Between dominance and decline: status anxiety and great power rivalry

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Abstract. This article investigates the role of status considerations in the response of dominant powers to the rise of emergent states. Accordingly, the hypothesis explored is that dominant actors are prone to fear that they will lose their upper rank, and, due to this status anxiety, resist the efforts of emergent powers to match or surpass them. The article begins by explaining why political actors deem status important and puts forward a theory of status anxiety in world politics. The more pronounced is this anxiety across status dimensions (economic and military capabilities as well as prestige), the higher the likelihood of conflict. This argument is then tested against competing theories of dominant power behaviour in two cases: the relations between France and Britain from the 1740s to Napoleon and those between Britain and Germany from the 1880s to World War One.

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Status has come recently into scholarly attention because of its relevance for explaining international conflict.[1] As a recent study found, standing represents 'by far the leading motive' to resort to force in more than 58 per cent or 62 of the 94 wars fought since 1648.[2] Status is well-established in studies of rising powers that argue that as the capabilities available to China, India, and Russia increase relative to the US, so does their demand for international recognition.[3] However, this literature depicts only half of the story of status in world politics, because it starts from the assumption that conflict is caused solely by a great power's rise. As Levy has suggested this is 'problematic', because conflict 'is a question of strategic interaction between

 1 Thomas Lindemann and Erik Ringmar (eds), *The International Politics of Recognition* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2011); Thomas Volgy et al. (eds), *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics: Global and Regional Perspectives* (New York: MacMillan, 2011); Reinhard Wolf, 'Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition', *International Theory* 3 (February 2011), pp. 105–42; Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, 'Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to US Primacy', *International Security*, 34 (Spring 2010), pp. 63–95; William Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War', *World Politics*, 61 (January 2009), pp. 28–57; Richard Ned Lebow, *Cultural Theory of International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
 2 Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 171–2.
 3 See inter alia Larson and Shevchenko, 'Status Seekers'; Volgy et al., *Major Powers*.

two or more states, and any analysis of the timing and initiation . . . must focus not only on the challenger, but also on the dominant power and on the strategic interaction between the two'.[4]

Accordingly, this article supplements current status research by examining the so far neglected response of the dominant state to the demands of emergent actors. This does not mean that analyses stressing the dominant state's intransigence towards rising contenders are absent. But no present theory explicitly traces this response to the dominant state's status concerns.[5] Instead, theories of hegemonic or of major war are built on the postulation that dominant states fear either for their physical security or for losing their material advantages.[6] By contrast, this article argues that a dominant state is also worried about its identity, values, and way of life, which are tied to the conservation of its high status. Consequently, status anxiety or fear of demotion on the part of the dominant actor has the value added of not only filling a gap in the status literature, but also of being able to explain more convincingly than contender theories rivalry that is perplexing from the sole point of view of the dominant state as gain- or security-seeker.[7]

Dominant power and rivalries

For a rising power, to challenge a stronger adversary before its rise is completed is self-defeating.[8] Conversely, after the two states have traded positions, such challenge from the former rising power becomes superfluous because it no longer has any reason to feel dissatisfaction. Thus, the pinnacle of statecraft for a rising power is to succeed the dominant state without having to fight it. Yet, this pinnacle has been seldom attained. From the Peloponnesian War to the Cold War, most contests over the top

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[4] Jonathan DiCicco and Jack Levy, 'The Power Transition Research Program', in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds), *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), p. 138.

[5] Exceptions who raise the point of the impact of status (or foreign policy role) for dominant states, but do not elaborate are Lebow, *Cultural Theory*; and Charles Doran, *Systems in Crisis: New Imperatives of High Politics at Century's End* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Morrow, 'The Logic of Overtaking', in Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke (eds), *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of the War Ledger* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

[6] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 197–8; Dale Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 4, 22. Power transition and global war are not considered among these alternative theories because they argue that wars are initiated by the contender, not by the dominant state, or/and depend on the degree of satisfaction of the rising power. On power transition see A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1968); A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Kugler and Lemke (eds), *Parity and War*; Ronald Tammen et al. (eds), *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2000); on global war see Karen Rasler and William Thompson, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle, 1490–1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

[7] Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity', pp. 29–30.

[8] This argument is emphasised both by power transition theory critics, who contend that the dominant state is more likely to initiate war, and by power transition proponents, who, with the exception of Organski's original formulation, argue that the contender will initiate war either post-transition or at the time of parity. Organski, *World Politics*, p. 333; Organski and Kugler, *War Ledger*, pp. 27–8; Daniel Geller, 'Relative Power, Rationality, and International Conflict', in Kugler and Lemke, *Parity and War*, pp. 132–3, 138–9; Jack Levy, 'Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China', in Robert Ross and Zhu Feng (eds), *China's Ascent: Power Security and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 26–7; Steve Chan, *China, the US, and the Power Transition Theory: A Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

position in the international hierarchy resulted in decades of rivalry. What accounts for this outcome? This article argues that dominant actors are likely to resist the efforts of upcoming powers to claim status superior to their own because they fear that they will lose their upper rank, a concern that this article refers to as status anxiety. The closer the rising power will get to supplant the dominant state, the more intense the latter's status anxiety, and the higher the likelihood of rivalry.

This is far from saying that status is unimportant for rising powers or that they are seldom aggressive. But their target is rarely the dominant state. Rising powers prefer softer opponents, whether waning great powers or weaker states.[9] In relation to the dominant state, rising powers prefer adopting a conciliatory approach, which would allow them to consolidate their position without triggering a clash.[10] When rising powers accept the risk of a rivalry pitting them against the dominant state, they do so only *after* the latter blocks their further advancement. Thus, while rising powers may choose to fight rather than stop their ascension, they would have no reason to fight as long as they are allowed to improve further their position in the international hierarchy. As Thucydides observed, it was the combination of the rise of Athenian power *and* the fear that this caused in Sparta that produced the Peloponnesian War. Accordingly, despite the traditional emphasis on shifts in the distribution of capabilities, the rivalry between Athens and Sparta is impossible to understand without extensive reference to Sparta's fears over status, that is to say, the unyielding response of the dominant state.[11]

This article does not seek to account for war, but rather for the initiation and continuation of positional rivalry among dominant states and their closest contenders. For such rivalries to escalate into war, multiple conditions have to be met, which may or may not be the actual case. First, the competition over status should take place across all major dimensions conferring status internationally: the rivals should therefore compete economically, militarily, and in terms of prestige, as well as see each other as the main status contender. In such contexts, the status anxiety of the dominant state is maximised, and this increases the risk of crises, and, hence, of confrontation. Second, the rivals are not likely to want war from the get-go, but rather to stumble into it. Thus, the argument could be made that wars originating in status rivalries are inadvertent wars, that is, authorised wars that are neither desired, nor anticipated by the participants at the onset of the crises that constitute their launching point.[12] These wars are triggered not by a direct attack of one side against the other, but rather by the intervention of the rising power against a weaker third

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[9] Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, pp. 546–7, 549–50; Lebow, *Why Nations Fight*, pp. 93–5.

[10] The rising power is eager to offer concessions knowing it is going to recoup them once it is stronger. Jack Levy, 'Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War', *World Politics*, 40 (October 1987), pp. 82–107, 96.

[11] Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests, and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[12] Lebow, *Why Nations Fight*, pp. 95–6; Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino, 'Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory', *International Relations*, 23:3 (2009), pp. 389–410, 400–1,406. For the definition of inadvertent wars distinguishing them from unauthorised wars see Alexander George (ed.), *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), p. 8. George mentions at least four possible causal sequences leading from crisis to inadvertent war: (1) the participants come to see the war as the inevitable; (2) a premium is placed on striking first; (3) the crisis constitutes the opportunity and legitimacy cover for preventive war; (4) one of the parties seeks to confront the other with a *fait accompli*. Ibid., pp. 545–50.

party, which, in turn, produces the counter-intervention of the dominant state.[13] Third, additional factors encouraging belligerence may come into play, the most significant likely being the lack of nuclear weapons, the existence and salience of territorial disputes, geographical proximity, an offence-defence balance favouring offence, and the absence on one or both sides of democratic institutions and of moderate leaders in office.[14] Hence, as the Cold War shows, not all rivalries over dominant status necessarily have to lead to war.

By comparison to war, rivalry refers to a contest posing a risk of militarisation (including therefore threats and militarised interstate disputes,) which occurs repeatedly between the same set of states that come to regard each other as enemies.[15] Rivalries may be of several types, the main ones being spatial, fought over territorial control, and positional, fought over the ordering of the international hierarchy. Spatial rivalries are the more common, but they are also more amenable to negotiated settlements; meanwhile, positional rivalries are more likely to be lasting because intangible stakes are harder to divide equitably.[16] In this latter category, status anxiety accounts especially for positional rivalry between dominant states and their nearest challengers.[17]

Dominant state refers to a power that surpasses the others in economic and military capabilities and prestige, but which is not strong enough to lay down the law to them, basically the overall strongest state in the system at a given time. However, a dominant state is not the same as a hegemon. Even though a dominant state is stronger, its lead on the other powers is not sufficient to confer it omnipotence; moreover, its superiority is not equally pronounced across all the dimensions conferring status among nations.[18]

The article is divided into three sections. The first section defines status and examines why states deem it important enough to confront others for it. The second section outlines the role played by status anxiety in shaping the dominant state's response to rising states' claims for advancement. Meanwhile, the third section overviews how status anxiety affects dominant states' response to upcoming challengers by considering the cases of relations between France and Britain from the 1740s to Napoleon, and relations between Britain and Germany from the 1880s to World War I.

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[13] For Lebow, hegemonic wars, meaning wars involving most of the great powers, are inadvertent (accidental) and are started by the intervention of either the dominant state or the rising power against a third party. However, wars originating in rivalries of status seem more likely to occur after an intervention from the rising power, which the dominant state then resists, because rising powers would not risk a serious clash imperilling their further ascension over a dominant state's intervention.

[14] John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics*, 30 (January 1978), pp. 167–214.

[15] This definition is a synthesis of the definitions for enduring rivalry and strategic rivalry. For the former see Paul Diehl and Gary Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 18–26; for the latter see Michael Colaresi, Karen Rasler, and William Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 25–8.

[16] Ibid., pp. 78–80; Vasquez, *War Puzzle Revisited*, pp. 80–2.

[17] This may add to the literature on causes of rivalries, since so far the initiation of rivalries has been attributed to a political shock, whether at the systemic level or concerning one side of the rivalry, or to territorial contiguity. Paul Diehl, 'Introduction', in Paul Diehl (ed.), *The Dynamics of Enduring Rivalries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), p. 14; Diehl and Goerz, *War and Peace*, pp. 149–51.

[18] Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity', pp. 97–103; Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

   This article should be construed as a plausibility probe seeking to determine if the status anxiety hypothesis is sufficiently warranted to justify further tests. The cases selected represent salient instances of prolonged rivalry involving dominant states experiencing decline relative to the second-ranked power, which make propitious testing grounds for the effect of status anxiety.[19] Selection bias is reduced, first, by considering the relations between Britain and the US, in which status anxiety was present on the British side and led to disputes without producing the expected rivalry outcome, which constitutes variation in the dependent variable; and second, by addressing the evolution of Franco-British and British-German relations over time from potential or fully-fledged allies to enmity, which represents variation in the independent variable, by showing the effect of the presence, absence, and intensification of status anxiety. Moreover, these cases are not easy tests, as they set up a 'three-cornered fight' between the historical record, the status anxiety model, and the competing theories that explain rivalry by reference to material gain and physical security.

Why do states want status?

Status refers to the rank an actor occupies in a given social group, based on its overall performance in multiple social dimensions.[20] As held by social identity and self categorisation theory, individuals define who they are as members of social groups: individual and collective identities are co-constitutive, not separate, let alone antithetical, as in theories such as that of crowd psychology or of groupthink where the group stifles the person.[21] An individual's personal identity cannot be divorced from his or her identity as member of a wider social group. This would be, as Turner put it, 'like Hamlet without the prince'.[22] Hence, since individuals define who they are through their relation to wider groups, it follows that they will only be able to achieve self-esteem by seeking a confirmation of their excellence from other members of society.[23]

[19] The British-German rivalry appears on both data sets constituted by operationalising rivalry as the occurrence of a given number of disputes in a certain number of years; and in data sets based on the mutual perception of the states as contenders/enemies. Colaresi, Rasler, and Thompson, *Strategic Rivalries*, p. 57; Diehl and Goertz, *War and Peace*, p. 145. The French-British rivalry does not appear in the Diehl and Goertz data set that only begins in 1815, but qualifies unambiguously, since from the 1740 to the 1810s, the parties were involved in about one war per decade. Moreover, the French-British rivalry figures in the recent list of rivalries compiled by Thompson, who argues that Paris and London remained rivals between 1731 and 1904. William Thompson and David Dreyer, *Handbook of International Rivalries, 1494–2010* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), pp. 46–8, also see pp. 48–9 on Britain and Germany.

[20] Herbert Hiram Hyman, *The Psychology of Status* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), p. 5.

[21] Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London: Routledge, 1988), chap. 2. For applications of social identity theory to International Relations see inter alia Larson and Shevchenko, 'Status Seekers'; Volgy et al. (eds), *Major Powers*; Jonathan Mercer, 'Anarchy and Identity', *International Organization*, 49 (Spring 1995), pp. 229–52.

[22] John Turner, 'Social Identification and Psychological Group Formation', in Henri Tajfel (ed.), *The Social Dimension: European Developments in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 518–38, esp. 526–7; Henry Tajfel and John Turner, 'The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior', in Stephen Worchel and William Austin (eds), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), pp. 7–24.

[23] Ibid., p. 16.

In order to attain and conserve such a positive public assessment, a social actor requires acknowledgment by others of his or her qualities and achievements. This confirmation, which is meant to signal preeminence and hence individual worth, is seen in instances of symbolic deferential behaviour such as allowing a higher-ranking actor precedence of passage, seating, or speech; being addressed by honorific formulas in communications spoken or written; being permitted unique access to a specific life-style; in the bestowal of exclusive privileges, such as the right to bear weapons, or to vote on certain issues; as well as in the exemption from common duties or punishment.[24]

Social actors do not require status solely because it adds to their pile of material resources or to their authority. Instead, human beings also seek status because of the psychological satisfaction they derive through achieving and conserving a sentiment of superiority by comparison to fellow actors. As Rosen writes, 'perhaps status matters, not because of what we get after we win, but because we enjoy *the process of beating people*', that is the very act of winning rather than the tangible consequences of victory.[25] To this extent, the results of status should be understood as more desirable as symbols of high ranking and thus, vicariously, of personal significance in a given society rather than as simple material perks. This is the frequent case in situations of overconsumption of luxury 'label' products where the artefact or service desired adds little to one's material well-being and results in inordinate costs; in the competitiveness of sports, games, and professional contests where the stakes are prevailing over a rival; or in scenarios such as road rage where disputes erupt over apparently trivial matters of precedence in behaviour or speech that nevertheless reflect on one's ranking.[26]

Yet, states are not the same as people because they lack the ability to experience emotions and because it remains unclear how the feelings of individuals aggregate in large social groups. However, the case can be made that decision-makers representing the state 'experience state emotions on its behalf', or, that there is an analogy between the behaviour of states and the psychological processes of individuals, so that states behave 'as if' they were persons.[27]

Furthermore, according to social identity and self categorisation theories, there is no clear boundary between individual and group identity. As such, individuals care not only about their ranking relative other individuals, but also about the standing of their groups relative to other groups. Thus, individuals routinely favour their in-groups over competitors both in the appreciation of qualities, the evaluation of results, and in the distribution of resources. The reason for this behaviour is that individuals are convinced that the high ranking of their group will also confer in turn commensurate elevated standing upon themselves. To quote Turner, 'there is a

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[24] Barry O'Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1999), pp. 190–3; Brian Turner, *Status* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 5–8.

[25] Stephen Peter Rosen, *War and Human Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 73.

[26] Ibid., pp. 92–3; Robert Frank, *Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails to Satisfy in an Era of Excess* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1999); Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1950), esp. p. 50; Roger Gould, *Collision of Wills: How Ambiguity About Social Rank Breeds Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[27] Alexander Wendt, 'The State as a Personal in International Theory', *Review of International Studies*, 30:2 (2004), pp. 289–316; Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, pp. 116–7.

tendency to define one's group positively in order to evaluate oneself favorably'.[28] Consequently, individuals derive satisfaction from the high rank achieved by their group and are similarly despondent when their group is shown to be inferior.[29]

This link between individual and group status does not hold solely for small groups, but is also relevant for large groups. In modern settings, individuals have a constant high stake in how their nation performs by comparison to other nations, because the higher the nation's standing, the stronger their pride as members of the nation and of its political manifestation, the state. To quote Greenfeld: 'nationality elevated every member of the community which it made sovereign. It guaranteed status. *National identity is, fundamentally, a matter of dignity*. It gives people reasons to be proud.'[30] That is to say that decision-makers have to care about their state's standing for two mutually reinforcing reasons. First, decision-makers identify with their state because they are not only members of the nation-state themselves, but also its chief representatives on the world stage.[31] Second, they would be compelled to cater to the sentiments of their domestic publics or/and of powerful domestic groups such as the military that regard status as a matter of national pride. To this extent, maintaining their own personal status in their respective domestic societies is tied to how high or low is the status of the state internationally. Moreover, even if leaders bow to domestic pressure for their own interest, the demand for status-conscientious policies derives from a high psychological investment of citizens in the international standing of their state.[32]

Status may also be significant because of two additional instrumental reasons: it adds to the coercive capacity of the state, and implicitly, to its security; and it increases the state's soft power, and therefore bolsters its legitimacy, which, in turn reduces its costs of exercising leadership. However, these forms of instrumentality are more complex than usually assumed. The straightforward connection between a state's policy and its perception by other states has been contested – states do not acquire a reputation for strength by firmness, or for weakness by giving in to their opponents, and consequently reputation is not proven as producing material advantages.[33] Thus, the repeated concern of decision-makers for status in the absence of verifiable material payoffs is easier to understand if status is conceptualised as sought foremost for the psychological satisfaction it provides, rather than for concrete

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[28] Turner, 'Social Identification', pp. 528–9; Brown et al., 'Social Comparison and Group Interest', pp. 190–1. This tendency is so pronounced that individuals discriminate in favour of their group even in contexts when they have no information or interaction with other group members.

[29] Robert Cialdini et al., 'Basking in Reflected Glory: Three (Footbal) Field Studies', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34:3 (1976), pp. 366–75; Mark Deschesne et al., 'Terror Management and the Vicissitudes of Sports Fan Affiliation', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 30 (2000), pp. 813–35; Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, p. 134.

[30] Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). Horowitz made a similar case, based on social identity theory, that ethnic conflict is motivated by the desire to protect or enhance one's group status relative other groups. Don Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1985), esp. chap. 4.

[31] It may even be the case that decision-makers are more concerned about their state's status than ordinary citizens because they constitute symbols of the state, because they are more status-sensitive due to their pursuit of public office, and because of their involvement in close interactions with foreign leaders against whom they measure their own status. Reinhard Wolf, 'Recognition and Disrespect between Persons and Peoples', in Lindemann and Ringmar (eds), *Struggle for Recognition*, p. 46.

[32] Ibid., pp. 46–7.

[33] Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Darryl Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

benefits alone. It is even conceivable that decision-makers who claim to act so as to manipulate the opponent's perceptions of their strength are motivated by deeper concerns for competitiveness in terms of status and for the related need to maintain domestic morale.[34]

Furthermore, status may add to the soft power of a state, but the pursuit of status may also undermine soft power.[35] For instance, it could be argued that the US intervened against Iraq in 2003 as a demonstration of strength in the aftermath of 9/11. The military success of the Iraq war enhanced (before the insurrection) the prestige of the US and contributed to its status. But at the same time, it affected negatively the soft power of the US in global polls.[36] Hence, while this article does not rule out that status may constitute a useful instrument, it regards status primarily as an end in itself.

Status anxiety

The status of an actor in a social hierarchy is determined through multiple ranking criteria.[37] Income, education, occupation, age, ethnicity, and gender are the most common such dimensions in contemporary societies. Therefore, status, in the sense of an overall position in society, has to be conceived as the 'complex of all such specific positions or statuses', some of which may contrast.[38] Status groups rank simultaneously high in some status dimensions, but low under other criteria, for instance high in terms of education, but low in terms of income or profession. A rich literature exists in both sociology and in International Relations on the disparity of social rankings, a condition usually referred to by the blanket term of status inconsistency.[39] However, not all status discrepancies are the same, which is why they might be divided in at least two different categories: status inconsistency and status anxiety.

Actors subjected to status inconsistency typically improve their position in some dimensions conferring status, but concomitantly still rank low in the others, and as a result seek to better their standing in those areas where they lag behind.[40] Defined as such, status inconsistency is a phenomenon affecting arrivistes. The improvement in other dimensions is necessary in order for the actor's general status to be increased, because excellence in one dimension is the basis of a claim to additional status, but does not guarantee recognition as would excellence in all dimensions. For this reason,

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[34] Steven Kull, *Minds at War: Nuclear Reality and the Inner Conflicts of Defense Policymakers* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

[35] See for the link between soft power and status Volgy et al. (eds), *Major Powers*, p. 10.

[36] On Iraq see Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, pp. 459–80; on soft power see Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

[37] Hogg and Abrams, *Social Identifications*, pp. 21–3; Tajfel and Turner, 'Social Identity Theory', p. 16.

[38] Hyman, *Psychology of Status*, pp. 5, 35–9, 91.

[39] Gerhard Lenski, 'Status Crystallization: A Non-Vertical Dimension for Social Status', *American Sociological Review*, 19 (August 1954), pp. 405–13; Johan Galtung, 'Structural Theory of Aggression', *Journal of Peace Research*, 1:2 (1964), pp. 95–119.

[40] Ibid., p. 99. Numerous quantitative studies link status inconsistency and war. Michael Wallace, *War and Rank among Nations* (Lexington, DC: Heath and Company, 1970); Maurice East, 'Status Discrepancy and Violence in the International System', in James Rosenau et al. (eds), *The Analysis of International Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), pp. 299–319; Manus Midlarsky, *On War: Political Violence in the International System* (New York: Free Press, 1975), chaps 5 and 6.

an actor cannot afford to specialise to the point of excelling in a single dimension but turning a blind eye to lagging performance in the others.

Meanwhile, status anxiety affects higher-ranked actors suffering a decline in one or several of the dimensions conferring status compared to a rising competitor. To this extent, such actors believe their overall rank in jeopardy, and therefore manifest a fear of demotion, or status anxiety.[41] Accordingly, status anxiety is not just any discrepancy between the statuses of a high-ranked actor, since not even dominant actors rank equally high in all dimensions – such complete domination is considerably rare. Instead, status anxiety refers to a particular discrepancy between statuses which appears as the result of the perceived competition of an actor threatening to overtake it in one or more areas. To exemplify, America's post-Cold War dominance is more pronounced in military capabilities than in economics, or in prestige – without generating status anxiety. But status anxiety will be created if the US appears on the verge of being overtaken by another state in any of these dimensions.[42]

Status inconsistency in an actor likely triggers status anxiety in another, since a status improvement for the former in one dimension entails at the same time a simultaneous reduction of the status available to the latter who is already higher-ranking. This is interpreted as an attack on its self-esteem and has to be opposed as a serious personal injury. As Tajfel and Turner argue: 'the dominant or high-status group too can experience insecure social identity. Any threat to the distinctively superior position of a group implies a potential loss of positive comparisons and possible negative comparisons, which must be guarded against.'[43] Consequently, status anxiety motivates a dominant actor to impede the new arrivals' advancement, to conserve superiority in the areas in which it is still ahead, and to recoup losses in those in which it has fallen behind.

Status anxiety in world politics

Three major hierarchies confer a polity international status. For a state to be dominant, it would have to lead in all these dimensions. These criteria consist of perceived military capabilities, economic capabilities, and prestige.[44] Prestige designates the perception that a state has achieved success in either peace or war, in terms of: (a) translating as close as possible its original political preferences into outcomes; and (b) delivering a result that is perceived as exceeding the performance of its competitors.[45] As Gilpin argued, prestige 'is achieved primarily through victory in war. The most prestigious members of the international system are those state that have most recently used military force or economic power successfully and have thereby imposed their

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[41] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage, 1955), pp. 131–73; Robert Doherty, 'Status Anxiety and American Reform: Some Alternatives', *American Quarterly*, 19 (Summer 1967), pp. 329–37; Alain de Botton, *Status Anxiety* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).

[42] Galtung, 'Structural Theory', pp. 96–7.

[43] Tajfel and Turner, 'Integrative Theory', p. 45.

[44] It is not capabilities, but their perception (correct or mistaken) that affects decision-making. William Wohlforth, 'The Perception of Power: Russia in the pre-1914 Balance', *World Politics*, 39 (April 1987), pp. 353–81.

[45] Prestige is not identical to status. Status refers to social rank, while prestige is defined as success in peace and war. Prestige is therefore one of the dimensions, in addition to military or economic capabilities, that confer status to a state internationally.

will on others.'[46] Throughout history a great power's credentials were revealed not through its hoarding of capabilities, but by surviving the crucial test of war against an already acknowledged great power. This reality continues to be acknowledged to some extent today, as the Correlates of War argue that great power standing depends not just on raw capabilities, but also on the perception as a *bona fide* member of the club by the other great powers.[47]

In a last ratio, only perceived achievements indicate whether capabilities' assessments are justified, superannuated, or too humble. In this way, states may be exposed as a paper tiger (Mussolini's Italy), a declining power (France in Indochina and Algeria), or a great power-in-the-making (Japan after the Russo-Japanese War). By extension, prestige is generated also by success off the battlefield in diplomatic encounters in which a state manages to promote an initiative, prevent other states from following policies harmful to its interests, or compel dissenters to bow to its wishes. Therefore, a state's perceived victories will increase its status, while perceived defeats will diminish it correspondingly.

Discrepancies of status occur in world politics whenever a state experiences an incongruity of rankings under the three hierarchies mentioned, and seeks to balance or rebalance them in term of its highest status.[48] Accordingly, the better a rising power performs under one criterion, the more its feat generates an entitlement for higher ranking, and hence the stronger its motivation to improve its position in the other status dimensions as well. To illustrate this condition of 'uneven capabilities portfolios', a rising power experiences status inconsistency in those contexts in which its growing economic capabilities are not matched by a comparative high position in military forces or *vice versa*.[49] This argument also applies to the disconnect between military or economic power and prestige – in order to be granted full recognition as a great power, a state that improves in one status area must also prove more successful than its competitors by putting these capabilities to full use. To quote Lebow, 'rising powers ... need to demonstrate their possession of qualities that warrant their acceptance ... the principal qualification is military success'.[50]

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[46] Gilpin, *War and Change*, pp. 32–3.

[47] Volgy et al. (eds), *Major Powers*, p. 5; Jack Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), pp. 10–13; Melvin Small and David Singer, 'The Composition and Status Ordering of the International System: 1815–1940', *World Politics*, 18 (January 1966), pp. 236–82, 238–9; David Singer, 'Reconstructing the Correlates of War Data Set on Material Capabilities of States, 1816–1985', *International Interactions*, 14:2 (1988), pp. 115–32, 119–20.

[48] This operationalisation of status discrepancies is DISTINCT from the models of Midlarsky, Gilpin, and Volgy, which ultimately are reducible to two dimensions: capability (a sum of various resources) and prestige (usually measured by the number of accredited diplomatic missions in a state's capital). Here it should be pointed out that Volgy and contributors actually argue that multiple dimensions – economic and military capabilities, foreign policy activities, and status attribution – confer status internationally. But when operationalising status, they conflate capabilities and activities in one category, which they then contrast with status attribution (the equivalent of prestige,) *de facto* reaffirming the familiar two dimensional model. Thus, for these authors, status inconsistency leads to both status underachievers, whose prestige is less than their capabilities, and to status overachievers, whose prestige exceeds their capabilities. By contrast, in this article's model, which follows Lenski and Galtung, status discrepancies occur when economic, military capabilities, and prestige, understood as success in peace and war, are misaligned. Hence, in this latter model, there are more than just two scenarios of possible discrepancies. Volgy et al., (eds), *Major Powers*, pp. 7, 10–2, 16–20; Gilpin, *War and Change*, p. 33; Midlarsky, *On War*, pp. 94–7, 116–7.

[49] Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity, Status, Great Power War', p. 39, fn. 25.

[50] Lebow, *Why Nations Fight*, pp. 94–5.

Conversely, if a higher-ranked state's standing in *any* of these three dimensions is seen as at risk due to the competition of a rising state, it will experience status anxiety.[51] Therefore, status anxiety will prompt dominant states to oppose the claims for equality or for superiority on the parts of upcoming powers.[52] This intransigence is to be explained by the fact that, as prospect theory suggests, status anxiety is likely to be more severely resented than status inconsistency because losses are resented harder than gains, which implies that diminishing status will also be more significant for an actor than further advancement. As a result, dominant powers are likely to be more risk-acceptant than rising powers in order to protect their established status, while rising powers are likely to prove more risk-averse, and, hence, more conciliatory.[53]

A dominant state can experience a loss of capabilities or of prestige without necessarily experiencing status anxiety. First, a state may experience an absolute decline compared to its previous performance without suffering status anxiety, if everyone else also experiences a similar decline. Second, status anxiety will be nil if the state declines by comparison to a state that is not seen as a status competitor. For instance, the US does not suffer status anxiety *vis-à-vis* Qatar, even though America's economy stagnates while Qatar's experiences the world's highest growth in GDP. Therefore, decline does not always entail status anxiety. For status anxiety to be present, decision-makers must perceive capabilities and prestige, whether correctly or incorrectly, as falling *compared to* a competitor state. As Tajfel and Turner write: 'in-groups do not compare themselves with every cognitive available out-group: the out-group must be perceived as a relevant comparison group'.[54] Consequently, dominant actors do not enter rivalries over status against every other member of society, but against a set of very specific, and in fact similar rivals in their *immediate* social vicinity, that is to say, other great powers.[55]

Yet, not all great power competitors would generate the same amount of status anxiety. Status anxiety will be the more intense, the more the upcoming state threatens catching up in more dimensions. Therefore, a state that suffers a decline relative a rising power in both military and economic dimensions will resent more status anxiety than a state suffering a decline in the economic dimension alone. Furthermore, status anxiety caused by competitors that rank third and lower will be reduced

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[51] It is conceivable that a state may resent simultaneously status inconsistency AND status anxiety, which makes it important to tell these two drives apart since they lead to different policies toward different actors. Germany before World War I was in the peculiar situation of seeking advancement due to status inconsistency because of the rise of its capabilities compared to Britain's; but, at the same time, may have also been exhibiting status anxiety by being worried of falling behind a rising Russia. Accordingly, Germany was conciliatory towards Britain, engaging for all intents and purposes in a détente from 1912 onwards, and belligerent towards Russia. See for a similar argument in which Germany's 'sudden rise turned to decline', Doran, *Systems in Crisis*, pp. 79–89, 121–40; Charles Doran, 'World War I From the Perspective of Power Cycle Theory', in Lindemann and Ringmar (eds) *International Politics of Recognition*, pp. 119–21.

[52] Since equality implies loss of status, it will also be resisted by the dominant power. For an illustration of this reluctance to accept equality see Melvin Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[53] See for the application of prospect theory to standing Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, p. 31, 537–9; Jeffrey Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[54] Tajfel and Turner, 'Social Identity Theory', pp. 16–7, 21.

[55] Leon Festinger, 'A Theory of Social Comparison Processes', *Human Relations*, 7:2 (1954), pp. 117–40, 121–3, 135–6; Tajfel and Turner, 'Integrative Theory', pp. 35–8.

relatively to that generated by the next-in-line power. Accordingly, for a dominant state, the perceived *closest competitor across dimension*s would be seen as the most threatening to its rank.

A good illustration comes from Anglo-American relations at the cusp of the twentieth century.[56] Great Britain certainly did not resent zero status anxiety in the face of the rise of the US. Britain had been surpassed in industrial output by the US since the 1890s, notably in sectors which had constituted acknowledged British strong points, such as the production of iron and steel and of textiles and the extraction of coal.[57] Frictions also developed over trade competition and over the 'American invasion' of US acquisition of British firms.[58] Furthermore, Britain was uneasy about the extension of the US influence in the Western Hemisphere. Britain initially rejected America's demands for arbitration in the context of the British dispute with Venezuela of 1895, with the secretary of state for colonies Joseph Chamberlain advising the prime minister Lord Salisbury to make clear to Washington that 'Great Britain is an American Power with a territorial area greater than that of the United States themselves and a title acquired prior to the independence of the United States.' Salisbury held after the eventual peaceful settlement of the crisis the view that 'a war with America – not this year but in the not distant future – has become something more than a possibility'. Moreover, Britain showed discomfort over America's pretensions to control an isthmian canal. As the Admiralty argued: 'in the case of war between Great Britain and the United States, the navy of the United States would derive such benefits from the existence of the canal, that it is not really in the interest of Great Britain that it should be constructed'.[59]

Yet, British status anxiety did not translate into an enduring rivalry: Britain ended up by settling differences on terms more often than not outright favourable to the US, such as the acceptance of arbitration over Venezuela, of the Roosevelt corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, and of the building of the Panama Canal, as well as concessions in the Alaska boundary dispute with Canada, and the withdrawal of British naval forces in 1906, thus eventually yielding to Washington the determining voice in the Western Hemisphere. At least part of the explanation for this British conciliatory line consists in that a dominant Britain prioritised among rising status competitors. Accordingly, Britain concentrated on those that possessed a more diverse, and, hence, more dangerous portfolio in terms of world trade, naval building, and prestige-seeking in areas of primary importance to the British Empire. Indeed, with no notion of GDP in the 1900s, trade rather than industrial production was the key statistic for Britain, and in that respect, the share of global trade of the US was half that of Britain's. Meanwhile, second-placed Germany was seen as the stronger competitor for international markets.[60] In terms of warship tonnage, the US remained throughout

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[56] For a similar point of view see William Thompson, 'The Evolution of a Great Power Rivalry: The Anglo-American Case', in William Thompson (ed.), *Great Power Rivalries* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 201–21.

[57] Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895–1914* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 8–9; Philip Bagwell and G. E. Mingway, *Britain and America, 1850–1939: A Study of Economic Change* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 153–6, 158–64; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Contest From 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 243–4.

[58] Ibid., pp. 244–5; Perkins, *Great Rapprochement*, pp. 122–6, chap. 7.

[59] Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815–1908* (London: Longmans, 1967), pp. 339, 347–8; Perkins, *Great Rapprochement*, pp. 14–5, chap. 7.

[60] Perkins, *Great Rapprochement*, pp. 121–2.

the 1900s the third-ranked power, behind the Franco-Russian alliance, and after 1905, behind Germany.[61] Finally, for all its ambition, the US remained a peripheral power, which sought to gain ascendance in a region of lower priority to the maintenance of British dominance. As the British press put it: 'that we should suffer in the end by conceding that ambition is unthinkable … we ought not to be found in America's way where our interests are secondary and hers supreme'.[62] To be certain, ideally, Britain would have preferred to be able to stand up to the US as well – but it could not do so without using its full power, and thus becoming vulnerable to more formidable status competitors.[63] As the British War Office suggested in 1903: 'in the event of war with the United States coinciding with a time of uncertain relations between this country and a European Power, the conclusion appears to be unavoidable that the present strength of the H. M.'s navy would not to suffice to defend on the high seas the interests of the Empire … [hence] the contingency of war with the United States should be avoided at all hazards, unless we are assured of the neutrality of all the European maritime Powers.'[64] Consequently, the relatively reduced status anxiety Britain felt towards a lower-ranked US allowed for a tolerant line, in contrast to the intransigence manifested in regards to Germany, seen as the greater status threat.

The more status competition will extend to additional dimensions, the more status anxiety will intensify, and the more the chances of a continuing rivalry will increase. Indeed, a dominant power falling behind in a single dimension is more likely to seek to regain its position by harnessing additional resources and cutting costs rather than by resorting to threats or actual violence. But the more the upcoming state will seem on the verge of replicating its initial success, the more it will threaten the status of the dominant state. Typically, in modern International Relations, rivalry will undergo a sequential progression from benign trade and financial competition, triggered by the rising state's economic growth, to more serious arms races, caused by the rising actor's efforts to match (and protect) its economic accomplishments in the military field, to open hostility, caused by the rising power's eventual assertive policy toward third parties.[65] The reasons for this exact sequence may have to do with the change brought by the industrial revolution in military affairs. If in preindustrial times, a polity could convert military force into economic bounty and *vice versa* more easily, as well as capitalise on victory in war through conquest, in present days an efficient military requires preliminary strong economic foundations; and, furthermore, the conquest of territory brings steadily diminishing economic returns. As a result, a growing state has to develop first economically, then militarily, and only then it is able to contemplate an assertive foreign policy. The problem is that as it is undergoing this sequence, the rising power is likely to elicit increasing status anxiety on the part of the dominant state.[66] The dominant state will not fear

[61] Aaron Friedberg, *Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 153; Kennedy, *Great Powers*, p. 203.

[62] Perkins, *Great Rapprochement*, pp. 184–5.

[63] Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power*, pp. 342–3. As Bourne writes: 'the growth of American power in the late nineteenth century… was at first by no means welcome to the policy-makers in Britain; rather its existence had to be accepted in a world where crucial dangers loomed elsewhere'.

[64] Ibid., pp. 362, 385; Friedberg, *Weary Titan*, pp. 185–8.

[65] For the point that economic rivalry is not sufficient for militarised rivalry to emerge, see Jack Levy and Salvatore Ali, 'From Commercial Competition to Strategic Rivalry to War: The Evolution of the Anglo-Dutch Rivalry, 1609–52', in Diehl (ed), *Dynamics*, pp. 29–63.

[66] Gilpin, *War and Change*, pp. 123–5, 162–5.

a direct attack on its territory, but will be concerned that, by allowing a free hand to the rising power, it will *de facto* abdicate its superior rank. Therefore, a situation of ambiguity over the proper distribution of status emerges between the declining dominant state and its nearest challenger, which is likely to generate rivalry.

Evidence

What kind of evidence would confirm the status anxiety hypothesis? One should be aware of the pitfalls of monocausality, not in the least because there are inevitable overlaps between status and security, since as rivalry over status heats up, the risk of violence also increases. Nonetheless, there are several tests that could be met in order to assess: (a) the presence of status anxiety; and (b) its relevance compared to explanations based on security and material gains.

First, in order for status anxiety to be present, one should encounter evidence that it was the dominant state's intransigence that affected the initiation and the continuation of rivalry; while there should also be evidence of the rising contender conciliating the dominant state. Second, since status anxiety refers to the subjective perception of falling behind a competitor, it makes sense to monitor the statements of decision-makers, such as official documents, public speeches, private correspondence, and memoirs. The presence of status anxiety would be confirmed by decision-makers' concern as to the deterioration of their state's status relative to a competitor and by worries as to the prospect of being supplanted by the upcoming power. The statements should also exhibit growing status anxiety as the competition between states encompasses additional dimensions. Conversely, lack of such evidence would weaken the status anxiety hypothesis.

Third, in order to compensate for ambiguous or disingenuous statements, the case studies also employ counterfactuals to determine whether the policies adopted by the dominant state were consonant with alternative theories that explain rivalry by reference to material gains and security.[67] Therefore, if security is paramount for the dominant state, one would find policies reflecting a heightened sense of physical threat; while, if material gains are involved, one would see policies aimed at securing outlying territorial possessions or/and trade. Contradicting evidence would weaken these interpretations, as would the presence of negotiations between parties to breech differences or even to create alliances, which would demonstrate that material considerations encouraged compromise rather than rivalry.

A final proviso must be made concerning statements by French and British decision-makers that reflect concern for the upsetting of the balance of power by the rising state, and as such may expose a long-term security risk, but may also convey concern for the loss of dominant status. Both interpretations may not be mutually exclusive, since decision-makers 'may try to balance power while at the same time struggling to alter their status in the global hierarchy'.[68] However, even as they two

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[67] James Fearon, 'Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science', *World Politics*, 43 (January 1991), pp. 169–95, 178. As Fearon contends: 'arguments about the relative importance of possible causes become arguments about the relative plausibility of different counterfactual scenarios'.

[68] William Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 138, 24–5, 135–6, 304–6.

interpretations remain difficult to tell apart, the status anxiety model may be to some extent more warranted.

The balance of power model assumes that the most dangerous distribution of power is an asymmetrical one, in which a state possesses significantly more capabilities (and presumably status) relative its competitors. Therefore, as long as the distribution of power between states is even, no security threat is present. But for hegemonic theories, such as status anxiety, the opposite is the case: the steeper the disparity of capabilities and prestige, the more stable will the international hierarchy be. Hence, the flatter the hierarchy becomes due to the emerging symmetry in status between the declining dominant state and its main contender, the higher the danger of rivalry.[69] The point is that, in both cases examined, the dominant state and the next-in-line power were almost level in terms of status and capabilities, which, if balance of power logic applied, should have resulted in mutual forbearance. To this extent, the French and British invocations of the balance of power may represent efforts to legitimise the dominant power's resistance to the rising power.

France versus Britain

Dominant state intransigence

From 1743 to 1815, France and Britain were almost continuously at war. Peace was kept only between 1763 and 1778, and the sole reason it lasted that long was that France felt that it had to wait so as to launch the next war from a superior position of Franco-Spanish naval strength.[70]

France remained throughout this interval the dominant albeit declining power.[71] By 1750, the kingdom fielded what was perceived as Europe's strongest ground force of 160,000 soldiers. By Napoleon's reign the Napoleonic Grande Armée counted, due to the Revolution's introduction of the levee *en masse*, the largest force on the continent: 700,000 men. French economic production, principally due to its agricultural output, was the equivalent of double the production of Great Britain.[72] Finally, in terms of prestige, France was recognised in the 1740s as the arbiter of Europe, and although defeated in the Seven Years' War, it resumed its supremacy in this dimen-

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[69] Ibid., pp. 11–14; William Wohlforth, Stuart Kaufman, and Richard Little, 'Introduction: Balance and Hierarchy in International Systems', in William Wohlforth, Stuart Kaufman, and Richard Little (eds), *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 18–19; Jack Levy, 'War and Peace', in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth Simmons (eds), *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 354–5.

[70] François Crouzet, 'The Second Hundred Years' War: Some Reflections', *French History*, 10 (1996), pp. 432–50.

[71] For assessments of French preeminence see Derek McKay and H. M. Scott, *The Rise of the Great Powers, 1648–1815* (New York: Longman, 1983); Jeremy Black, *From Louis XIV to Napoleon: The Fate of a Great Power* (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp. 90, 124.

[72] François Crouzet, *Britain Ascendant: Comparative Issues in Franco-British Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Tim Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648–1815* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007); Paul Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 35–41. However, France's economic advantage was undermined by a venal and antiquated taxation system, which led to a higher British extraction capacity. Britain also surpassed France in industrial and technological development as well as number of ships. Thus, as Crouzet argues, while France might have been the stronger country from a mercantilist production perspective, Britain was, nonetheless, the more developed, richer country.

sion under the Directorate, the Consulate, and the Empire. Moreover, French decision-makers thought as France as dominant, being firmly convinced of the French exclusive right to supremacy. Accordingly, when France slipped behind Britain in the Seven Years' War, this was seen as an incomprehensible anomaly in the 'natural' order of things. In the words of the French Foreign Minister the duc de Choiseul: 'I am completely astounded that England ... is dominant ... One might reply that it is a fact: I must concur; but as it is impossible, I shall continue to hope that what is incomprehensible will not be eternal.'[73]

Out of the five wars of this period, four were initiated by France (1743; 1754; 1778; 1792). The one exception, the war of 1803, constituted preemption on the part of London in the face of unacceptable pretensions raised by Napoleon, which were deemed a pretext to resume hostilities.[74] While war is not rivalry, this pattern confirms the status anxiety model, because while the French side was routinely the more aggressive, the British were more willing to compromise on terms that were more often than not considered acceptable, if not downright favourable to France. Perhaps the best such instance was the treaty of Amiens of 1802, by which Britain agreed to *de facto* French supremacy in Western Europe and notably in the Netherlands, while also carving out a French colonial role. Yet, Amiens failed due to French insistence on effecting even greater gains at Britain's expense, consonant with Napoleon's desire to eliminate Britain as a rival world power.[75]

French status anxiety and rivalry escalation

French elites fully realised their country's decline compared to Britain, and feared this prospect. As far back as the peace of Utrecht of 1713, France expressed uneasiness with the economic growth and increasing colonial ambitions of Britain. In 1714, a memorandum to the French Foreign Minister the marquis de Torcy cautioned that French manufactures and trade will die out due to British competition, so that France will become dependent on Britain, just as Spain had become dependent on France. As a consequence of this growth, Britain was thought to eventually 'become formidable through an increase in population, employment, and riches'. By the 1730s, the view had become commonplace among French commentators that Britain had caught up France economically.[76] Consequently, the French worried openly that 'the financial and maritime power of the English, which gets every day larger and more dangerous' was strong enough 'to destroy or at the least disturb the trades in which France has hitherto held her own'. The British eventual goal was thus 'to encroach upon France ... and keep her subordinate'. In 1748, another Foreign Ministry memorandum suggestively entitled 'On the English Project for a Universal Monarchy' argued that Britain's push for maritime and trade supremacy was directed at achieving dominant power status. In 1750, the governor of New France the marquis de la Gallisonière warned that 'if anything can, in fact, destroy the superiority of

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[73] Edmond Dziembowski, *Un Nouveau Patriotisme Français, 1750–1770* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), pp. 224–32, also see pp. 83–6; 232–3; 238–40.

[74] Robert and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 2007), pp. 109–10.

[75] Schroeder, *Transformation*, pp. 226–30.

[76] Crouzet, *Britain Ascendant*, p. 125; Dziembowski, *Nouveau Patriotisme Français*, pp. 267–311.

France in Europe, it is the English naval forces' since they could be used to seize French colonies, whose wealth 'would certainly give them superiority in Europe'.[77]

The leitmotif in these statements is that British naval and commercial competition represented an indication of a concerted British effort to usurp France's rightful position at the top of the international hierarchy. Colonies and ships were deemed important less as objectives in themselves, than as factors determining the rank of a state in the international hierarchy. Even Choiseul, one of the few French decision-makers to argue for a naval strategy, was only doing so because of his belief that navies and colonies were essential for a nation to remain supreme in the European system. As a Foreign Ministry memorandum contended: 'the possession of these lands (the Americas) will confer a decisive superiority to the nation that will be able to keep them'.[78]

To this extent, for French decision-makers, the Franco-British rivalry was foremost a confrontation over the apportionment of international status. For instance, Choiseul wrote to the French ambassador in Madrid that the Seven Years' War was the most interesting war France had undertaken in the last centuries, since this was a question of remaining the first power or becoming the second.[79] This was not an isolated view. The former French foreign minister, the Maréchal de Noailles argued to Louis XV that 'the English, Sire, are ... the most dangerous and most formidable enemies of France, a haughty nation, jealous of Your Majesty's greatness and power, pretending to dispute with you the first rank in Europe, to equal your power on land, and dominate entirely at sea'.[80] Yet another memorandum from 1760 made the case that Britain's cardinal sin was the belief it could ever usurp French supremacy in the ranking of powers; and in 1762 the foreign ministry argued that due to 'unforeseeable circumstances' in the war, 'the rank of the two powers shifts, as it happens when one power rises and the other declines' and urged that France should 'work relentlessly to get up from this first weakening step'.[81]

Accordingly, France's paramount objective was to defend its status by a sound defeat of the presumptuous British contender. In this respect, Choiseul was perfectly explicit in his ambassadorial instructions: France would 'play in Europe the role suitable to its seniority, dignity, and its greatness'. This role consisted in 'humiliating any power that would try to rise above France, whether by arrogating to itself an unjust preeminence, or whether by seeking to steal away its influence and credit in general affairs'.[82]

Status anxiety is also detectable in French policy following defeat in the Seven Years' War. Defeat prompted France into an obsessive course of political revanche, aimed to restore its preponderance through cutting Britain down to size, as one memorandum wishfully argued in 1777: 'in a few years [Britain] will fall to the second or third rank of European powers without hope of ever rising again'.[83]

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[77] Ibid., pp. 227–41; Crouzet, *Britain Ascendant*, pp. 129–30; Daniel Baugh, 'Withdrawing from Europe: Anglo-French Maritime Geopolitics, 1750–1800', *International History Review*, 20 (March 1998), pp. 1–32, 14–16.

[78] Ibid., pp. 18–9; 'Mémoire de Monsieur de Choiseul Remis Au Roi en 1765', in Pierre Étienne Bourgeois de Boyne, *Journal Inédit, 1765–1766* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), pp. 447–77; Dziembowski, *Nouveau Patriotisme Français*, pp. 258–9.

[79] Ibid., p. 214.

[80] Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 116.

[81] Dziembowski, *Nouveau Patriotisme Français*, p. 232.

[82] Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *Choiseul: Naissance de la Gauche* (Paris: Perrin, 1998), p. 63.

[83] Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 156.

'Providence has marked this moment for the humiliation of England', thought the Comte de Vergennes, Choiseul's successor, during the American War of independence, while the French foreign ministry expressed the view that 'the year 1778 will decide the fate of England and the predominance of France'.[84]

To be certain, French international behaviour post-1789 was far more complex than just revanche, so this article makes no claim to picture the whole of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars as the consequence of French status anxiety in relation to Britain.[85] Nevertheless, achieving/restoring French superiority remained a pillar of Franco-British relations until 1815. For instance, as Schroeder writes, the goal for the French invasion of the Low Countries in 1792 was 'to create for France a protective glacis out of its neighbors and compel its enemies to recognize its due status in European affairs. This would make the revolution as well as the state secure – not a revolutionary but a normal goal. Security always means more than safety against military threats, and includes protection for a state's and a people's values, status, and way of life.'[86] In the same logic, Napoleon was using justifications for war against Britain that would not have been out of place in 1754. As he argued, 'all my wars came from England', meaning that it was British commercially-driven aggressiveness that sought to destroy France, since the 'English interest demands that France be reduced to the rank of secondary power.' While Napoleon entertained at times the prospect of power-sharing with his rivals, especially Russia, next-in-line Britain remained the one enemy that had to be humiliated through total defeat.[87] Hence, in this respect, Republican and Empire France's foreign policy represented a continuation of French intransigence towards Britain.

There is also evidence indicating how French status anxiety worsened over time. For the span of the 1720s, far from being rivals, France and Britain were formal allies, and preserved a cool *entente* in the early 1730s even after the alliance expired. But in the late 1730s, relations took a turn for the worse, finally leading to open war. The competition between the two remained chiefly economic and colonial through the 1720s and early 1730s.[88] But, by the end of the latter decade, France and Britain were also engaged in competitive warship construction.[89] This was as well the timeframe for a growing Britain to launch an assault in 1738 on the decrepit colonial empire of Spain in the attempt to gain further trade advantages with the new world. This was seen by France, even though its own possessions were not the British direct targets, as a clear indication that Britain aimed at supplanting it as a dominant power by building a stronger colonial empire in the Caribbean, India, and North America and led to the dispatch of a counter-expedition even before the War of the Austrian succession started.

[84] Ibid., pp. 158, 161.

[85] Norman Hampson, *The Perfidy of Albion: French Perceptions of England during the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), chaps 5 and 7.

[86] Schroeder, *Transformation*, pp. 113–16.

[87] Ibid., pp. 238–41; Napoleon, *Pensées Politiques et Sociales* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), pp. 313–20. Napoleon entertained a lifelong Anglophobia arguing that Britain should have ended up as an appendage to France, not much different from Corsica.

[88] Pierre Pluchon, *Histoire de la Colonisation Française: Le Premier Empire Colonial* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), pp. 135–9, 161–2.

[89] The budget of the French navy tripled from 1728 to 1740, while still representing half of Britain's expenses. Walter Dorn, *Competition for Empire: 1740–1763* (New York: Harper, 1940), pp. 115–16.

Material gains and security

The reason why France responded with hostility towards Britain's rise had little to do, contrary to the expectation of systemic war theories, with French greed for territory or colonies or with French physical insecurity.

Prior to 1789, France understood its role as a satisfied power. This *status quo* orientation was not disingenuous, as France passed the opportunity of territorial gains with the exceptions of Lorraine and of Corsica, notably returning without compensation the once-much-sought Austrian Netherlands (present Belgium) to Austria in 1748, contemplating a federation of Italian states, and concluding accords with several of the German states and Swiss cantons. France therefore did not seek additional gains at the moment of the rivalry initiation.[90]

Even after 1789, an otherwise imperialist France was not unduly interested in acquiring Britain's colonial empire. The reason was that for French leaders from Louis XV to Napoleon, colonies were valuable only insofar as they could add by their income to French position in Europe.[91] Throughout the period, France disposed of its colonies as bargaining chips or showed little interest in their protection, recovery, conservation, or development. To exemplify, in 1763, in what was at the time described as a diplomatic masterstroke, France gave up its claim to Canada for a return of the Caribbean sugar islands, and, with no pressure to do so, ceded in the bargain Louisiana to Spain. In between the 1770s and the 1790s, France did not attempt to recapture its lost colonies from Britain or to protect its remaining positions in India and the Caribbean. After regaining Louisiana and a futile attempt to restore slavery in Haiti, Napoleon had no qualms in selling the first to the US in 1803 and then abandoning the latter to rebels. Similar cavalier neglect characterised Napoleonic policy in relation to colonial endeavours in India and Egypt. Moreover, France never made an attempt to develop the naval forces that would have allowed it to defend its colonies or its trading convoys in a war against Britain, resorting instead to a more short-term profitable *guerre de course*.[92] Accordingly, French colonial interests cannot account for French continued enmity towards Britain.

Moreover, French and British material interests were by no means irreconcilable. As Black argues: 'these were not two powers competing for the same section of road: in many respects France and Britain could pursue separate goals. Yet there was an inherent ''structural'' struggle for primacy, and this exacerbated some of the ''spatial'' disputes.'[93] The two great powers had considered the sizable benefits of cooperation for two decades in the aftermath of the Utrecht settlement. With peace and stability as their goal, France and Britain found common ground in acting as allies in the 1720s against revisionist Spain and ambitious Austria, defeating the first, and bullying the second into renouncing its maritime projects for aggrandisement.[94] Therefore, a spheres of influence arrangement was not impractical for both rivals. Britain did not object to an incremental increase in French influence in the Low

[90] Black, *From Louis XIV to Napoleon*, pp. 91–5, 124.
[91] Ibid., pp. 27–32; Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, pp. 110–14.
[92] Ibid., pp. 199–209, 254–62; Pluchon, *Histoire*, chap. 5; Dorn, *Competition*, pp. 102–21.
[93] Jeremy Black, 'Enduring Rivalries: Britain and France', in Thompson (ed.), *Great Power Rivalries*, pp. 254–68, 264.
[94] McKay and Scott, *Rise of the Great Powers*, pp. 101–31; Black, *From Louis XIV to Napoleon*, pp. 70–84.

Countries, Germany, and Italy in the 1730s or at Amiens, and France could (and perhaps should) have reciprocated by allowing Britain a blank cheque outside Europe.[95]

As far as security is concerned, Britain's stakes were high, as its survival as an independent power was seen as tied to its trade and its navy.[96] But this was not valid for France. France could have invaded Britain, as it attempted to do in 1759 and 1805, and planned for in 1744 and 1778. But Britain would have found it impossible to invade France. France was concerned about its colonies, but this fear stemmed from their status significance rather than from any strategic preoccupation. A confirming piece of evidence is that French naval strategy was unmistakably offensive, not defensive. This is to say that the chief reason for France to have a navy was so that it could take the war to Britain, rather than to protect French territory against British depredations. As the comte de Maurepas, the minister for the Marine put it in the 1740s: 'I submit that it is principally on the sea that one must make war on a maritime power ... I agree that in France land forces are necessary ... but are not naval forces equally so when the war is against a maritime power?'[97]

Finally, France claimed it was mindful of the impact of the rise of Britain for Europe's balance of power. However, Britain's rising capabilities were not so formidable as to pose a danger to Europe's combined forces: instead Britain and France were neck-to-neck in terms of power and prestige, which led to ambiguities about their proper rank. Thus, France supported the *status quo* against Britain chiefly because the existing distribution of status worked in its own favour as the dominant state in the system.[98]

To sum up: France's rank had declined compared to Britain and, as a result, France felt its status increasingly under threat, which led to London becoming its natural enemy. This is not to say that French or British foreign policy can be reduced to this rivalry: each power's foreign policy agenda was much wider. But the Franco-British conflict represented the central alignment of world politics: while other states could switch alliances, France and Britain remained implacable rivals.

Britain versus Germany

Dominant state intransigence

From the 1880s to 1914, Britain's position in the international hierarchy was increasingly that of a beleaguered state clinging to a steadily eroding position. As Joseph Chamberlain put it, Britain had become 'the weary titan [that] staggers under the too vast orb of its fate'.[99] However, this does not imply that Britain was no longer dominant, as it was still the prime industrial, trading, colonial, and naval power.[100] According to Kennedy, due to the 'combination of financial resources, productive

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[95] Schroeder, *Transformation*, pp. 174–6, 296–8; Black, *From Louis XIV to Napoleon*, p. 180.
[96] Blanning, *Pursuit of Glory*, pp. 109–11.
[97] Dorn, *Competition*, p. 117. Also see fn. 79.
[98] Black, *From Louis XIV to Napoleon*, pp. 120–1.
[99] Joseph Chamberlain, 'Opening Speech at Colonial Conference, London, June 30, 1902' quoted in Julian Amery, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol. 5 (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 31.
[100] Kennedy, *Great Powers*, pp. 148–9, 154–5; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 292.

capacity, imperial possessions, and naval strength … [Britain] was still probably the "number-one" world power'.[101] By 1914, Britain's manufacturing output was 13.6 per cent versus 32 per cent for the US and 14.8 per cent for Germany, but in trade Britain was still first with a share of world trade of 17 per cent compared to 13 per cent for second-placed Germany. Britain was the number one power at sea with more than double the warship tonnage of Germany: 2,714,000 versus 1,305,000 gross tonnage. Germany's own superiority in land forces was far less pronounced versus Russia and France, since although it had a higher capacity to mobilise and spent more on its army, it ranked third in standing armies with 812,000 troops as opposed Russia's 1.3 million and France's 846,000 (Britain ranked fifth with 381,000 soldiers.) British prestige remained high on the wake of diplomatic successes in securing the ententes; and moreover, Britain remained by far the world's most successful coloniser, with an empire stretching over 12 million square miles of which a third were acquired since 1876. By contrast, Germany's barely exceeded one million square miles.[102]

True enough, it could be argued that it was Germany that initiated World War One, not Britain. However, Russia, not Britain, was Germany's target, which is consistent with the earlier argument that rising powers' aggressiveness will be directed not at the dominant state, but against weaker third parties. In turn, this assertive behaviour by the rising power triggers the intervention of the dominant state, which then leads to inadvertent war. Indeed, Britain declared war on Germany, after Berlin had opened hostilities against France and Russia. Even if it was willing to contemplate war against Russia and France in July 1914, Germany went to great pains to show that the true aggressor was Russia and even offered Britain an explicit great bargain, promising in exchange of neutrality to forgo any territorial gains against France. Germany would have preferred not to fight Britain, as evidenced by the consternation in Berlin when Britain eventually made clear its intention to intervene.[103]

Moreover, this pattern of seeking British neutrality was also in evidence in German policy in the preceding Moroccan crises as well as in the arms negotiations of 1912. Hence, while Berlin sought to avoid a clash with Britain, it was London that obstructed repeatedly Germany's path to further international advancement.

It is true that Germany's obsession with a place in the sun pushed Berlin into *Weltpolitik* and intensive shipbuilding program aimed at achieving eventual parity to Britain.[104] But it is doubtful that status gains mattered for Germany more than status losses did for Britain, or, in other words, that status inconsistency was stronger

[101] Kennedy, *Great Powers*, p. 231. This argument contradicts Copeland, for whom World War One was a preventive war initiated by the dominant power: Germany. Copeland, *Origins*, chaps 3–4.

[102] Kennedy, *Great Powers*, pp. 200–3, 224–32; Correlates of War Project, 'National Material Capabilities Data', at: {http://www.correlatesofwar.org}; Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (2nd edn, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 670–1; Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850–1970* (London: Longman, 1975).

[103] Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 445–6, 514–20; Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pp. 64–82; Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 131–46.

[104] Michelle Murray, 'Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition Before the First World War', *Security Studies*, 19 (November 2010), pp. 656–88; Holger Herwig, *'Luxury' Fleet: The Imperial German Navy, 1888–1918* (London: George Allen & Unwyn, 1980); Ivo Nikolai Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics, 1862–1914* (Boston: Allen & Unwyn, 1984).

than status anxiety.[105] The best evidence to this effect is that Germany unambiguously had thrown in the towel in its naval race against Britain by 1913. Britain not only maintained 60 per cent superiority versus the German navy, but also signalled its willingness to go beyond matching Berlin warship to warship by laying two keels for every new German Dreadnought, which would have resulted in an even more lopsided British advantage. Despite an angry initial reaction, Germany ended up by admitting that it could not simultaneously increase its army and keep up in the race in warships.[106] Consequently, in 1913 the secretary of state of the Navy Office Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz officially accepted the existing superiority of ratio suggested by Britain, and in early 1914 the German government refrained from introducing a new supplementary law that would have called for further shipbuilding. As a result, the budget allocated to the navy declined sharply from 54.8 per cent of the total German military budget in 1911 to 49.4 per cent in 1912 and to 32.7 per cent in 1913. By 1914, Britain fielded 20 Dreadnoughts, 9 battle cruisers, and 26 battleships as compared to Germany's 13, 9, and 12 respectively, which meant that Britain had *de facto* won the arms race. As Herwig argues, by 1914, 'the dream of Weltpolitik had gone glimmering'.[107]

British status anxiety and rivalry escalation

Kennedy writes that the reason behind the Anglo-German antagonism consisted in 'economic shifts [that] increased the nervousness of British decision-makers already concerned about "saving the Empire"'.[108] Kennedy is right in that Britain had been worried for its dominant status even before it had begun being concerned about the German challenge. Germany thus supplanted Russia, which had been seen for decades by Britain as the next-in-line power. But Kennedy's statement does not account fully for British status anxiety, which was caused by more than just economic shifts. Britain perceived Germany as a dangerous competitor precisely because Berlin was emerging as a formidable competitor not only in trade, but also in naval construction, and the pursuit of prestige in world politics.

From the 1880s onwards, British scholars and decision-makers have been acknowledging Britain's decline *vis-à-vis* more populous and better-endowed rivals, principally the triumvirate of Russia, the US, and Germany. As the historian John Seeley contended, Britain risked being reduced 'to the level of a purely European power,

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[105] It may be more plausible to argue for a German case of status anxiety towards Russia. For a similar interpretation see Copeland, *Origins*; Doran, *Systems in Crisis*.

[106] This reaction was the notorious war council of 8 December 1912 in which the German army leaders advocated war 'the sooner, the better'. The deliberations included an attack against Britain, but Tirpitz argued that the navy was not yet ready. However, opposition from Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg led to the projected war on Britain to be abandoned on favour of rapprochement. John Röhl, *The Kaiser and His Court* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chap. 7; Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900–1914* (New York: David McKay Company, 1974), pp. 276–312; Anthony Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), chap. 11.

[107] Holger Herwig, 'Imperial Germany', in Ernest May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 87, 81–7; Herwig, *Luxury Fleet*, 78, 90–2; Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (2nd edn, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 104–5.

[108] Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p. 466.

looking back, as Spain does now, to the great days when she pretended to be a world-state'.[109] Similarly, for Joseph Chamberlain, British decline relative rising competitors was so worrying that it necessitated the integration of the existing colonies into a more competitive 'Greater Britain'.[110] As he warned, falling behind competitors was intolerable: since 'in proportion to our competitors in the struggle for existence we are getting behindhand', Britain 'would sink from the comparative position which it has enjoyed throughout the centuries. It would no longer be a power, if not supreme, at all events of the greatest influence ... It would be a fifth-rate nation, existing of the sufferance of its more powerful neighbors. We will not have it.'[111]

Britain was initially worried by the Dual Alliance of St. Petersburg and Paris, rather than by Germany and the US, because of its history of war with Russia, the threat to British India, the size of its army, and the stiff naval competition of the Franco-Russian alliance, which by 1905 had 63 battleships built or building, while Britain had 68.[112] It was only in the 1905–7 interval that Britain became concerned that the Reich had emerged as its top competitor.

Abundant statements from British decision-makers attest to the growing anxiety produced by Germany. Thus, Eyre Crowe, Senior Clerk at the Foreign Office, argued in his 1907 memorandum that, regardless of whether Germany was intentionally 'aiming at political hegemony' or had blundered into an overly-aggressive stance, Britain's response should have been uncompromising. Accommodation risked encouraging Germany to go on 'to diminish the power of any rivals, to enhance her own by extending her dominion, to hinder the co-operation of other states, and ultimately to break up and supplant the British Empire'.[113] The British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey contended that falling behind Germany would have had disastrous consequences for Britain's overall position among nations: 'if we fall into a position of inferiority [in the arms race against Germany] our self-respect is gone, and it removes that enterprise which is essential both to the material success of industry and to the carrying out of great ideals, and you fall into a state of apathy. We should cease to count for anything among the nations of Europe and we should be fortunate if our liberty was left.'[114]

Effectively, by 1909, the view that Germany was aiming for supremacy and that Britain was the only country that stood in its way had become commonplace in the British Foreign Office. For instance, the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs Arthur Hardinge believed Germany sought a position of predominance and was the only British potential enemy in Europe and his successor Arthur Nicolson reasoned along the same lines that 'Germany has a decisive aim in view ... to obtain a predominant and decisive voice in all questions in which European powers and England are concerned or interested; it is patent that, if this aim were achieved we

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[109] John R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1905), pp. 349–50.
[110] Porter, *Lion's Share*, chap. 3.
[111] Joseph Chamberlain, 'Speech at Bringley Hall, July 9, 1906', in Charles Boyd (ed.), *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches* (London: Constable & Company, 1914), vol. 2, pp. 361–72, 368.
[112] Keith Nielsen, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); on the navy see Friedberg, *Weary Titan*, pp. 153, 144–51, 161–73.
[113] 'Memorandum by Mr. Eyre Crowe on the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany', in G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds, *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*, vol. III (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928), pp. 403, 407, 417.
[114] Padfield, *Naval Race*, p. 219.

should be subservient to Berlin ... We are the only Power who can resist the achievement of that aim.'[115] And Britain meant to defend its status, as Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, put it bluntly during the Agadir crisis: 'Britain should at all hazards maintain her place and prestige among the Great Powers of the world ... 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 ... then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure.'[116]

A purely economic explanation for why Britain started perceiving Germany as its main challenger is not sufficient. British leaders were not concerned excessively in the early 1900s about British productivity, which they had no indisputable means of assessing, since they lacked a measure of GDP.[117] Trade competition was certainly very significant, but for the free-trade minded British decision-makers it represented both a contributing factor to Britain's own prosperity and an incentive for Britain to try harder to conserve markets.[118] Rather, Britain became concerned that Germany aimed at dominance because it was seen as launching an assault on British status in all key status dimensions.

Simple arithmetic indicated that in the aftermath of the sinking of much of Russia's fleet at Tsushima, Germany had been catapulted in the position of the world's second largest naval power, with 31 battleships in use as opposed to France's 29 and Russia's surviving 10.[119] Accordingly, much of the anxiety that Britain had resented *vis-à-vis* St. Petersburg was transferred to the now next-in-line German power. As Admiral John Fisher, First Sea Lord, argued: 'our only probable enemy is Germany'.[120] Yet, Germany was at this stage no more than a presumptive enemy based on its existing capabilities. The transition to actual enemy was caused therefore by German actions, in particular the decision in November 1907 to intensify naval construction, which would have resulted in an almost equivalence by 1913 in the newly introduced Dreadnought, which rendered obsolete the existing battleship design.[121] This development therefore resulted in an arms race in between 1907 and 1912.

Naval dominance was a *sine qua non* for dominant status because it provided the guarantee of British Empire and trade, by enabling traffic with India via the Red Sea route and the Cape route, and by threatening the enemy's economic lifeline with blockades. As Admiral Fisher argued in relation to Britain's ability to settle outcomes in its favour by applying overwhelming naval power: 'the Navy must always so stand! Supreme – unbeaten', adding that 'the British Empire floats on the British Navy ... The existence of the Empire depends on it!'[122] This was an engrained

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[115] Thomas Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 343, 348, 352.

[116] Ima Barlow, *The Agadir Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), pp. 298–9.

[117] For this reason, British decision-makers, who were noticing an absolute growth, doubted that Britain, which after all was still ahead in trade, was in decline after all. This impossibility of demonstrating objectively the British economic decline led to the eventual electoral defeat of Chamberlain, who proposed the introduction of tariffs. Friedberg, *Weary Titan*, pp. 67, 44–5, 26–30, 57–62, 68–72.

[118] Steiner and Neilson, *Britain*, pp. 63–72.

[119] Friedberg, *Weary Titan*, p. 153.

[120] Padfield, *Great Race*, p. 153.

[121] Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp. 163–6; Marder, *Dreadnought*, pp. 159–71.

[122] P. K. Kemp, *The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher*, vol. 1 (London: The Navy Records Society, 1960), pp. 18–19; Padfield, *Great Race*, pp. 184, 182–5.

British view, as evidenced by earlier statements such as Lord Selborne's, First Lord of Admiralty, in 1901: 'our stakes are out of all proportion to those of any other Power', which was why 'to all other nations a navy is a mere luxury'.[123] Accordingly, Britain's preoccupation with preserving at all costs superior numbers at sea through a 60 per cent superiority relative the second-ranked naval power exceeded strict considerations of defence efficiency of the British Isles. As Steinberg observed: 'an obsession grew in both Britain and Germany that naval power could be measured by simple arithmetic ... Fisher's Dreadnoughts had weaknesses and Tirpitz's virtues which had nothing to do with the size of their guns, but only experts suspected it. Numbers became the game and even men who instinctively knew better played it.'[124] Therefore, the maintenance of naval supremacy had gradually taken on a life of its own, because being first in ships mattered to being first overall.[125]

Nonetheless, as Crowe contended, the dimension of prestige also mattered in the rivalry: 'it is not merely or even principally the question of naval armaments which is the cause of the existing estrangement. The building of the German fleet is but one of the symptoms of the disease. It is the political ambitions of the German Government and nation which are the source of the mischief.'[126] This mischief was manifested by German efforts to boost its prestige at the expense of Britain's, foremost in the two Morocco crises of 1905–6 and 1911. In both crises, Germany responded to French efforts to create and enlarge a protectorate in Morocco by resorting to a political blackmail designed to humble the French, and to show them that their British Entente partner was unwilling to protect their interests.[127] The very same logic applied in July 1914. If Britain stood idle, even though it was not directly under threat or legally obliged to act under the Entente, it would have suffered a considerable prestige loss by conceding that Germany was now in a position to act as the arbiter of Europe, which would have meant accepting demotion. As Grey put it when rejecting the German great bargain offer in July 1914, such course would have brought Britain's 'everlasting dishonor' and 'disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover'.[128] Basically, as status anxiety deepened, the rivalry also worsened.

Material gains and security

If the status of the two powers had not been in question, their material interests would have pointed in the direction of cooperation, not of conflict. The disputes over colonies between Britain and Germany were relatively benign compared to those opposing Britain to France and Russia. Since *Weltpolitik* was not a claim for

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[123] Kennedy, *Antagonism*, p. 416.

[124] Jonathan Steinberg, 'The German Background to Anglo-German Relations, 1905–1914', in F. H. Hinsley (ed.), *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 213.

[125] As Gray argues, it is not easy to draw a distinction between a future security threat from Germany, even though a present one was ruled out, and the threat to the British rank as number one naval power, for which there was 'eloquent proof'. Colin Gray, 'The Urge to Compete: Rationales for Arms Racing', *World Politics*, 26 (January 1974), pp. 207–33, 224, esp. fn. 42.

[126] 'Memorandum by Mr. Crowe', in Gooch and Temperley (eds), *British Documents* VI, pp. 534–5.

[127] Eugene Anderson, *The First Moroccan Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1930); Barlow, *Agadir*.

[128] Albertini, *Origins*, pp. 632–3.

a definite geographical area, but rather for status commensurate to a world power possessing colonies, Germany was not competing for the control of real estate in Africa and Asia with a direct impact on the British position in India. Consequently, Britain was able to broker repeated accords with Berlin on the division of colonial spoils even as late as 1914.[129]

Not only were the German and British material interests compatible; they were also complementary. Germany was the second largest British market, and the second largest source of British imports after the US. Meanwhile, Britain was the chief destination of German exports, and the second source of Germany's imports.[130] Moreover, both Berlin and London shared an interest in opposing the ambitions of the Dual Alliance: if Britain was concerned about Russia's advance in Asia, Germany was equally preoccupied in resisting French revanchism and Russia's own alarming rise. It is suggestive from the perspective of common interests that a formal alliance between Britain and Germany was actively contemplated at three junctures: in the 1870s, in 1898, and in 1901. The fact that an alliance did not materialise was not due to irreconcilable interests, but, rather to the fear of each state of being exploited by the other side.[131]

An undeniable and non-negligible security component existed in the British-German naval rivalry, but this was not necessarily paramount. First, British political and naval leaders did not agonise over the threat of a German naval invasion. Steady evidence shows how this prospect was discounted repeatedly. For instance, Admiral Fisher argued that invasion was 'a chimera' and 'an impossibility'. In 1905, the Committee for Imperial Defence, a body bringing together the political and military heads of the army and navy and chaired by the prime minister, reached the conclusion that 'serious invasion of these islands is not an eventuality which we need seriously to consider'. In 1908, in the midst of the arms race against Germany no less, the Committee still had not changed its views: 'so long as our naval supremacy is assured against any reasonably probable combination of powers, invasion is impracticable'. This conclusion was then reiterated on the eve of the war in 1913.[132] Hence, Britain was not over-concerned about a 'bolt from the blue', a threat by Germany to its physical security.

A second important point is that none of the crises over Morocco or the Balkans posed any security threat to British territory or bore any relation to the naval balance between London and Berlin. In fact, by July 1914, due to Germany's concessions in the arms race, the two sides' relations had improved into a *détente*.[133]

Security fares better if considered from a balance of power perspective. Balance of power was frequently mentioned by British decision-makers (Grey and Crowe in particular), because if Germany defeated France or/and Russia, it would have *then* been in a position to endanger Britain by marshalling additional resources.[134] But, as Kennedy remarks, this logic is problematic, as 'the concept of the "balance of

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[129] Steiner and Neilson, *Britain*, pp. 72–5; Kennedy, *Antagonism*.

[130] William Woodruff, *Impact of Western Man: A Study of Europe's Role in the World Economy, 1750–1960* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), pp. 284, 288–9.

[131] Germany wanted improved relations with Russia and British support against France, while Britain wanted Germany to help it against Russia. Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp. 388–9.

[132] Marder, *Dreadnought*, pp. 348, 350, 356, 345–58.

[133] Sean Lynn-Jones, 'Détente and Deterrence: Anglo-German Relations, 1911–1914', *International Security* 11 (Fall 1986), pp. 121–50.

[134] Paul Kennedy, 'Great Britain Before 1914', in May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies*, p. 173.

power'' was never deeply explored, in either the political or the military sense'. In fact, British decision-makers, including the Committee for Imperial Defence, were aware at the time that Germany, far from being the more powerful and, hence, security threatening entity in the system, was level in terms of capabilities with the Franco-Russian alliance, so that 'if it [Germany] resorted to war, it would possibly, perhaps probably, be checked by its foes and then defeated'.[135] To this extent, for Britain, equilibrium, not a lopsided German superiority characterised world politics, and, according to balance of power logic this should have resulted in stability, not conflict.

Furthermore, the existing *status quo* favoured Britain's continuing dominance, which was why its claims that Germany was disturbing the balance of power could be seen as self-serving.[136] This concern to remaining number one was occasionally acknowledged by British leaders. For instance, Lord Thomas Sanderson, a former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, argued that Britain 'must appear in the light of some huge giant sprawling over the globe, with gouty fingers and toes stretching in every direction, which cannot be approached without eliciting a scream. This sentiment was aptly expressed by a member of a Deputation from South Africa who concluded . . . with the remark 'we are told that the Germans are good neighbors, but we prefer to have no neighbors at all'.[137]

Hence, due to the gradual deterioration of its status relative to Germany, Britain transformed from a potential German ally into an inflexible opponent who, while allowing other rising powers leeway, resisted tooth and nail further German advancement in the international status hierarchy.

Conclusion

Rivalries between great powers over dominance have captured scholarly attention since the days of Thucydides. However, the bulk of studies have concentrated on shifts in capabilities, while neglecting the motives that produce such positional rivalries. The status anxiety hypothesis is an effort to address this omission, by tracing their occurrence and continuation, sometimes for decades, to the clashing status requirements of the dominant power and those of the next-in-line state. In a nutshell, status anxiety argues that the refusal of the dominant power to allow the succession of the challenger will be a fundamental cause of rivalry, worsening as the rising power threatens to overtake the current leader in additional dimensions. The purpose of this article was to formulate this hypothesis as well as subject it to preliminary testing. The findings suggest that status anxiety represented a significant influence, though not necessarily excluding additional balance of power considerations, in the foreign policy decision-making of declining dominant powers: France in the mid-eighteenth century and Britain at the turn of the twentieth century. Status anxiety thus helps account for the hostility France manifested towards Britain, and Britain towards

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135 Ibid., pp. 194–5.
136 See for this argument Jack Levy, 'What Do Great Powers Balance Against?', in T. V. Paul, James Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 43–4.
137 'Memorandum by Lord Sanderson', in Gooch and Temperley, *British Documents*, III, p. 430; also see Padfield, *Naval Race*, pp. 308–9.

German demands for superior status, a reaction which is more problematic to account for by theories stressing solely physical security and material gains.

A further contribution of this endeavour is that it suggests the existence of a dominant power club, distinct from the club of major or great powers, and, as such, following a different set of rules.[138] The existing status literature has concentrated exclusively on the latter club, arguing persuasively that there is no impediment for granting either admission to new members or opportunities for further advancement to current ones.[139] Hence, status competition in the great power club is seen as non-zero sum. But the dominant power club has a membership of one, which makes it unfeasible for the dominant power to satisfy the demands of dominant power aspirants without voluntarily surrendering its supremacy. Accordingly, status competition over the dominant position is more likely to be zero-sum and lead to rivalry.

The findings of this article are at this point only plausible, yet they highlight the need for further research covering the entire universe of dominant powers in order to determine both if intense status anxiety always prompts conflict and if reduced status anxiety or its absence lead to stability. Consequently, additional studies of the role of status for dominant powers foreign policy should be conducted, extending beyond the current *en vogue* concentration on the foreign policy of rising powers alone.

Indeed, dominant powers' status anxiety may be increasingly policy-relevant, if unipolarity were to erode due to a steady shrinking of distance between the US and China. This is not to suggest that Sino-American confrontation under the ominous shadow of nuclear weapons is inevitable, but to draw attention to the possible heightened risks posed by status anxiety in future decades. In the words of President Obama: 'if other nations do not play for second place, I do not accept second-place for the United States of America'.[140]

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[138] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.
[139] See inter alia Larson and Shevchenko, 'Status Seekers'; Volgy et al. (eds), *Major Powers.*
[140] {http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/State_of_the_Union/state-of-the-union-2010-president-obama-speech-transcript/}.