Münkler, 3sat Interview

failed to keep war located in one geographic area; not guilty of exacerbating things before the formation of Franco-Russian and Entente Cordiale; both guilty and not guilty during the two Moroccan Crises, as Germany restrained herself by not starting off a military conflict and also backing down in the end. However its actions during the First Moroccan Crisis tightened the Entente Cordiale, so it probably counts as an action that exacerbated the spiral between Germany and the other powers, mainly Britain. During the Second Crisis, the tightening effect on the Anglo-French alliance was only stronger. Germany very much self-restrained herself, as we can also see by the fact that Wilhelm gained the pitiful nickname of “Wilhelm the Timid”, not “Wilhelm the Conqueror”, during his time in office. Also, would Germany have acted in an unrestrained fashion, it would have grasped for hegemony around 1905. One did not have to constrain Germany, so the point “[to] be willing to be constrained” makes no sense here. From July 1914 on, Germany ceased to exercise self-restraint. Last, during July 1914, no one country even tried to constrain any country, no matter if from the own or the adversary coalition, let alone restraining oneself.

Understanding that states cannot escape from the security dilemma by accumulating power, and that alleviating the security dilemma through moderation and cooperation is a valid means of self-help. Realizing and acting according to the premise that the prevalence of balancing behavior means that aggressive actions usually promote counterbalancing and leads to a decrease of security

Germany did not accumulate more power in order to escape the security dilemma. It just happened to be that Germany had the largest population and the strongest industry, and the translation into military strength is something that came (and comes) rather natural. The argument that Germany blindly accumulated military power is simply wrong, also looking at the naval plans, considering that all of the major powers engaged in modern naval programs. Also, Germany did not want to overtake Britain, but merely aimed at a certain ratio (2 to 3).¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, during the First and Second Balkan Crisis, Germany did not let herself get taken away by, what critics say, hegemonic desires. Only in the summer of 1914, after Britain’s betrayal of trust, Germany ruled out cooperation. Even during the two Moroccan Crises, I don’t see a lack of moderation. If we look at the First Moroccan Crisis, we can even witness Germany being the one that seeks cooperation through the summoning of the Algeiras Conference; true though, it only cemented Germany’s international isolation. However, we cannot say that Germany lacked willingness to moderate and cooperate here. The Franco-Russian, Anglo-French, and Anglo-Russian alliances were constructs as a response to larger power-political developments. Germany did not provoke these through

167 Münkler, 3sat

aggressive behavior.



(In the face of a threat) striving to form an alliance to defensively balance the threat.

In October 1904, Germany offered Russia an alliance; Russia declined.¹⁶⁸ Germany had been in the Triple-Alliance since 1882. It is safe to say that Germany, in her best interest, should have managed to ally with at least one of the major powers, that is with Britain, France (very unlikely), or Russia (which was the most realistic option, which was rejected by the Russians though). This is the decisive point in determining Germany's foreign policy irrationality. It is not about what Germany *did*, but instead what it *not* did, which is: forming an alliance against (or rather teaming up with at least one of:) Britain, France, Russia, which is actually *able* to balance against them; the coalition with Austria-Hungary and Italy was of marginal balancing effect at best. It is the non-compliance with the prescription of this very point which makes Germany an irrational actor, starting in 1905.

Conclusion

“Where a number of states are in balance, the skillful foreign policy of a forward power is designed to gain an advantage without antagonizing other states and frightening them into united action.”¹⁶⁹

Even if to some people this rather looks like foisting of guilt on someone else, whether or not one agrees with this perspective, it at least has the power to make us think twice before condemning Germany's behavior. Could WWI have been avoided if Germany did not express unconditioned support for Austria-Hungary after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo 1914? Possibly. Could a war of that scale have been avoided if Germany would not have challenged Britain's naval supremacy? Maybe. Could war have been avoided if Germany would have made concessions regarding Alsace-Lorraine and would have not conducted economic war against Russia, driving those two countries into an alliance? Likely. Would a more transparent policy of clearly showing her intentions and a more tactful and deliberate diplomatic appearance have helped Germany to avoid getting encircled? Probably so. It is a narrow point of view, evaluating Germany as an isolated actor in a neutral system. A broader questionnaire would also involve the following questions: would war have been avoidable if the great powers, and especially France, would have treated Germany as a serious contender for imperial possessions instead of sharing everything

168 Clark, p. 154

169 Waltz, "Origins", p. 622

amongst each other only instead? Would war have occurred if England would have chosen to act more deliberate and would have not threatened to “annihilate” German commerce on the seas if Germany gets involved in South Africa? Would it not have been helpful if England, as the superpower (in decline), to adopt the role of the “honest broker” just like Bismarck used to, especially during and after the first Moroccan crisis, instead of unmistakably support France all the way, giving Germany a feeling of not being taken seriously? Would the situation have escalated if Russia would have made concessions in the Balkans, or at least try to understand Austria-Hungary's reaction after the assassination of their Archduke there? Would the major powers have been forced to decide over war or peace if Serbian terrorists would not have assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand? Would, despite Germany's naval program, Britain not have been discouraged from seeking alliances with France and Russia, if it would have believed that Russia still has the ability to balance German power? Would Britain have felt the need to ally with Russia, if Russia would not have been decisively weakened by losing the Russo-Japanese War in 1905? Wouldn't Russia not have felt the need to concentrate all their efforts on the Balkans and Europe, if it would have been more successful in East Asia? I could continue the list for another page. One might ask what this has to do with realism's indicators of rational behavior? “Rational behavior” is a relative term which has to be defined in the face of particular events. The enumeration of thoughts above shows that it is everything but easy to apply realism's indicators of rationality to Wilhelmine Germany, given the immensely complex world-political situation between from 1897 to 1914.

A theory in particular that deserves to be mentioned here, is to be found in the power-transition theory literature. The basic point is that “wars [are] most likely when a declining great power, feeling its interests threatened directly, decided on a show of force to reestablish its prestige.”¹⁷⁰ What seems clear by now is that, Britain, Germany, France, Russia, they all had great means to de-escalate the situation. Neither of them did. It is an inconvenient truth that “all the major powers shared a heavy responsibility in 1914.”¹⁷¹

First, no matter which rationales and explanations we can find for Germany's behavior, the central question from a defensive realist point of view is not whether an action was justified, or whether cooperation and self-restraint was conducted. The central question is, whether security, and all the means by which a state can reach national security was valued to a point at which we can see it by deeds, not words, if it was valued higher than other goals.

170 Calleo, p. 37

171 Ibid, p. 33

Second, the arguments that evolve around the phrase “overexpansion” are not sufficient in determining a state as rational or irrational. If (over-)expansion remains unpunished by other states, if those other states fail to balance against it, then expansion is not irrational, because in the case of non-formation of a balance-of-power-coalition, the security situation of the rising state would not have been affected. An example for this would be Prussia (under Bismarck) in the 1860s, where it fought three wars without the interference of third countries. Therefore, if we would want to determine Germany's supposedly irrational behavior prior to WWI from an “overexpansion is irrational”-perspective, we would have to conclude, that Germany was a rational actor, since it, before the formation of the many times mentioned alliances between 1894 and 1907 were not primarily informed by a supposed aggressive behavior on part of the Germans.

There is, however, another dimension closely linked to irrational behavior to defensive realists, which shows that overexpansion is really only one facet of the many faces of irrational actions a state can engage in. Like I said, the one crucial question is whether Germany managed to react to the alliance structures that (for whatever reasons) emerged around it. It did not manage to do so. It is therefore irrational. Now people might ask “How can this be irrational, it wasn't (mainly) Germany's fault that those alliances formed!?” But this, if we take defensive realism very sharp, misses the point. It is about security, and nothing less. The fact that Germany failed to break the encirclement, and more so, even contributed to strengthen opposing alliances during the two Moroccan Crises, tells us that Germany did not regard its security as the highest end. Now, one might ask “What could Germany possibly have done? It offered Russia an alliance in 1904, and the reasons it rejected to form anti-Russian, respectively anti-British alliances, were very reasonable. Should it just have made concessions on the Alsace-Lorraine issue, e.g. returning it to France? That would undoubtedly anger the German public and would probably have resulted in a stark weakening of the ruling class's domestic position. Making concessions on Alsace-Lorraine was unrealistic.” Exactly this is the point; this is where Realpolitik would have identified the depth of the issue of Alsace-Lorraine, and, no matter the consequences on the domestic level, practitioners of Realpolitik would have seen that, without security on the outside, you cannot have security on the inside. Consequences domestically should not influence a Realpolitik state to a degree that makes bad foreign policy. Bismarck knew that, that is why he, as best as he could, tried to stay out of the imperial competition, because it would probably cause conflict of interests with other countries, and the prestige of having colonial possessions does not enhance the hard-power of a country. Moreover, it does not matter that other states acted aggressively (mostly Britain) or disrespectful (mostly France) towards Germany, and it also does not matter which and what caused the alliances to form. When in 1894, France and Russia became allies, one could still say that it wasn't an anti-

German alliance. But when in 1907, the other three most powerful states in Europe, formed an alliance system, the argument that it weren't primarily anti-German alliances does not grasp the main point. The potential danger of a scenario like that should ring all the alarm bells among the German leadership. German rulers must have tried to do whatever it takes to balance against it, which would be at least ally up with one of the three, no matter how that will be perceived by the domestic audience and lobbyist groups. The latter, of course, would dub cooperation as losing face, hence, cooperation as a means for self-help (Tang, Waltz) was unavailable. Nationalism did play a big role here, and was responsible for Germany breaching with rational politics. In the more often used interpretation of a state that breaches with the premises of defensive realism, Germany turned irrational really just in the end, when it went to war in 1914. One of Tang's characterizations fits particularly adequate: "Preventive war is a move that seeks to escape from a security dilemma..., thus a move to make a possibly avoidable tragedy an inescapable reality."¹⁷²

Germany, even after Bismarck resigned and Wilhelm took over in 1890, and also, and more importantly, after the start of Weltpolitik in 1897, continued to be a rational actor. However, it turned irrational at a certain point, and that point is when it failed to draw the consequences of the new alliance structures. Wilhelmine Germany was not an irrational actor because it was aggressive (except for August 1914 and after) and overbearing¹⁷³, but because it failed to adapt to the international situation in a way that would enhance its security. Germany was not a "self-destructive expansionist"¹⁷⁴ before WWI, however, in that sense, it probably was one from August 1914 on. I want to re-emphasize that the main focus of this chapter was the period before July 1914, before Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated, which forced European states to choose whether they want to be defensive or offensive realist states. This is because, even if we choose to characterize Germany as irrational at/for the outbreak of WWI, that doesn't reflect the two decades leading up to this disaster. In addition to that, none of the European states covered itself in glory in 1914. Especially Stephen van Evera's theory that "[e]vents that tip the balance of resources...trigger thoughts of war among states that face relative decline."¹⁷⁵ when we think about Britain's (but also

172 Tang, p. 89

173 Clark, p. 152: "The once widely held view that Germany caused its own isolation through its egregious international behavior is not borne out by a broader analysis of the processes by which the realignments of this era were brought about."

174 Snyder, "Myths", p. 12

175 Van Evera, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War", p. 9; see also Gerhard Ritter, "Kriegswerk und Staatskunst II", p. 78: "It strikes that, among the British military staff, the great war with Germany is unavoidable – long before the beginning of the actual naval arms race", further noting that "at the end of 1897, general James M. Grierson writes his friend that 'we have to take actions against the Germans, better sooner than later, or else, they are going to take actions against us. A pretense for war shouldn't be too hard to find, and I don't believe that Russia would take sides with Germany.'"

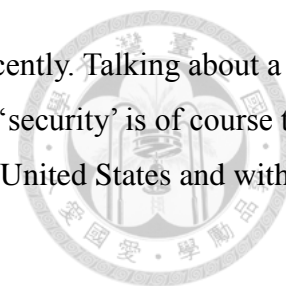
France's and Russia's, but of course Germany's and Austria's as well¹⁷⁶) actions and deliberations in the decade leading up to WWI, would motivate her to change the balance of power in its favor, which it did, by first building the Entente Cordiale with France in 1904, later allying with Russia in 1907. Münkler summarizes Britain's state of mind on point: "While at the *start* of the nineteenth century, England replaces France as *the* super power, we can see that at the *end* of the century, it is first the USA, then Germany that leave England behind, and continue to pull ahead. We must not underestimate the fact that one can't write the rules oneself anymore, but has to follow the rules that others write. That's why England, first, became Russophobic, then Germanophobic."¹⁷⁷

Would Germany, after 1907, have managed to ally with at least one of either Britain, France, or Russia, counterbalancing the encirclement, taking away the felt need to forcefully break out of the circle (in 1914), strip German nationalist groups of the power to exert their influence *because* of that very encirclement, therefore *maybe* avoiding war and its eventual defeat, Wilhelmine Germany would have been an overall rational actor. The argument that by 1871 already, with the founding of the German Empire, the balance of power had been irreversibly broken, is not valid. It had been broken, no doubt about it. However, had Germany made, admittedly immensely painful, concessions, for example on the Alsace-Lorraine issue, that is, conduct Realpolitik, after it was obvious that this was one, if not *the* main reason for French antagonism, things could have turned out differently in the end. Since it didn't turn out to be like that, the judgment can only be that, from a defensive realism's point of view, with its heavy focus on security and chances of survival, Wilhelmine Germany turned into an irrational actor, the earliest in 1905, most definitely by 1907, and very surely by 1911.

176 Münkler 2013, "The French...feared their marginalization, the Russians worried about losing their influence after the defeat against Japan..., and Austria-Hungary about her great power status. And because in Britain prevailed a fear of demise and the Germans suffered from an encirclement-obsession, there was no room left for the rational pursue of interests." *Huffington Post*

177 Münkler, 3sat

Part III: China's Many Identities



This chapter will focus on China's foreign policy after Tiananmen until recently. Talking about a country's foreign policy, and arguing from a realist perspective, the factor 'security' is of course the most important one. Discussing China's security, the relationship with the United States and with its closest neighbors is of pivotal importance.

Researching China's foreign policy – why realism?

“Every nation's diplomacy is meant to enhance its security.”¹⁷⁸

Ashley Tellis, with reference to World War I, adequately points out that “states can – and will – resolutely pursue their strategic interests, despite the enmeshing bonds of trade and commerce because security competition directly implicates immediate national or regime survival in a way that has no counterpart in economic interactions.”¹⁷⁹, and continues stating that “[r]apid modernization of PLA...when complete, will undermine a key precondition for strategic stability in Pacific Asia – the unimpeded US ability to assist its allies when they are threatened...”.¹⁸⁰ That is why, naturally, a big focus of this chapter will be put on the Southeast China Sea (SCS) disputes, or as Erik Beukel, citing a Chinese source, writes: “the mother of all territorial disputes”.¹⁸¹ It makes sense, thinking of the very number of disputants that include the small islets, reefs and rocks in the SCS in their “core interests”. It is unsurprising that many authors refer to the SCS disputes as the “least unlikely trigger for interstate-war”.¹⁸² The magnitude of the SCS issue gets further confirmation from Suisheng Zhao (2004: 267): “Beijings sovereignty claim may eventually bring China to the fore with *all* countries in South East Asia[!]” (emphasis added)

It is without doubt that, the decades since “Reform and Opening” represent one of the most impressive shifts in power, in the distribution of capabilities, in the last century. Shifts in relative power and its effects is realism's home ground. That being said, why choosing the timeframe of analysis starting with basically 1990, and not with the start of “Reform and Opening” (改革開放) in 1978? The answer to that question rests, unsurprisingly, within the realm of great power politics. Suisheng Zhao stipulates that before “Reform and Opening” “Beijing used to be a regional power without a regional policy”. It could do so because the main focus of its security diplomacy had to be made with consideration to Cold War-dynamics. Only when facing the end of the Cold War, this global security policy had to be adjusted to a regional security policy.¹⁸³ The fact that renowned

178 David Shambaugh 2013, p. 59

179 Ashley Tellis, p. 80

180 Ibid, p. 86

181 Erik Beukel, p. 9

182 Ibid

183 Zhao, “The Making of China's Periphery Policy”, p. 256 ff.; see also Paul Goldwin, p. 28

China-scholars, e.g. Thomas Christensen, refer to China as “the high church of realpolitik in the post-Cold War world”, and Michael Swaine characterizing China as having an “[i]nstrumental attitude toward international regime, [with] [n]either commitment nor antipathy to international norms. [Instead everything is done according to] pragmatic calculation.”¹⁸⁴, only further emphasizes realism’s claim to being a perfectly matching international relations theory for analyzing China.

Christensen writes that China doesn’t engage in any moral/ideological debates when making foreign policy (when talking about Taiwan and territorial disputes further below, we will see that Christensen’s claim is wrong), and that, as compared to, e.g. the United States (highlighting its desire to promote democracy and its general discontent when dealing with non-democratic states), China never emphasizes political-ideological differences, let alone viewing them as an obstacle to making business with other countries. For example, we never witness(ed) China promoting “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, since it doesn’t matter or help when we have to focus on the really important things in doing business: national development, economy, security; ideology does certainly not belong to the former.

By the same token, however different in kind, China is a good example of a representative of Realpolitik because it “fear[s] Japan’s renaissance as a world-class military power in the early 21st century.”, a “prediction” [that is] consistent with balance-of-power theories but not with the analysis of many Japan experts throughout the West, who believe that cultural pacifism after World War II, domestic political constraints, and economic interests will steer Japan away from such ambitions.”¹⁸⁵ Lieutenant General and Deputy Commandant of the Academy of Military Sciences, Li Jijun, states: “A half century has passed, and facts show that Japan’s refusal to fully confront its militarist past with “the kind of self-introspection” the Germans had undertaken and that had “promoted European reconciliation.”¹⁸⁶ We can say without doubt that China’s fear, or better: understanding, of the international system seems to prove it right after all, looking at Japan’s planned military reform in 2015.¹⁸⁷

Well-known scholar David Shambaugh stipulates that the, what he calls, “Realism with Chinese Characteristics”-school, as currently holding the dominant position in the debate on China’s global posture; especially since 2008, when more moderate elements in the government appear to have lost ground to the Realists (and also Nativists).¹⁸⁸

184 Swaine, p. 45

185 Christensen,, Sep/Oct 1996

186 Goldstein, p. 105

187 “Japan military reform poses threat to Abenomics”, May 2015

188 Shambaugh (2013), pp. 21; 31ff.; 43

Moreover, and more generally, China's mere size (by literally any metric), naturally make its actions "more consequential and unsettling than those of others", especially when we look at the SCS dispute, where smaller states are of course very concerned what it would mean for future diplomatic disputes, if China's coercive policy would actually be successful.¹⁸⁹ We have to remind ourselves, that it doesn't even take aggressive behavior from a hegemonic-ish state in order to cause unrest and suspicion, maybe even fear, among other states. The very existence of a heavy concentration of capabilities on a single actor, is enough for the security dilemma to play out. After all, intentions are unclear.¹⁹⁰ However, that doesn't mean that everything a state does after the security dilemma starts to get perceived and acted according to by the actors, doesn't make a difference anymore. Of course it makes a difference if the powerful state, the main holder of capabilities, expresses benign intentions, enacts in confidence-building measures (CBM)¹⁹¹, or contrarily, just elbows other states aside in the pursuit of the realization of its national interests.

Before getting into the specifics, it is important to identify China's main policy goals. As Michael Swaine points them out, they are 1.) preservation of domestic order and well-being in the face of social strife; 2.) defense against persistent external threats to national sovereignty and territory; 3.) attainment and maintenance of geopolitical influence as a major and perhaps primary state in the Asia-Pacific region and possibly beyond.¹⁹² Lampton completes the list, adding "global interdependence" and "technology-driven action-reaction dynamics".¹⁹³

In achieving these goals, a growing China faces significant obstacles. Especially starting in the 1990s (particularly after Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Tour" (南巡) in 1992), China's rise in hard-power spheres – the economy and the military – contributed to the classical security dilemma: while Beijing's investment in power-projection capabilities as well as reassertions of sovereignty over territory in the East China and South China Sea is a somewhat natural process (at least the former), however, neighbors and the United States quickly started hedging against China, which Beijing in turn, perceived as a confirmation of its deep fear of getting contained or "bullied"¹⁹⁴ by foreign powers.¹⁹⁵

The argument seems especially compelling when taking a look at how Ashley Tellis puts the situation through a realist lens, namely that, due to the fact that according to estimations, 43% of

189 Jeffrey Bader, Kenneth Lieberthal, Michael McDevitt, "Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective", in: *The Foreign Policy Brief (Brookings)*, August 2014, p. 7

190 Mearsheimer (2001), offensive realism's second main tenet

191 Shiping Tang, "A Theory of Security Strategy For Our Time" (2010), Chapter 4

192 Michael Swaine, p. 39-40

193 David Lampton, p. 109

194 Lampton, p. 136; Goldstein, p. 161

195 Goldstein, p. 89

global production of goods and services will be in Asia by 2025, the US is expected to prevent any Asian power to gain dominating influence in the region, just as it prevented a unilateral rise of any European power in the last century (when Europe was the economic center of the world).¹⁹⁶ This point gets also elaborated on in detail by John Mearsheimer.¹⁹⁷

Correctly pointing out the fact that China ceased being potentially used as a tool of great power politics between the U.S. and Russia, Goldstein concludes that “nearing the end of the Cold War, China’s international situation could hardly have seemed brighter, [as] [n]either superpower posed a serious threat...and both seemed willing to nurture good relations with an economically awakening China.”¹⁹⁸

However, with the Tiananmen “massacre”, China’s situation quickly deteriorated and the years between 1989 and 1992 were pretty grim. And even as the “thread to China’s security diminished, Beijing demonstrated an assertive, if not aggressive, nationalism in its approach to territorial claims in the [SCS].”¹⁹⁹ The question, then, is: did Beijing still somehow act according to the rationales of defensive realism? If it didn’t, did nationalism play a role?

And why is it important to elaborate so extensively on an issue that seems pretty easy at first sight? Couldn’t I just say “China’s aggressive actions caused Asian states and the US to balance against it. Its actions were therefore irrational.”? This would be easy and convenient. It would, however, fail to see things in perspective. Chinese leaders have a very special understanding of national security. As Shambaugh points out accurately, the Chinese word for security (安全), means “complete safety/tranquility”.²⁰⁰ And, with reference to Swaine’s and Lampton’s above mentioned definitions of Chinese policy goals, safety, in Chinese eyes, is not merely a thing of foreign diplomacy. In fact, the biggest thread to safety, in the eyes of the Chinese leadership, is domestic unrest.²⁰¹ Do measures to enhance China’s security therefore have to be evaluated in the light of public reactions to the country’s foreign policy? In the course of this chapter, we will find out if the latter is a legitimate justification for certain diplomatic behaviors, or if, in contrast, exploiting the argument of inner safety is rather detrimental to China’s overall security situation. Also, and coming back to a more realist interpretation of security, we have to pay close attention to the security structure in the light of America’s “unipolar moment”, and how that (including its aggressive policies basically all

196 Tellis, p. 90

197 “Tragedy of Great Power Politics“, see offshore-balancing and his deliberations on regional hegemons (e.g. the US) not accepting the emergence of peer-competitors (e.g. other regional hegemons like potentially China)

198 Goldstein, p. 43

199 Paul Godwin, p. 28

200 Shambaugh 2013, p. 285

201 In 2012, the spending for internal security exceeded that of external security (111 billion USD vs 107 billion USD), Shambaugh 2013, p. 59

over the world) contributed to China's foreign policy formulations. In this sense, Chen Jie's summary of China's point-of-view, discussing its position on the SCS disputes, shall serve as concluding this part: "In [China's] eyes, the nature of the dispute is crystal clear: initially taking advantage of China's turbulent domestic politics and its preoccupation with superpower threats, regional countries have occupied China's islands and reefs, carved up its sea areas, and looted its marine resources. While other regional countries perceive China...as aggressive and provocative in the South China Sea, Beijing intrinsically sees its assertive policy as a long-overdue and legitimate action to protect its territorial integrity."²⁰²

Before prematurely pushing China into a corner, we also have to keep in mind that, because of the mere difference in power between China vis-à-vis its neighbors, we might be influenced in our objective judgment of the situation. Would all the claimant countries be circles of the same color and size, the difference in our perception about China's actions as compared to the actions of Vietnam and The Philippines, would very likely not be as obvious as it is of now. However, it is also fair to say that only China claims *all* of the islands under dispute, as well as 80% of the entire SCS, which is unique and unmet by the other Southeast Asian states. It is also correct that China will gain *de facto* control of the territory it claims, if it continues to build sand-shelfs with the pace it has been building them as of recently.²⁰³

The 1990s

This chapter and the following two are going to be split into two parts; China's relations with the US, and China's relations with ASEAN. Often, as we will see, these two kinds of relations are closely linked to one another, especially after 2008. In the 1990s the distinction was still clearer, as Asian states only started to make use of the possibility of "internationalizing" the disputes with China, and consulting the US. However, an issue that surely *is* inextricably linked with the US, is China's behavior towards Taiwan.

The 1990s were a decade with raising tensions among Asian states, especially in the SCS dispute. But not only the relations between China and its Asian neighbors were difficult. US-China relations in the 1990s had a rough start, since with Sino-Soviet reconciliation, the strategic rationale for US-China relations was basically eliminated (not the economic one though).²⁰⁴ The foundation for the

202 Chen Jie, p. 893

203 David Tweed, "China May Gain Control of South China Sea, U.S. Navy Says", April 2015

204 Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, p. 39

rise in assertiveness can be traced back to the late 1980s, when China, for the first time, adopted a strategy of regional policy. As Fravel points out, in 1987, China established a permanent position in the region by occupying nine vacant features. This sparked a territorial race with Vietnam, and resulted in a deadly clash over Johnson reef in 1988, with 74 Vietnamese being killed.²⁰⁵ This can be seen as one major factor that contributed to the general suspicion of Asian states and the U.S. towards China in the 1990s. China's massive increase in hard-power and Tiananmen further severed the suspicion and the security dilemma. Beijing further nurtured suspicion as it adopted its "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone" in February 1992, effectively claiming the entire Spratly islands and authorizing the Chinese navy to evict trespassers by force.²⁰⁶

Without spoiling the research below, however, it is interesting to note that, by the end of the 1990s, opinions about whether China's security situation had increased or diminished, are by no means consistent. Tucker writes: "By the end of the 90s, US-China relations had significantly worsened"²⁰⁷; whereas Swaine (2000) states that there had been "significant security gains for the Chinese state during the past decade."²⁰⁸ It is hard to persuade myself of Swaine's judgment, if Tucker's evaluation proves to be true, since China's overall security situation is closely tied to its relations with the US, given the extensive US-led alliance network and the number of means that the US can apply to influence China strategically. Goldstein agrees, writing that "[t]he potential threat from the United States topped the list of Beijing's security concerns..."²⁰⁹

This indecisiveness in evaluating China's security situation calls for applying a framework to it, in order to being able to draw clear-cut conclusions about the situation.

China-US relations

When accessing China's security situation, it is most helpful to first take a look at how China itself perceives it. It is no exaggeration, saying that the US was an unchecked superpower that has been conveying an expansionist and hegemonic image of itself since the end of the Cold War, "bent on global and regional domination." Its domination of the international finance systems; the spread of democracy; emphasis on human rights; the strengthening of old and building new military alliances; intervention in regional conflicts; controlling multilateral security organizations; and most importantly: the rigorous and consequential actions towards regimes that don't conform with the

205 Fravel, p. 298

206 Chen Jie, p. 898

207 N. Tucker, p. 41

208 Swaine, p. 46

209 Goldstein, p. 102; see also: Wu Xinbo: "Chinese Visions of the Future of U.S.-China Relations", p. 376

international system the way the US wanted them to, all these factors contributed to a feeling of insecurity among Chinese leaders.²¹⁰

Goldstein sets the time for Chinese aggression in the nineties to start in 1992; from 1989 to 1992, so the author, “[Chinese] foreign policy was limited essentially to small steps to undo the setbacks in economic and diplomatic relations that followed the international outrage about Tiananmen.”²¹¹ An increasingly strong economy, also motivated by Deng’s Southern Tour, helped China to gain more confidence again, which it also translated in its SCS diplomacy, as to be seen the already mentioned establishment of its “Law on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone” in 1992, accompanied by benign rhetoric but with a “defiantly uncompromising” stance on sovereignty in the SCS.²¹²

An important factor in shaping Chinese policy was the strengthening of the US-led pacific alliances with Australia and most importantly Japan and the US-Australian declaration “Relations of Strategic Partners of the 21st Century between Australia and the United States” in 1996.²¹³ The US basically strengthened ties with every country of importance in China’s neighborhood (Japan, South Korea, The Philippines, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore) – later referred to as “five-finger-strategy”; China was encircled.²¹⁴ What we cannot say is that China was not given a chance to adjust its aggressive policies, since the Clinton administration in 1994, shifted towards a strategy of engagement and economic rebounding, only to getting disappointed again by China’s reaction to Lee Teng-Hui’s visit to the US in 1995, and China’s fortification of defense structures on Mischief Reef in the same year. The before-mentioned balancing dynamics went indeed far. So far, that Avery Goldstein argues that “[b]y March 1996, Beijing confronted an international environment potentially more dangerous than at any time since the late 1970’s...”²¹⁵

It seems that China, by the mid-nineties, had completely lost its Realpolitik approach which had made it so successful since the early seventies, starting with Sino-American rapprochement and followed by Reform and Opening almost a decade later. Beijing couldn’t have played its cards, and the security dilemma, worse. Goldstein brings it to the point, writing that China’s actions “catalyzed the perception that China’s first steps in modernizing its military should be interpreted as foreshadowing a trajectory of growth whose consequences had not been fully appreciated.”²¹⁶ I could not agree more.

Quickly after the formation of the mentioned coalitions, Beijing quickly realized the situation it had maneuvered itself into. It was nothing less than a wake-up call. That’s why in mid-1996, Beijing

210 Shambaugh 2002, p. 297-298

211 Goldstein, p. 46

212 Ibid, p. 110

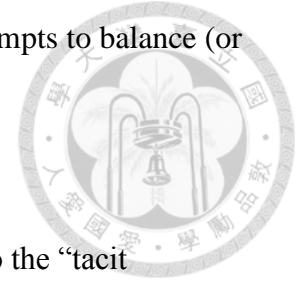
213 Ibid, p. 103

214 Ibid, p. 102

215 Ibid, p. 47

216 Ibid, p. 75

adopted a new grand strategy of improving bilateral relations with many countries, embracing multilateralism, and most importantly simply refrain from any serious attempts to balance (or challenge) US power.²¹⁷



China-ASEAN relations

Here also, I will start off presenting China's perspective. Chen Jie refers to the "tacit understandings" of Southeast Asian states, namely Malaysia, The Philippines, and Vietnam, in dealing with the SCS territorial disputes, excluding China. Chen points out the cooperative attitude of China towards the other claimants, e.g. proposals for joint cooperation in exploring natural resources in the area. Simultaneously, however, the author states that, probably understandably, in the light of the tacit talks between other claimant states, China's only option in elevating its position in negotiations was by establishing military presence on the disputed islands, in order to "obstruct regional claimant countries' efforts at joint exploitation to the exclusion of China".²¹⁸

Chinese policy towards ASEAN-states was ill-advised in the first half of the 1990s. The seizure of the Mischief Reef in 1995, which is well within the Philippines' 200 miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), did not only raise unrest and fear (the term "suspicion" is too weak in this context), because of the aforementioned reasons, but also because of the approach China adopted in executing the seizure. Beukel writes that it was "an act of stealth", an act of tacitly breaking with the 1992 Manila ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, which had called on all countries to use only peaceful means in resolving disputes; this agreement had of course also been signed by China. The joint statement, also in the light of China's continued fortification of the structures it had built on the reef, between China and The Philippines in 1995, that disputes shall be solved through diplomatic dialogue etc. looks like slapstick humor at its finest. In ASEAN-states' eyes, there was no doubt that China's policy of "creeping assertiveness" to gain greater physical presence in the SCS was something that would gradually get worse, the more powerful China became.²¹⁹

Having said this, could it be that, given China's major military modernization, China's security vis-à-vis ASEAN states was still enhanced because the military balance was so big that even ASEAN states in a coalition could not actually balance against a powerful China? For example, if Mexico and Canada would unite against the US, as a reaction to the latter positioning a large amount of missiles at the borders with the former, we still couldn't dub this hypothetical Mexican-Canadian coalition as detrimental to the United States' security. Could it be that pure hard power, without paying attention to the formation of coalitions was enough to put China in a position in which its

217 Ibid, p. 89, 119

218 Chen Jie, p. 898 ff.

219 Beukel, p. 12

security was higher than before its aggressiveness? Plain and simple: No. Goldman writes that while it is true that “China’s improved air and naval capabilities were beginning to give it the edge over any individual ASEAN state”, however, if China would face a coalition of ASEAN states, Beijing’s chances of winning such a conflict were dim. Also, considering the fact that other countries were more experienced with modern air and naval equipment, therefore “better prepared than China to integrate modern (third-generation) fighter jets into their militaries”, which is why those states would profit immensely from coalitions with states that can provide them with modern technology (e.g. the US).²²⁰

However, China, as stated in the previous subchapter, not only made adjustments in its relationship with the US. Also vis-à-vis ASEAN (except for the 1998 discovery that China had further fortified its physical presence on Mischief Reef) significant progress was made. The 1997 Asian financial crisis provided China with the opportunity to present itself as a benign power, as a responsible stakeholder. It withstood the crisis better than other countries, and China’s steady growth proved to be a source of stability for the region. It hence gained “very significant influence in the region [and] the power to shape Asia-Pacific development in ways that it never had previously”.²²¹

China’s leaders started to realize that the country’s relations to ASEAN and to the US are almost inextricably tied to one another, since trade and commerce in Asia, but also strategic considerations, are pivotal interests of the United States. Jiang Zemin made it clear on the CCP’s 15th National Congress in October 1997 that “China’s modernization requires a stable international environment”.²²² Since modernization of the country is of paramount importance for China to become even more self-sufficient, and lastly also being able to more and more set the rules of interactions in the region, which is, again, closely linked to the country’s security, first identifying the lack of international security, and then, more importantly, act according to it, adopt new strategies to face present challenges, leaving ideology mostly behind, but instead conducting Realpolitik, was an extremely smart move. It was Realpolitik because even though China’s leaders would have rather continued to confront the US and Taiwan about its dubious relationship, especially considering that the US didn’t and doesn’t get tired to preach restraint in arms issues, but at the same time continue to sell large amounts of weapons to Taiwan, one of *the* central issues of content in China and Sino-American relations, it refrained from doing so, because it understood that doing so is only detrimental to the country’s international stand and security; also and especially thinking about the US’s ability to heavily influence their partners in Asia to the

220 Goldstein, p. 64

221 Suisheng Zhao, p. 261-262

222 Ibid, p. 265

disadvantage of China. In Suisheng Zhao's words, China realized that "[it] cannot change the US forward deployment and its web of alliances in Asia, at least in the foreseeable future. Working with the US is not a choice but a necessity."²²³

China *slowly began to turn* into a rational actor after 1996 because it understood to adapt to a situation that had its roots within the existing structure of the system (US-led alliance network); that it, however, contributed to worsen (by aggressive policies and challenging the hegemon). In the end, China managed to change its behavior, adopting a new grand strategy, and actively contributing to enhance its security.

However, even by the end of the decade, in China's 1998 defense white paper, it condemns hegemonism and more or less bluntly points at the United States without namely mentioning it, by saying that "some countries, by relying on their military advantages, pose military threats to other countries, even resorting to armed intervention".²²⁴ With all due respect from China's legitimate fears of the US containing it, we have to make one thing clear: when facing a perceived threat, answering to it by means of internal or external balancing, is justified and legitimate. Arguably, it enhances the country's security. However what does *not* enhance the country's security are aggressive policies, enforce *de facto* sovereignty over disputes territories, breaking international agreements and continuing to proceed in the same fashion (further fortifying its structures on the Mischief Reef after the joint statement with the Philippines in 1995) after the other party thought that an agreement had been achieved. Doing the latter, trying to decrease or escape the security dilemma by the use of force, is ill-advised in every sense. That is why, taking US-hegemonism as an excuse for aggressive policies in the SCS, is an inadequate causal relation. In defense realism's eyes, this is irrational behavior.

Coming back to the apparent contradiction between Michael Swaine's and Nancy Tucker's assessment of China's security situation by the end of the 1990s, we can point out the following: Nancy Tucker is right, stating that Sino-America relations were worse by the end of the nineties than by the end of the eighties. While at the end of the eighties, China still had strategic value in American eyes, as a counterweight to the Soviet Union, however, with the Soviet Union's demise and Tiananmen, the 1990s couldn't have started worse with regard to US-China relations. The short phase of reconciliation between 1992 and 1995 were short-lived, because China's actions in the SCS and the Taiwan Strait damaged relations severely. The fact that China started to re-adjust its grand strategy by mid-1996 is true and important, and it helped decreasing overall tension, not only in relations with the US, but more so in its relations with ASEAN. But was the decision to not act

223 Ibid, p. 272

224 Shambaugh 2002, p. 289

hyper-aggressive anymore, as well as China's behavior during the Asian financial crisis enough to set relations with the US and ASEAN back to normal, let alone elevate them to a higher level? Certainly not. No matter if China tried really hard, the damage had already been done, the alliances among ASEAN member states and between ASEAN and the US had already been strengthened; the structure (to check China) had been established, and the mending process would take longer than just three years (1996-1999). Even though the Belgrade embassy incident surely soured US-China relations, however, it was more one-sided and didn't really have an effect on China's security situation.

Hence, I cannot support Swaine's claim that China, during the 1990s, was able to gain a significant amount of security. Would he have put it along the lines of "the corner stone for significant security gains had been set" (starting in mid-1996), I would agree with that.

The years 2000-2008

"At the beginning of the 21st century, from a military standpoint, China has never been more secure."²²⁵

Shambaugh identifies one of the main factors responsible for China's security as being the almost 180 degree turnaround of Sino-Russian relations. He states that the relationship has moved from the brink of nuclear war to a "productive "strategic cooperative partnership"" in only a decade's time, resulting in the twenty-year "Sino-Russian Treaty of Good Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation" in July 2001.²²⁶ On top of that, there have been signed more than fifty bilateral agreements between the two countries since the end of the Cold War, and even in territorial dispute issues, they have been able to reach certain agreements.²²⁷ So Shambaugh basically agrees with Swaine's argument about China's security, an argument I have rejected in the previous section. So what happened within the 2-3 years that lie between Swaine's and Shambaugh's assessment of the situation?

In 2001, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and for the first time Uzbekistan, came together in establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which was initially founded in 1996, back then known as "Shanghai Five" (with Uzbekistan not on board yet). This, in addition to the just mentioned breakthrough in Sino-Russian reconciliation, played a big role in enhancing China's security.

However, relations with the US, as well as China's strategic gameplay in territorial disputes, and very importantly the Taiwan issue, were even more important in shaping up the country's security

225 Shambaugh 2002, p. 284-285.

226 Ibid, p. 287

227 Shambaugh 2013, p. 80-81

situation (after Swaine's (2000) and Shambaugh's (2002) assessments of the situation).

China-US relations

In (re-)evaluating China's position vis-à-vis the United States, Goldstein puts the emphasis on the amount of "strategic partnerships" China was able to put under its belt, because those partnerships "would enable China to address its concerns about US preponderance without resorting to the more directly confrontational and seemingly futile alternative of a straightforward attempt to counterbalance American power."²²⁸ During the early and mid-nineties, China did the exact opposite – directly attempting to balance the US. Now, China had learned, it considered cooperation without straightforward confrontation a viable means of self-help!

We can see something enormously important here: China's relations with the US at the beginning of the 21st century weren't really good whatsoever; calling it a "rocky start" fits very well indeed.²²⁹

So why do Shambaugh and Swaine characterize China's (strategic) safety so positively? Isn't it that the relationship with the US is *the* pivotal determinant for evaluating China's security? How could its overall security situation be good while US-China relations were bad²³⁰? Well, apparently the relations to ASEAN or more simply: the majority of Asian states, is even *more* pivotal than China's relations with the US, simply because it would be a lot harder for the US to influence countries that have good relations with China. Why would these states risk their good relations with their most important economic partner for the sake of "listening" to the US? Every nation is still pursuing its *own* national interest, not that of other nations. The US can be *called* upon by Asian nations if and when they feel *threatened*. However, it is not possible for the US to urge Asian nations to enact in containment-policies towards China, if this isn't in their national interest in the first place. China played its hand well.

Moreover, it is paradox and ironic that, in the end, Taiwan played a crucial role in bringing the US and China closer together. But it is not that the issue suddenly popped up and China "got lucky". Instead, it was China's handling of the situation, a masterstroke in strategic diplomatic maneuvering, that improved US-China relations, elevated Beijing's international reputation, increasing its security: contrary to its exaggerated reaction to Taiwan's provocation in 1995, Beijing handled the "crises" in 2000 and 2003-2007 relatively well²³¹; Goldstein speaks of "coercive

228 Goldstein 2005, p. 130f.

229 Ibid, p. 183

230 E.g. the Bush administration's major arms sales to Taiwan in 2001; Bush categorizing China as a strategic *competitor* instead of a strategic *partner*; Bush's statement that the US will do "whatever it takes" to help Taiwan defend itself; Hainan incident in April 2001. See Suisheng Zhao, p. 270; Tucker p. 42

231 In August 2002, then president Chen Shui-bian publicly referred to cross-strait relations as "one country on each side" (一邊一國), coupled with calls for legislation that would ultimately make possible a referendum on Taiwan independence even though he had promised in his May 2000 inaugural address not to do so; further escalations followed by late summer 2003. Goldstein, p. 187

ambiguity”. China signaled the US that there were risks to an American policy of increasing support for Taiwan, especially when we look at the 2000 White Paper prior to the presidential election in Taiwan, which broadened the circumstances under which force might be used, however refraining from getting into details regarding a time frame; China sent a “deadline without a date”.²³² In the course of Beijing’s handling of the Taiwan-issue, as well as its larger involvement in global governance issues, especially in nuclear talks with North Korea, China managed to “swift[ly], significant[ly]” improve relations with the US, as to be seen by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao’s December 2003 visit to the White House, and president Bush’s open warning for Taipei, in the presence of the former.²³³

China-ASEAN relations

Also towards ASEAN, Beijing conveyed an increasingly “moderate [and] flexible [approach], [it] foster[ed] closer bi- and multilateral agreements [and gained] broad support by Southeast Asian states”.²³⁴ In August 2002, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan announced that the country was ready to become the first nuclear weapon state to sign the protocol to the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, followed by some more rhetorical tit for tat at the China-ASEAN summit in November 2002.²³⁵

In fact, China-ASEAN relation seemed good to the degree that in spite of China’s massive military build-up, and that, according to realist logic, other states should feel threatened by that, ASEAN seemed “blithely unmoved”, as they failed to respond to it by means of increased defense spending for example. Now it could be assumed that these states participated stronger in alliances or security forums that exclude Beijing, at least. Jason Kelly states that even this did not happen; the only thing that did happen was that “each state has maintained or improved relations with the United States...while simultaneously increasing commercial, cultural, and popular interactions with China”.²³⁶ This is a good example that actions speak louder than words and also louder than military build-up alone. The latter, alone, is insufficient in explaining the formation of coalition against China. Else, in a more general example, countries would hedge against the US; they don’t, because they don’t perceive the US as a threat (at least democratic countries don’t...). Shambaugh (winter 2004/2005) even goes so far as to state that the concerns China’s neighbors voiced about the possibility of China becoming a domineering regional hegemon and powerful military threat had

232 Goldstein, p. 180

233 Ibid, p. 193, p. 188

234 Sutter, p. 64f.

235 Goldman, p. 123

236 Jason Kelly, p. 27, 31

“muted” (by that time).²³⁷

While the first eight years of the new century were nothing short of a great diplomatic success for Beijing, with a massive increase in security, the years that followed posed new challenges. Tucker writes, “Beijing’s success in fighting the global recession, as the US and Europe succumbed, shaped more nationalistic, confident, assertive...behavior beginning in 2008, [the main question being: would] China continue to adhere to an international system put in place by Washington without Chinese participation or [would] it seek to rewrite the rules?”²³⁸

The years after 2008

“What was painstakingly built by Beijing over the decade 1998-2008, however, quickly unraveled in the short span of eighteen months from mid-2009 through 2010.”²³⁹

“[Mid-2009 until the end of 2010] were the worst years in Chinese diplomacy since 1989-1992.”²⁴⁰

This chapter will mainly focus on the SCS disputes that, yet again, flamed up in 2009, since it is of determining importance for China’s security, and gives serious reason to be worried; underestimating the conflicts in the SCS (also in the East China Sea with Japan) must not be underestimated.

Something that likes to get mentioned when talking about China’s coercive behavior after 2009, is “*tao guang yang hui*” (韬光養晦). *Tao guang yang hui* means ‘keeping a low profile’, or, putting emphasis on internal affairs, developing the economy, not getting too involved in global governance issues. However, with China becoming relatively more powerful, the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to give only one example out of many, some have concluded that China has abandoned *tao guang yang hui*.²⁴¹ Others suggest that “Deng’s intention all along was to wait for a time when China was ready to assert itself in the global sphere, not simply lay low forever.”²⁴²

It is curious that, on the one hand, China carried out a number of strategies starting from the mid-

237 Shambaugh (2004/2005), p. 64

238 Tucker, p. 43

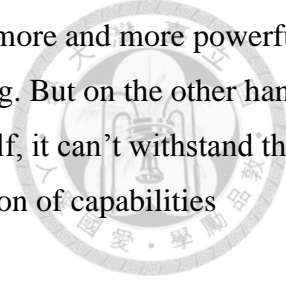
239 Shambaugh 2013, p. 99

240 Ibid, p. 51-52

241 Shannon Tiezi, “Chinese Media: Maybe It’s Time the US Heeded Deng Xiaoping’s Advice”, on: *The Diplomat*, April 2015, also see Bader, Lieberthal, McDevitt: “South China Sea in Perspective”, who don’t use the phrasing of ‘*tao guang yang hui* has been abandoned’, but instead say that some people argue that “peaceful rise” (later “development” instead of “rise”) has been abandoned.

242 David Wolf, “Understanding “Tao Guang Yang Hui””, on: *The Peking Review*”, Sep 2014

1990s – emphasizing cooperation, using benign rhetoric, befriending Russia and on some level the US –, in order to prevent realism’s prediction – that with China becoming more and more powerful, other states are more and more likely to balance against it – from happening. But on the other hand, it seems like on more and more occasions (after 2008), it can’t restrain itself, it can’t withstand the seduction of the new opportunities a relatively larger share of the distribution of capabilities (power) in the system – at least in East Asia – provides.



Is an aggressive SCS policy the right way? The *obvious* answer would be: of course not. For example, Jeffrey A. Bader, Kenneth G. Lieberthal and Michael McDevitt suggest that, “if and when China’s rise takes a coercive turn, the U.S. needs to push back.”²⁴³ That should be enough of a warning, one might think.

The important point is not if China has violated international law yet. Written laws are not important to realists; the unwritten laws, however, are of major importance. The crux of matter is that, also according to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, Daniel Russel, “Chinese reclamation isn’t necessarily a violation of international law, but it’s certainly violating the harmony...and it’s certainly violating China’s claim to be a good neighbor and a benign and non-threatening power.”²⁴⁴

We can only remind ourselves of the fact that “[t]he United States has a critical interest in providing to its allies and partners in the region that it will maintain a strong security presence to prevent a power vacuum from developing as China rises.” We should ask here “what causes what”? The crucial point is China’s perception of East Asia, itself, and what needs to be done in order to continue to being further being able to develop the country and appropriate its security by its own terms.

The core of China’s problem – “deep and structural”

In his June 11, 2014, article “China and the U.S. Alliance System”, Timothy R. Heath brilliantly summarizes China’s position on point.²⁴⁵ Heath starts off stating that “the U.S.-led security architecture in Asia [is] an obstacle to [China’s] vision”, basically acknowledging that the structure of the system as it is in today’s (South-) East Asia, is a problem in itself, in China’s view. In

243 Bader, Lieberthal, McDevitt, “China’s Rise Presents Challenges in the South China Sea“, September 2014

244 Nicholas Khoo, “Moving Towards Casus Belli? Interpreting Recent Chinese Activity in the South China Sea”, May 2015

245 Timothy R. Heath, “China and the U.S. Alliance System”, on: *The Diplomat*, June 2014

China's eyes, the very existence of this system is a threat to its security, as Asia becomes more important and competitive. As Xi Jinping stated at the CICA summit²⁴⁶: “Development is the foundation for security.”, which in no way is a new party line, “recalling that as early as 1997, the 15th Party Congress report stated that “development” is the “key to resolving all of China’s problems.””²⁴⁷



But hasn't China developed exceptionally well *without* rewriting the rules in the region? Is being a somewhat revisionist power necessary to accomplish the goal of national development/rejuvenation? The reasons for this seemingly new(ly re-emerged) perception of East Asia's system are “deep and structural”. Now, “deep and structural” seems unfitting in applying to things like the United States' *rebalance* to Asia. “Deep and structural” fits better to the entire system, the *U.S.-led* system that is; e.g. the extensive alliance system the US has been maintaining for decades. On top of that comes always worrying about Japan becoming (maybe motivated by its close ties with the U.S.) aggressive again, and never being able to rebuild the system from scratch and, more importantly, in ways that benefit primarily China (and maybe Asian nations in a broader sense) as compared to mainly benefitting the US. It is naïve to believe that the United States doesn't massively benefit from the structure of the system as of now. Else, American protest (with Japan) against the establishment of the AIIB, as well urging its allies not to join AIIB, is hard to explain. China is well aware, one could also say “paranoid”, about U.S. ambitions to contain it through promoting Western values and making use of its alliance system. That fear was already manifest before China's assertive turn. Thus, “deep and structural” hits the nail right on the head.

While we can sometimes use the term “paranoia” to describe states fear of each other under the security dilemma, however, when facing the United States, such fear is more compelling, since the record of US-intervention in a wide array of states during the 20th and 21st century is not theoretical, but factual, and it still happens from time to time. Therefore, it is true and understandable that “[t]he U.S. decision to...rebalance..., makes [the perceived] threat [in China's eyes] all the more real and pressing.” The numerous reiterations from the American side that it does not aim at containing China is, of course, meaningless; as meaningless as Chinese rhetoric is, when it is inconsistent with its actions. Deeds speak louder than words, and the mere existence of the US-led structure and its potential possibilities to contain China speaks louder than both words and deeds (in China's eyes).

Having said all of that, China is in no way declaring the U.S. its enemy; quite the opposite is the case: it is engaging in a number of bilateral diplomatic measures, enhancing cooperation between

246 For the complete speech in written form (in English), see: Xi Jinping, “The Governance of China”, p. 389ff.

247 Heath

the two powers, while being sure of one thing: the need for a “New Model of Major-country relationship”²⁴⁸. China needs regional stability, since it is of paramount importance to its development. But this development can, in the end, only be successfully executed if the system is tailored to China’s needs. And if not “tailored to its needs”, then at least without the ever lingering possibility that the U.S. could make use of its alliance partners, influence, and not least military power in the region, to actively contain China, should bilateral relations (further) sour. Therefore, the structure has to be changed, not out of hegemonic desires, but out of a “deep and pervasive” need for security (and prosperity).

In this sense, the US-Japanese alliance is a perfect example of China feeling threatened and aiming to enhance its relative security. It need not be mentioned that both the U.S. and Japan have difficult relations with China, to say the least. They are allies, and regularly reiterate their commitment to each other. After 2008/2009, when some voices predicted a decline in U.S.-power, China simultaneously gaining relative power, Beijing saw this as a chance to put itself in a better position vis-à-vis the U.S.-led security system. It tried and is attempting to do so by pressing claims in dispute areas, founding AIIB, establishing ADIZ, in the hope that U.S.-influence would decline by increasing its *own* relative share of power in the region.

The balancing

First, we have to acknowledge the fact that there *has* been balancing behavior on part of China’s neighbors and the US. Bader, Lieberthal and McDevitt write that “[t]he United States has reached an agreement with the Philippines to increase defense cooperation and rotation of U.S. forces through the Philippines, and U.S.-Vietnam defense relations have improved. The United States and Japan each have committed to provision of coast guard vessels and other means of improving the Philippines’ maritime security.”²⁴⁹ It is of course convenient to argue in favor of the impression that China’s security in East Asia has relatively declined. However, in order to verify or falsify this impression, we have to take a closer look. For example, it could be argued that, outside of the U.S.’s “pivot to Asia” grand strategy, which looks at (re-)locating 60 percent of its naval forces to Asia, the effects of the rebalancing of East Asian states among each other, as well as in cooperation with the U.S., are rather marginal and symbolic. Moreover, South Korea and Japan are not claimants in

248 Xi, p. 306ff.

249 Bader, Lieberthal, McDevitt (Aug 2014), p. 8

the SCS disputes. So while in a broader sense, China is affected by the just mentioned alliances, its actions in the SCS would theoretically not lead to actual conflict with them (here Japan and Korea).

How do we measure “marginal”? If we look at Wilhelmine Germany, we get a better understanding of “hard”-balancing. In the time leading up to World War I in 1914, we witness the formation of fully-fledged alliances of major powers (although not primarily anti-German by the time they were established, however, very well anti-German when things got messy in the summer of 1914). What do we have in (South-)East Asia since 2009? We have to identify the major powers (outside of China) first. They are Japan only, and it is not even a claimant in the SCS disputes. The U.S.-Japanese alliance isn’t something that emerged in the wake up China’s aggressive turn in 2009. In addition to that, the only country in South East Asia with which the U.S. is engaged in a mutual defense treaty, being required to defend in case the country is attacked, and which has territorial disputes in the SCS with China, is The Philippines. The U.S. and The Philippines signed an enhanced defense cooperation agreement in April 2014.²⁵⁰ But having said that, how likely is it that China is actually going to attack Philippine soil...?

Sino-Russian relations and the factor ‘Vietnam’

One could bring up that there is a world to China’s West, and that East- and Southeast Asia is by no means *the* determining factor for China’s security. During the last years, China has massively upgraded its relations with nuclear powers like Russia and Pakistan, and also with Iran. On top of that, relations with India are not bad either, as indicated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent official visit to China (although it is true that India would rather stick with its democratic allies, namely Japan and the United States). We could state the obvious that military relations with nuclear powers are weightier than enhanced security cooperation among Southeast Asian states. Taking a closer look at Asia’s security structure, however, we see a different picture.

Here, it really depends on which argument one chooses to put forward first: the one that says Sino-Russian relations are what they appear to be like on the surface, which is “good”, especially in identifying the U.S. as their main adversary. Or do we choose to believe that the apparent improvement of Sino-Russian relations is only superficial and mainly of economic nature? It is not easy to determine that. But I think that when talking about the SCS dispute, the latter of the two possible arguments is more correct. Therefore, I will first put forward the arguments of the former,

250 Margaret Talev; Phil Mattingly, “U.S., Philippines Sign Defense Pact Amid China Tensions”, April 2014

followed by arguments that argue in favor of the latter, since I think we have to give it to Stephen Blank and his analysis of the situation. One thing is certain: Sino-Russian relations are very ambiguous.

In May 2014, China and Russia conducted joint naval drills. It followed a joint statement, where both countries speak of having reached a “new stage of comprehensive strategic partnership”.²⁵¹ Both countries are also set to deepen their cooperation under the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia (CICA). Chen Dingding further states that “there are mutual strategic needs as both China and Russia want to create a multipolar world that is not dominated by the U.S., particularly as China faces threats from the U.S.-led alliance in Asia.” Chen goes on by referring to Professor Yan Xuetong from Qinghua University, quoting him in saying that the most important question underlying Sino-Russian partnership is whether the two countries have shared strategic interests. Yan states that “the West would never trust Russia, thus Russia has no better alternative to siding with China. On the other hand, China’s number two position in the world means that China will not be supported by the U.S. with regard to most international affairs issues. Moreover, a declining U.S. will choose an offshore balancing strategy by relying on its allies in Europe and Asia, thereby increasing pressures for China and Russia. Such increasing pressures pose common threats to China and Russia. Thus, a China-Russia alliance would benefit both countries in the next 10 to 20 years.” While being a proponent of the high importance of the Sino-Russian partnership, Chen concludes by writing that in the years to come, a formal Sino-Russian alliance is unlikely.²⁵²

Contrary to the above mentioned, in 2013, Stephen Blank reported about growing Russo-Vietnamese ties²⁵³, “clearly aiming to deter the China threat”, so the author. Russia and Vietnam have already been strategic partners since 2001, however updated their relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2012. The argument seems compelling, reading that “[a]s per an agreement inked in November 2014, Russian warships visiting the deep water port of Cam Ranh only have to give prior notice to the Vietnamese authorities before steaming in whereas all other foreign navies are limited to just one annual ship visit to Vietnamese ports.”²⁵⁴ We have to seriously doubt the strength and depth of the Sino-Russian partnership (outside of its anti-American orientation), when looking at this: “Russian built submarines armed with the potent Klubs [supersonic cruise missiles submarines can be armed with] are expected to play a critical role in any

251 Chen Dingding, “Are China and Russia Moving toward a Formal Alliance?”, May 2014

252 Ibid

253 Stephen Blank, “Russia’s Growing Ties with Vietnam”, 2013

254 Rakesh Krishnan Simha, “Why the Bear is Back: Russian Military Presence in Vietnam”, June 2015, includes a detailed description of how Vietnam managed to beef up its military in the recent years through cooperation with Russia.

conflict in the South China Sea. According to one analyst, the land-attack cruise missiles mark a “massive shift” advancing Vietnam’s naval capabilities... They’ve given themselves a much more powerful deterrent that complicates China’s strategic calculations.”, which is why China has “gone ballistic about Russia selling them to Vietnam.”²⁵⁵ Altogether, Vietnam has managed position itself in a much stronger position vis-à-vis China, through strong ties with the U.S., Russia, and India, both diplomatically and militarily.

In accordance, Jeffrey Mankoff’s characterization of Sino-Russian relations goes in the same direction: “Moscow touts its partnership with Beijing mostly to prove to the rest of the world that Russia still matters, while China views it as a low-cost way of placating Russia. Lacking much of a common agenda, cooperation is limited to areas where their interests already overlap, like bolstering trade. In the parts of the world that matter most to them, Russia and China are more rivals than allies... Nor does sporadic cooperation between the Russian and Chinese militaries alter the fact that China’s assertiveness worries Russia as least as much as it worries the United States. Russian military commanders acknowledge that they see China as a potential foe, even as official statements continue to focus on the alleged threat from the United States and NATO.”²⁵⁶ Blank concludes by saying that “[o]n the one hand [Russia] supports China against the US and on the other works to constrain Chinese power in Asia”, speaking of Russia’s “own pivot to Asia”.²⁵⁷

Japan, the United States, India, Australia

Last, I want to address the 2007 initiated Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) between the United States, Australia, Japan, and India. True, the fact that it was initiated before China’s assertive turn, tells us that it was not caused by China’s aggressiveness that started in 2009 (obviously), and before it was quadrilateral, it has already been trilateral since 2002 (then with the exception of India). Does this support the assumption that structures to contain China are not necessarily motivated by its aggressive behavior, but by its mere economic and military development, which are, as we have learned, “natural and justified” developments? If that is actually the case, no wonder that China perceives this “balancing against the natural development of things” as unjustified. As a matter of fact, “the “Quad” held some of Asia’s largest military exercises to date in 2007”²⁵⁸ Later, the “Quad” (at times “Triple” due to Australia not participating under its former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd) somewhat withdrew, possibly and probably due to less aggressive Chinese behavior, only to come back in 2014, motivated by Chinese aggression.²⁵⁹

255 Ibid

256 Ibid

257 Blank, April 2014

258 Daniel Twining, “Asia’s New Triple Alliance”, Feb 2014

259 Ibid

North Korea

Would it not be plausible to determine North Korea, which has acted in extremely aggressive ways since Kim Jong-Un assumption of power in December 2011, as the main reason for the U.S.'s military balancing? Especially when thinking about the United States' longstanding alliances with South Korea and Japan, whose security is immediately affected by North Korean aggression, it makes sense to at least question if Chinese coercion is the main reason for the U.S.'s strong military presence in the region, or if it is not rather North Korea. The one doesn't exclude the other, but: if North Korea is the main reason, this implies that the assumption that Chinese coercion provoked the U.S. to enact in military balancing, loses some potency, which then again would indicate that China isn't as irrational as some might think. I think North Korea is definitely a big factor. But we simply cannot say that if North Korea would have been more peaceful in the last years, that this would have kept the United States, so to say, out of Asia. Therefore, we have to keep our focus on China.

Summary

Just looking at the territory which is claimed within its dubious NDL, China's claims look nothing less but disconcerting. However, the more important question is, in how far is China's behavior overexpanding?

Baader, Lieberthal and McDevitt summarize: “[we] should not exaggerate... what is going on in the South China Sea and regard it as an Asian counterpart to Russian aggression against Ukraine. China's territorial claims in the South China Sea are of long standing. Troops are not moving, people are not being killed. Management of claims disputes is important, but occasional assertions of sovereignty by one actor or another are not a fundamental challenge to recognized borders or the integrity of existing states.”²⁶⁰

We see that determining who started first and “what caused what” is a tough question to answer, and is mostly subject to subjective evaluation, both on part of scholars and of state leaders. That is why we have to put the question in a simpler way: have China's actions and overall strategy in the SCS— this includes military build-up, economic development, coercive policy – put the country in a situation in which its security has decreased in comparison to pre-2009? While of course it really depends on the level of balancing by the Southeast Asian states (plus the United States, Japan,

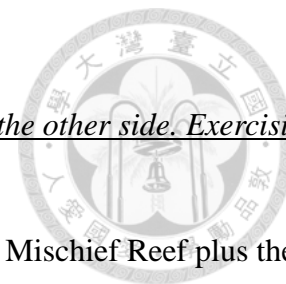
260 Bader, Lieberthal, McDevitt, p. 3

South Korea, and surprisingly seemingly also Russia!), as well as the quality of their cooperation among each other, I think we have a clear case here.

China's security situation, internationally, *did* receive a blow. We simply cannot dismiss the heavy balancing behavior of Asian states among each other; in cooperation with the United States; and even with Russia – a country supposedly having strong ties with China. Dismissing it and making up reasons why China's actions might be rational after all, because we want to either dissociate us from the many China-bashers, or because we simply think, or rather assume, that the Chinese government's overall strategy could possibly be a very sophisticated one, would have a bitter double-standard taste / bias to it. This doesn't mean that China's actions are not embedded in a larger strategy, at which end it will be off better – safer – than before 2009. We don't know that. Some people say that Xi Jinping is a smart leader, both domestically and internationally. That might be the case. From a defensive realist perspective, however, it is hard to argue against the fact that China's actions in recent years have been more detrimental to its security than they have been beneficial, even if we consider it in the face of the U.S.-led alliance system and the threat to its security that China perceives it as.

The latter is nothing new; new is only that China is a powerful stakeholder now, who sees a chance at rewriting the system according to its own terms and needs. In pursuing that, it has rejected viewing cooperation in this issue field as a viable means of self-help, since cooperation does not mean making use of benign rhetoric while simultaneously gaining de facto control of territories under dispute. Whereas other states managed to upgrade their security relations among each other, China has basically no allies in the region. The ambiguous, even shady, partnership with Russia, as well as the good relations with Pakistan and Iran are of little help in the SCS. Sino-Russian relations are more anti-American than they are of supporting character for China's claim in the SCS, since Russia itself might be interested in China not gaining sovereignty of basically the entire SCS. Hence, according to defensive realism (which only focusses on the international dimension), China has been an irrational actor in the SCS disputes since 2009.

Tang's defensive realism's indicators of rational behavior



Refraining from actions that may exacerbate the spiral between itself and the other side. Exercising self-restraint and be willing to be constrained

The armed clash with Vietnam at the end of the eighties; the seizure of the Mischief Reef plus the fortification of structures on the reef, even after a joint agreement with Philippines after the latter's initial discovery of defense structures on the Reef; the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995/96; and China's continuous and repeated actions starting in 2009 and lasting until today, speak a clear language. On the other side, China's diplomacy between 1997 and 2008 speak a clear language, too. No doubt, China has exercised self-restraint, when we consider that it considers Taiwan and territorial disputes as issues of national core interests. Its actions cannot and must not be compared to Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Understanding that states cannot escape from the security dilemma by accumulating power, and that alleviating the security dilemma through moderation and cooperation is a valid means of self-help. Realizing and acting according to the premise that the prevalence of balancing behavior means that aggressive actions usually promote counterbalancing and leads to a decrease of security

China well understood this starting from the late 1990s until 2008. While I think that China actually did not understand this point before 1997, because it attempted to coerce outcomes, however, I don't believe that China suddenly forgot this after 2008. Prior to 1997, due to China's lack of experience regarding regional policies (something that China had to newly learn after the shift of importance from global to regional policy in the wake of the end of the Cold War), there is reason to believe that it was actually a learning process, seeing how coercive behavior drives neighboring states and the US to balance against it, hence the adoption of the new grand strategy after 1997. It is simply impossible, that only a decade later, China forgot these lessons. So it well understands the problem, but doesn't act in a way that solves issues. While China, after 2008, still understands that it can't escape the security dilemma by being aggressive, however, what it *doesn't* seem to understand is the fact that the international dimension of security is not less important than domestic security; at least from an objective point-of-view, and not from a regime-preserving point-of-view.

(In the face of a threat) strive to form an alliance to defensively balance the threat

Since China's security is largely dependent on developments in nearby waters and China's global scale partnerships (BRICS, Pakistan, Iran) are a non-factor in territorial disputes with East- and Southeast Asian countries, we can only say that China failed to form alliances against the extensive

alliance network maintained by the US and its Asian regional partners. China is a “lonely power”²⁶¹. Even after adopting its new grand strategy in 1997, in the wake of a heavily declining security situation in the early and mid-nineties, China did not enhance its security by forming a balancing coalition, but by direct improvements of bi- and multilateral relations with conflict parties. However, we have to be fair here and say that, for China, balancing is an act of impossibility thinking of the historical, far back-reaching roots of the alliance network in East Asia and (South-)East Asian states traditional commitment rather to the US than to China. Having said this, some people say that the founding of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a means of balancing US preponderance in the region, especially when thinking about the fact that literally every important country, with the exception of Japan and the US, will be member of it. On the one hand, we must not play this down, on the other hand, however, AIIB can hardly be characterized as a means of balancing US preponderance on a strategic level, which is the most important determinant of a state’s security: the strategic level, not the economic level. If we want to give China the benefit of the doubt on this point, we might argue (rather speculate) that AIIB is the first step in actually balancing against the US, and it might as well translate into some kind of strategic balancing in the future. I would not put my money on it though, since every attempt to strategically balance US power in the region backfired starkly so far; the last attempt of redistributing capabilities in the region has been answered with nothing less but the US’s “pivot to Asia” in 2011.

Nationalism / Conclusion

After having identified China as an irrational actor in some time periods between 1990 and now, we can examine if nationalism can be held accountable for its actions. The predominant opinion among scholars is clear, namely that nationalism was, if not the *reason* for Chinese aggression, however, at least a *factor* (Tellis 2013:90; Chen 1994:898; Zhao 2004:347ff.; Shambaugh 2013:51, 311).

First of all, it is no myth that after Tiananmen in 1989, and the worldwide collapse of communism, China’s leaders reached out to nationalism as their new device for legitimizing their rule.²⁶² For territorial disputes it means that “[i]f, after losing territories to Western powers a century ago, China should now lose territory to regional countries...the legitimacy of the communist regime would be questioned.”²⁶³

The degree to which nationalism played and still plays a role in times of conflict, is sometimes put more straightforwardly, whereas in some other sources we can only find implications that it played

261 Shambaugh 2014, “The Illusion of Chinese Power“

262 Chen Jie, p. 898

263 Ibid, p. 894

a role. To the former belong Leni Stenseth (respectively the sources he quotes from, among those Suisheng Zhao) who (in 1999) writes that “China’s assertive policy in the Spratly Islands dispute has been linked to the growing tide of nationalism within the PRC”, as well as stating that “China’s extensive territorial claims are grounded in emotion and ideology, not based on a rational estimation of need for oil and gas”, or that (citing Zhao here) “recovery over lost territories takes preeminence over economic development”.²⁶⁴ I could not think of a way to describe the opposite of Realpolitik any clearer.

Then, to the latter, belongs David Lampton, stating that “increased national self-confidence” and the awareness of “its own political vulnerability” are responsible for adopting “a stronger foreign policy”, even in the light of “the space [for doing] so was narrowing.”²⁶⁵

I think the case is clear: China is a rational actor, unless it is about issues of territorial sovereignty. Then, it considers things other than (international) security more important. Why is it like that? What could be more important than international security? The answer, according to China’s leaders, is: domestic security. The amount of domestic turmoil if the government would make concessions on issues of national sovereignty would be immense, and arguably of peril to the regime’s and the country’s internal – and therefore overall – stability/security. But this train of thought misses one crucial point, namely the reason for the outrageous reactions that can be expected if concessions would be made. Is it not the government’s own decision to make territorial disputes issues of “national core interest”? It is conducting a *fait accompli*-style policy, maneuvering itself into a position in which diplomatic negotiation space is starkly limited from the very beginning! Zhao points this out by referring to this perfect example: “Although China has offered joint development to other claimants, its concept of joint development seems to involve joint development of the producing oil and gas fields on other claimants’ continental shelves – and then only after China’s sovereignty has been recognized.”²⁶⁶

Taking a polemic standpoint, the deciding question would: isn’t internal security at least as, if not more important, than international security? *Not* taking a polemic stand, and more accurately, the question should be: can national security only be achieved by an aggressive foreign policy (by satisfying the people’s thirst for national glory)?

Recalling Xi Jinping’s statement at the CICA summit in May 2014 (“Development is the foundation for security”, see subchapter “China’s core problem”), and the 15th Party Congress

264 Leni Stenseth 1999, p. 347ff.

265 Lampton, p. 73

266 Zhao, p. 266

report in 1997, which stated that “development” is the “key to resolving all of China’s problems”, one could say the answer is obvious: since stability is the fundamental precondition for development, and China’s aggressiveness in the early- until mid-nineties and after 2008, has in fact de-stabilized the region (strategically, not economically), pursuing an aggressive policy is ill-advised. But the thing is, the component that makes judging the way China has chosen to go after the global financial crisis so hard, is the fact that even in the just mentioned example, one could make the case that domestic stability is just as, if not even more, important than regional stability; and how can we know that the people’s thirst for national glory (and therefore stability?) can only be appeased by aggressively pushing for territorial gains in the ECS and SCS? The only thing that speaks against this lingering argument of “the Chinese government has to listen to the people’s voice if it wants to ensure overall stability” is the fact that, during Deng, and at least again since Xi Jinping, nationalism is constructed in a top-down process. And even the latter, claiming that since Xi Jinping, nationalism is top-down, is a claim that cannot be proven. It could well be, that Xi just really well understands how to control the nationalism that flamed up (bottom-up) during the late Jiang- and basically entire Hu Jintao-era.²⁶⁷ Could it not be that, after all, Xi Jinping masterfully established a compromise between maintaining domestic stability by somewhat giving in to the people’s demands, while at the same time not letting the territorial disputes escalate? Has, in the case of China, foreign policy replaced “religion” in the famous Karl Marx’ saying “Religion is the opium of the people”? Wouldn’t that be an amazing example of a perfectly rational actor according to defensive realism? And even if it happened to be that we cannot include the domestic dimension into defensive realism’s judgment about China’s security, therefore being forced to judge that China has been an irrational actor, while actually, from a broader perspective, paying attention to the domestic situation, China has been able to increase its security, what does that say about realism? It would imply that although, overall, China’s security has increased (while it might have decreased internationally), China is still an irrational actor. It wouldn’t make sense. Should this actually be the case, then it would certainly reveal a major weak point in (defensive) realism, respectively in its take on rational behavior.

However, since I haven’t chosen defensive realism as a determining tool for deeming a country as rational or irrational just because this paper requires me to do so, but instead since I am convinced that defensive realism represents the best manual for rational behavior. For me, the point is clear: structural realism stipulates that the structure of the international system gives strong enough incentives for state leaders to subordinate domestic politics to upholding the status quo; at least it

267 For an explicit take on that, see: Christopher Hughes (2011), “Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: the geopolitik turn”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 20(71), September, pp. 601-620

should do so, and if states decide to be a revisionist power, to upset the equilibrium, therefore not operating according to what structural (defensive) realism describes as the paramount requirement for the safety of the state, then such actions that upset the balance of power are irrational. According to defensive realism, it is no question that China has been conveying revisionist traits; the exception being the time period from the late nineties until 2008. International scholars agree that this was the period in which China experienced the most impressive levels of security. We simply cannot deny that when the “strategic/security component of US-China relations is more strained than ever”, as well as the US rebalancing to Asia, strengthening its alliances with literally every of its Asian allies (Australia, Japan, South Korea, The Philippines, Thailand), in addition also strengthening defense and intelligence ties with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Singapore, and Vietnam²⁶⁸, that this is beneficial to China’s security in any way. It may well be the case that China’s assertive policy after 2008 is a necessary adjustment to certain domestic developments, the government’s actions may therefore be right, however, realism doesn’t account for domestic politics and I firmly believe that the overall security of a state cannot be enhanced by subordinating international to domestic politics, hence sacrificing international reputation, stand, and security, in order to keep legitimation in the Chinese people’s eyes. The root of the problems are way deeper, if it is necessary to achieve legitimacy of rule through aggressive/assertive nationalism abroad.

Even if we emphasize the positive developments since the late nineties, according to Shambaugh, “China [is] a lonely power. [In fact], even in [its] closest relationships – Russia, Pakistan, North Korea – strong elements of distrust percolate beneath the surface of seemingly harmonious state-to-state relations.”²⁶⁹

“China’s assertiveness has strengthened the regional claimant countries' efforts to reinforce their military occupations and expand their naval/air forces, contributed to ASEAN's policy of internationalizing the dispute and involving extra-regional powers in South China Sea security arrangements, and added to regional unity against China.”²⁷⁰ From a defensive realist angle, it is not possible to describe an irrational actor in an even clearer way; from a defensive realist angle, between 1990 and 2015, China has been a rational actor between 1997 and 2008.

268 Shambaugh 2013, p. 77

269 Shambaugh 2013, p. 7

270 Chen Jie, p. 902

Part IV: Conclusion



A Classification into Bismarckian / Wilhelmine Germany

After having analyzed Germany's and China's foreign policy in terms of defensive realism's definition of rational behavior, it is time to make a judgment on whether contemporary China used to be (or is) more a resemblance of Bismarckian- or rather of Wilhelmine Germany. I am stating the obvious when I say that it is neither completely the one, nor the other; after all, China has "many identities".

It gets interesting when we look at what Margaret MacMillan has to say: "With different leadership World War I might have been avoided. Europe in 1914 needed a Bismarck...with the strength of character to stand up to pressure and the capacity to see the large strategic picture."²⁷¹ Does this mean that if China is more Wilhelmine than it is Bismarckian, the chances for conflict are higher (of course only hypothetically)? Coming up with an accurate answer is very important.

Opinions on whether China rather resembles the one or the other are manifold. Saying that China resembles Bismarckian Germany means that it understands balance-of-power dynamics, acts according to it, in short: conducts Realpolitik. Acting according to balance-of-power dynamics this means: either forming a coalition itself, or keeping other (maybe belligerent) states from establishing a coalition against it. Realpolitik means: refraining from letting nationalism influence the country's foreign policy; not giving in to the voices of powerful domestic actors, but instead respecting the constraining structure of the international system.

Goldstein (2005) characterizes China as having some compelling similarities with *Bismarckian* Germany. He enumerates the similarities as: both were/are geopolitically rising powers; both naturally drew/draw the attention of other major actors; both found/find themselves in unfavorable geopolitical circumstances²⁷²; both assured/assure neighbors that they didn't/don't harbor hegemonic desires²⁷³; both prevented/prevent the hardening of hostile alliances while concentrating on its own development²⁷⁴. Moving on to the comparison with Wilhelmine Germany, Robert E. Kelly adds two more points to Goldstein's list, as both countries were/are "encircled"; and "nationalism and grievance" were/is high.²⁷⁵ We can see, a comparison between the two states is legitimate. Now if the *result* of the comparison further supports the initial compelling similarities – in other words: are they really alike? – is a different question and will be answered in this chapter as

271 MacMillan, *The Rhyme of History*

272 Goldstein, p. 192

273 China saying that it will never seek hegemony; Germany saying that it is saturated.

274 Goldstein, p. 207

275 Robert Kelly, "Comparing China and the Kaiser's Germany (part 1): Similarities

well.

Talking about the differences between Imperial Germany and contemporary China, and bringing in the debate about facing a superpower, Joseph Nye states that “the gap in overall power between the US and China today is greater than that between Germany and Britain in 1914.”²⁷⁶ This is an important observation, since one would assume that given the great difference in power, China would refrain from challenging US power and commitment in the Asia-Pacific, a lesson it seemingly had learned after the early to mid-nineties. However, since 2009, China is taking yet another shot at challenging not only the US, but the entire region.

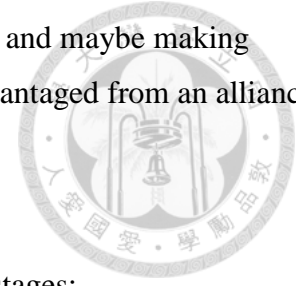
One can entertain the comparison with Imperial Germany from a balancing point-of-view and say that China was a resemblance of Bismarck’s Germany from the late 1990s until 2008. It realized that it overplayed its hand in the early nineties vis-à-vis its neighbors and the US, and quickly refrained from actions that would further decrease its security. Bismarck after 1871 did the same: refraining from further expansionist actions which likely would summon a hostile coalition after Germany had already defeated three countries in a decade’s time, the last being France. Further aggressive actions wouldn’t have gone unanswered, at least that is what Bismarck reckoned and acted according to. Bismarck faced reality, just as China faced the realities of the immense gap in power between itself and the US, let alone a US-led alliance web (with China being the main factor for the emergence of the very). Bismarck largely refused getting involved in the imperial race for colonial possessions; he saw that administering colonies in faraway regions is rather detrimental to economic interests than it is beneficial, that prestige is the reason for acquiring them, not rational calculation of economic needs. China seemingly did the same when, from the late 1990s until 2008, it acted according to a (supposed) strategy that realized that claims for territorial possessions in the SCS is not based on a rational estimation of the country’s energy needs, but instead motivated by ideology.

It is important to be accurate on the timeframes here. Germany’s foreign policy from 1871 to 1914 has two main time stages:

- 1.) 1871-1904: Bismarck’s reign and the first fourteen years of Wilhelm; without getting nitpicky, I think it is safe to say that Germany was a throughout rational actor during this period, especially until the late 1880s. There are signs that indicate Germany becoming somewhat unwise in some policy fields, the most important one being not being able to arrange itself with Russia, basically single-handedly reactivating France from its isolation that Bismarck’s policy during the 1870s and 1880s was so eagerly aimed at.

276 Joseph Nye (Jan 2014), “1914 Revisited?”

- 2.) 1905-1914: Germany turned irrational by not adapting to balance-of-power-political developments, unable to breaking its isolation through cooperation and maybe making painful concessions on sensitive issues in order to not being disadvantaged from an alliance-technical perspective.



China's foreign policy from 1989 until today, has to be split up into three stages:

- 1.) 1989-1996: Irrational non-realpolitik foreign policy. Causes: the Tiananmen Incident; no experience with regional policy issues after the end of the Cold War; aggressive behavior towards the Philippines and Taiwan; relations with the US also bad.
- 2.) 1997-2008: Adoption of a new grand strategy focused on (peaceful) development; moderation and cooperation; refraining from challenging US-power; improvement of bilateral ties with numerous countries; improvement of relations with Russia; smart handling of the Taiwan issue while simultaneously entertaining good relations with the US, despite the Bush jr. administration's continuation of selling large numbers of (defensive) weapons to Taiwan.
- 3.) After 2008: overthrowing nearly everything Beijing had worked so hard for in the previous decade; causing the United States' rebalance to Asia; causing basically every East Asian state to engage in balancing behavior against it.

A good example of failing to properly characterize China into Bismarckian or Wilhelmine Germany, respectively misinterpreting the concept of Realpolitik, can be found in the September/October 1996 edition of "Foreign Affairs". Here, Christensen writes that China is the "high church of realpolitik", (maybe unwillingly) making a comparison with Germany under Bismarck. I don't see it. Let us recall the meaning of Realpolitik/realism (both is really almost the same to me): putting the state's security first! If a country introduces economic reforms which are contrary to its own propagated political-economic orientation, simply because it is good for the country and the people, then this is not Realpolitik, but economic pragmatism. Worrying about the long-time foe Japan becoming powerful again, feeling threatened by a coalition between Japan and the other non-friend (foe would be too much here), the United States, not listening to bare rhetoric that China should not feel threatened by it, but instead, drawing its own conclusion about certain developments and evaluating things through a realist-lens, *is* Realpolitik.

However, the crucial point really lies within territorial disputes and sovereignty issues, since here, the absolute opposite of realpolitik emerges: nationalism. Worse: China *acts* (or *acted* before 1997; debatable if in SCS disputes, but surely with regard to the Taiwan Crisis 1995/96) according to nationalist sentiments. Worst: it immediately affected the country's security. If we accept that

Taiwan and other “lost territories” are of core-interest to Beijing, and that the “reason for the concerted Chinese acquisition of AA/AD [anti access/access denial] [technology] was rooted in the desire to prevent US naval and air forces from being able to intervene effectively on Taipei’s behalf if one day...”²⁷⁷, we might conclude: protection of core-interests is rational. And *that* is the crux of the matter; just like Jack Snyder pointed it out, other goods are believed to be more valuable than security! So in some way, treating issues from a nationalist core-interest’s perspective, is, in some way, overextending or self-defeating behavior. Also, as stated previously, the argument that mismanagement of the Taiwan issue will cause domestic unrest, therefore endanger the regimes security, is wrong, because choosing to make Taiwan a matter of national core interest and reiterating this whenever the opportunity arises, is already a result of a non-realpolitik policy-style. Hence, in the early to mid-nineties, China was not a Realpolitik-country. It did not manage to form balancing alliances or keep hostile alliances from forging. It was an irrational actor according to (defensive) realism. Without going into further detail again, the same conclusions (as far as possible as of now) can be made about China’s behavior after 2008. I think the main difference between Wilhelmine Germany and contemporary China is that Wilhelmine Germany was not responsible for the formation of the many times mentioned alliances, while China was and is responsible for the formation of balancing alliances among (South)-East Asia states and the US. Wilhelmine Germany did not manage to adjust its policy towards weakening these alliances, something that China was able to do between the late 1990s and 2008, as a direct response to the perceived potential danger of these balancing coalitions. The puzzling question is why it went back to its old ways, so to say, after 2008. On the one side, it surely is confusing and we should not underestimate the potential danger of the ECS and SCS disputes. On the other side, however, we know that we are dealing with a state that proved to have the ability to realize that balancing coalitions pose a threat to national security and that only by means of cooperation and restraint, it is possible to enhance national security again. Knowing that we are dealing with an actor who essentially knows what is irrational and what isn’t, is something that gives hope for a peaceful settlement of the current disputes. Probably though, in the face of China’s much more sophisticated power (compared to the early-mid-1990s), it needs a strong reaction of regional states and the US, a reaction that is relatively equivalent of the reactions to China’s aggressive behavior two decades ago. How that reaction should look like, I don’t know. What we know for certain, though, is that with China becoming even more powerful, coercing it becomes more and more difficult.

Having explained all of that, and using the same metric – balance of power and adapting to changes

277 Tellis, p. 88

in the very – we use when concluding that China resembled Bismarckian Germany from 1997 to 2008 to compare China to Germany, then, we have to say that already before its sudden assertive turn in 2009, China resembled Wilhelmine Germany! As just mentioned, it failed to balance against coalition that it was not part of, in the early nineties (and after 2008), which in fact was Wilhelmine Germany's main fault.


Despite having debunked the *Weltpolitik*-myth earlier, it is still worth pointing out that China has not engaged in strategies of strategic influence globally, it is therefore not guilty of (any sort of strategic) *Weltpolitik*, something that many authors (whose main research field is not pre-WWI Germany that is...) bring up as one of *the* triggers of the alliance formation of Russia, England and France, and ultimately the outbreak of WWI. True, China is engaged in all kinds of economic businesses globally (AIIB; “one belt and one road” 一帶一路), but this is nothing that could be interpreted as being indicative of harboring hegemonic desires. Strategically, it concentrates its efforts on its own geographic area only; which other country doesn't do so?


I think we should not ask whether or not China is a resemblance of Germany. Instead, we should treat them as balls of the same color within a structure, look at of what these balls are composed of (economic and military strengths, balance of power in their respective region,...), apply a framework of analysis (defensive realism), and look at how these balls act under the constraining structure of the system. I often think that researching China, seeing China differently than other states, has something of sensationalism to it. After all, everyone is interested in China, and producing articles with names like “China rising, smaller states hedge in fear”; “US and China will go to war”, will attract more readers than “China is a benign power which acts in confusing way sometimes because it hasn't found its place in the system yet, or determined which path it wants to go; however, that doesn't mean that war is upon us...”²⁷⁸ Of course there are similarities between these two “balls”, as stated above. And realism, so far, predicted the rise of China pretty well, too! But does that mean that significant conflict is unavoidable²⁷⁹? No. The belief that war is inevitable was omnipresent 100 years ago; today it isn't the case anymore. This means that if conflict is in the air, there is more time to handle it.²⁸⁰ That being said, however, we have to apply a final comparative framework to the comparison, in order to point out the similarities and differences between the two; Tang Shiping's indicators shall do the job.

278 Titles are made up

279 Mearsheimer, “Tragedy“ (latest version), Last chapter (


280 Nye, “1914 Revisited“; also Christopher Clark (2014) in a talk with German philosopher and author Richard David Precht

Germany 1871-1904	China 1997-2008	Germany after 1905, and especially after 1907	China 1989-1996	China after 2008
 <p><i>Refraining from actions that may exacerbate the spiral between itself and the other side. Exercising self-restraint and be willing to be constrained.</i></p>				
Clearly stopped any sort of aggressive foreign policy after 1871 in order to prevent possible, exacerbation. Germany (Bismarck) conducted self-restraint in power-political issues and colonial issues and ceased to employ further aggressive policies.	As a response to a drastically worsened security situation in the aftermath of its aggressive policies in the early to mid-nineties, Beijing adopted a new grand strategy in order to prevent further deterioration of its security; it refrained from actions that exacerbate the spiral.	Wilhelmine Germany always conducted self-restraint, up until August 1914. However, instead of searching for ways to enhance its security by means of cooperation and making concessions in sensitive areas, <i>or</i> : being confident enough to see that the power structures weren't targeted at Germany, in both Moroccan Crises, Germany failed to do so and only strengthened the perceived belligerent alliances.	Can't say that China "failed to adapt", because situation that threatened China's security was yet to be summoned, <i>by China itself</i> , self-responsibly. Hard to determine whether the actions of 1995 and 1996 count as actions that exacerbated a spiral or really just caused it in the first place. No restraint; seizure of Mischief Reef; military reaction to Li Teng-hui's Cornell University visit. Only a strong balance-of-power-political reaction was	Clearly guilty of exacerbating the spiral of distrust between other countries and itself; has not yet started to refrain from actions that exacerbate the spiral. Mixed signals from China's side. Aggressive policies followed by temporary refraining from exercising aggressiveness and benign rhetoric.

			able to restrain China from continuing its early-/mid-nineties strategy.	
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Understanding that states cannot escape from the security dilemma by accumulating power, and that alleviating the security dilemma through moderation and cooperation is a valid means of self-help. Realizing and acting according to the premise that the prevalence of balancing behavior means that aggressive actions usually promote counterbalancing and leads to a decrease of security.


Check.	More than anything else (with regard to alliance-formation in the next point), this is what Chinese leaders understood and acted according to in that decade. China can only become strong through peaceful development. Alliance formation is not an option, hence cooperation is the most valuable option.	German leaders did either not understand this, or considered considering direct cooperation with the big powers not as valuable and important as to make painful concessions in other fields, for example domestically. It did not act aggressively until August 1914; just as all the other big powers. However, Germany guilty of de-localizing the war and bearing a higher guilt of turning making the conflict turn into a scale of that magnitude. Did try	Questionable if the China's aggressive actions during that period stem from a desire to break a security dilemma, or if it is merely a consequence of lack of experience in dealing with regional disputes. Did not realize or act according to, the fact that aggressive actions will backfire most of the time.	I reckon that after the lesson China had learned in the mid-nineties, it does understand balance-of-power-dynamics. It still doesn't act according to it. We can only speculate about possible reasons. It's increasing strength is a definite one.
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		break the perceived shackles of the Triple-Entente by aggressive means.		
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(In the face of a threat) striving to form an alliance to defensively balance the threat.

Isolated France for two decades and formed the Triple-Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy, as well as the League of the Three Emperors with Russia and Austria-Hungary, despite hardly facing any threat at that time.	It did not form an alliance, since this is simply impossible for China in East Asia: South Korea, Japan, The Philippines, these are all countries that historically have strong ties with the US, and it has proved them right to bet their money on their commitment to the US. The US is not a rising state, and in some way, Asian states are used to US presence and value the public goods it provides; there is no way they would throw this over board for the sake of an	Did not manage to form an alliance against the perceived threat of the Triple Entente. Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy was basically a non-factor.	Numerous reasons why forming an alliance in Asia against the number one “threat” – the US – is not a possibility for China...	Global partners in many other fields, mostly economically. No alliance partners for the crucial issues of the SCS and ECS disputes. BRICS and the liaisons with Pakistan and Iran, aren’t factors that contributes to China’s security in whatever way; Margaret MacMillan : BRICS-countries “are joined together more in theory than reality” ²⁸¹ ; India
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281 MacMillan, “The Rhyme of History“

	<p>alliance with China, a country most of East Asian states has had issues with in the past or even present.</p>		 <p>strategically committed to democratic countries; Russia backs Vietnam militarily; Brazil and South Africa have no business in the SCS.</p>
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I think if it wasn't for the First World War's 100th anniversary, less scholars would come up with this comparison. I believe, if one wants to see something in a certain light, if one wants to make an analogy between things, one will find arguments for it. It is a dangerous thing to do, evaluating China in the light of a comparison with Wilhelmine Germany, because our thinking will naturally be affected by it. Joseph Nye writes that "we shouldn't let historical analogies determine our thinking."²⁸², and I couldn't agree more with him. Robert Kelly quotes David Shambaugh, stating that "it is hard to find an analogy for contemporary China, so we should not necessarily read it as Germany 1914 out of methodological desperation."²⁸³ The comparison is a legitimate one, but we have to be very sure which of the three stages of Chinese foreign policy we compare with which of the two stages of Imperial Germany; there is no such thing as "China resembles Bismarckian/Wilhelmine Germany".

282 Joseph Nye 2013, "China Is Not Imperial Germany", http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2013/02/27/china_is_not_imperial_germany_100580.html

283 Kelly, "Comparing China and the Kaiser's Germany (part 2): Differences"

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