RISING POWERS AND THE QUEST FOR STATUS
IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY REGIMES

Rohan Mukherjee

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, a number of scholars have studied how the rise of new great powers such as China and India will impact global order. However, important questions such as why these countries might choose to become more “responsible” actors instead of simply free-riding on existing institutions, or conversely why they might undermine the very order that has facilitated their rise, have not been systematically studied. Existing literatures on power transition and international organization do not comprehensively explain these types of behaviors.

A rapidly growing literature on the pursuit of status in international politics can help shed light on these questions, but so far it has not demonstrated how or when status matters relative to other goals that states pursue in the international system, such as security and economic gain. In this dissertation, I develop a theory of status-seeking to explain why rising powers sometimes uphold the rules and norms of international regimes when it is not in their material interest to do so; and conversely, having joined international regimes, why they sometimes break from them at great cost.

Drawing on social identity theory, I show that rising powers follow a range of strategies to attain great-power status, or symbolic equality with the great powers, and that these strategies translate into different rule-oriented behaviors—following, breaking, or shaping—in international regimes. A rising power’s choice of strategy will depend on the extent to which it perceives the international regime to be open to its rise and procedurally legitimate.

I test this theory in the domain of international security regimes, specifically those designed to restrain certain weapons and modes of warfare. Through longitudinal case studies of
the United States and the maritime laws of war in the mid-19th century, Japan and naval arms control in the interwar period, and India and nuclear non-proliferation in the latter half of the 20th century, I show that rising powers draw important inferences about their own status from the design and functioning of international regimes, and are willing to accept significant risks to enhance their status within these regimes.
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The weaknesses and errors in this work are mine and mine alone.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

RISING POWERS, INTERNATIONAL REGIMES, AND STATUS AMBITIONS

Since the end of the Cold War, China has rapidly emerged as a potential challenger to the United States’ hegemony in Asia and beyond. Scholars and analysts have spent close to three decades trying to ascertain how this longer-term global geopolitical shift will impact the international system not just in terms of potential military conflict but also in terms of the rules and institutions of the global order fashioned and led by the US since the end of the Second World War. The probability of full-scale war breaking out between the US and China is sharply attenuated by the former’s global military primacy and the respective nuclear arsenals of both countries. The more pertinent question therefore is how China will approach the myriad international regimes that compose the American global order. Will Beijing’s rise be “responsible” and based on the norms of the existing order, or will it be marked by contestation, rule breaking, and opposition to these norms?¹ The answer has proved elusive. Since the late 1980s, the world has seen China go from the Tiananmen Square crackdown, multiple nuclear tests, and the Taiwan Straits Crisis, to the doctrine and policies of “peaceful rise,” and back to

¹ In a 2005 address to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick famously hoped for “a China that not only adjusts to the international rules developed over the last century, but also joins us and others to address the challenges of the new century.” See Zoellick, Robert. 2005. “Whither China? From Membership to Responsibility.” Remarks to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, September 21, https://www.ncuscr.org/sites/default/files/migration/ZoellickRemarksNotes06WinterSpring.pdf.
some form of assertiveness, particularly with regard to its maritime neighborhood.\(^2\) What Beijing’s next set of moves will be is anyone’s guess.

This fundamental uncertainty about China’s relationship with the global order raises a larger class of questions. Why do rising powers sometimes act in ways that undermine the international regimes that have abetted their rise? Why do they act in ways that are likely to antagonize the great powers and other countries when it would be easier to truly engage in a peaceful rise? Conversely, why do rising powers sometimes sacrifice their material interests in order to uphold the rules and norms of the global order? These questions have occupied a number of contemporary scholars, who have focused on traditional concepts drawn from international relations theory, ranging from balancing to institutional design and socialization, to explain why rising powers sometimes uphold international regimes and at other times violate or subvert them.\(^3\) With a few exceptions, however, these works have taken the form of either *sui generis* studies of single countries or empirically thin comparative analyses of contemporary

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rising powers. Consequently, while the field has accumulated knowledge about countries such as China, India, Brazil, and Turkey and their respective approaches to international regimes in the post-Cold War period, there is little systematic cross-country knowledge of how rising powers as a class of states have behaved historically in these arenas. More importantly, the vast majority of work in this area takes a strictly materialist perspective on the motivations of rising powers. As a result, scholars are yet to convincingly explain why rising powers (and many other countries) sometimes undertake international institutional obligations when doing so is more costly than defection, subversion, or some other strategy. Conversely, existing theories are equally unable to explain why, having joined international regimes, rising powers sometimes break their rules—even if temporarily—at significant cost or risk to their own security.

In this dissertation, I address these gaps in three ways. First, I draw on a longstanding body of research in social psychology on social identity and intergroup relations, which has increasingly gained prominence in international relations scholarship over the last decade, to argue that rising powers care not just about material goals but also social goals such as status—specifically, great-power status. I pay close attention to the postulates of Social Identity Theory (SIT) in particular and devise hypotheses about the manner in which a rising power’s perceptions of the openness and legitimacy of an international regime shape its behavior toward the regime.

Second, I test these hypotheses using historical cases of rising powers since the advent of modern international law and multilateral institutions in the mid-19th century. Within an over-arching common framework of international security regimes designed to regulate weapons and warfare, I examine the cases of the United States and the laws of maritime war in the mid-19th

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century, Japan and naval arms control in the interwar period, and India and nuclear non-proliferation in the mid-to-late 20th century. A status-based understanding of rising-power behavior helps answer important puzzles in the respective existing literatures on each of these cases.

Finally, in each case, I examine variation in the behavior of the rising power over time, thus minimizing potential bias in my findings that might arise from unobservable differences between countries and allowing me to more carefully control for potentially confounding factors. In this manner, I am able to apply the same analytical framework and set of hypotheses to the respective cases of three rising powers in three time periods facing similar types of international regimes and similar incentives to cooperate or defect within these regimes. The systematic identification of similar patterns of behavior among rising powers in different eras enhances the validity of the theory in explaining how rising powers as a category of states approach global governance.

This project also contributes to the literature on status in international relations. Over the last decade, a number of scholars have convincingly made the case that status matters in international relations, that states great and small value where they are placed in other states’ perceptions of various global hierarchies of wealth, power, democracy, human rights, etc. The field is now ripe for moving beyond arguing that status matters, to explaining the conditions under which it matters more than the other goals states strive for in international politics. In other words, when does status become the driving force in a rising power’s decision-making calculus? In the following chapters, I answer this question in the context of international regimes: status ambitions drive a rising power’s foreign policy in moments when the

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international regime either presents an exceptional opportunity for the country to attain symbolic equality with the great powers, or when the regime creates a situation in which such equality is denied. In these moments, a rising power is likely to sacrifice its material interests in the pursuit of great-power status. Which status-seeking strategy a rising power will adopt at any given time depends on its perception of the openness and legitimacy of the international regime in question.

A theory of status-seeking in international regimes can illuminate vital aspects of contemporary rising powers’ approaches to global order. Yong Deng describes China as being “intensely sensitive” about its international status, “treating it as if it were the overriding foreign policy objective.” Similarly, Pratap Bhanu Mehta argues that India is “an extraordinarily status conscious power.” The central question in today’s world is whether the global order can be modified “to incorporate a greater role for rising or more assertive powers such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, and Turkey.” The answer depends on solving puzzles surrounding rising powers’ approaches to international regimes. Why, for example, did China decide to set up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) when existing global and regional mechanisms of development finance already exist? Can India be expected to cooperate more closely with the international nuclear non-proliferation regime in the future despite being a non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)? Why does Brazil continue to participate in the activities of a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that does not represent its interests or

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give it permanent membership? Dafoe et al observe that “If there is one feature of reputations and status that scholars are in agreement upon, it is that leaders, policy elites, and national populations are often concerned, even obsessed, with their status and reputation.” In the rest of this dissertation, I take this assertion at face value and develop its implications in a manner that contributes to answering the above types of questions.

The rest of this chapter reviews existing literatures that are relevant to my research question. In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I provide the conceptual framework on which my theory rests, the theory itself, and the dissertation’s research design. Chapters 3 and 4 test the theory in the case of the United States and the laws of maritime war in the mid-19th century. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on Japan and naval arms control in the interwar period. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on India and nuclear non-proliferation in the mid-to-late 20th century. Chapter 9 provides concluding observations.

EXISTING LITERATURES

The research questions motivating this dissertation lie at the intersection of three theoretical literatures: power transition, international organization, and status seeking. In this section, I examine these three traditions to the extent that they can help explain variation in the approaches that rising powers take to international regimes.

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Power Transition

Power transition theory as a research program is limited in its view of power transitions. Most of the seminal works in this area are concerned almost exclusively with the likelihood of war breaking out between the dominant state and rising challengers.\(^{11}\) The causal mechanism is simplistic: rising powers experience increases in their capabilities and consequently seek to alter the international system in ways beneficial to themselves, resulting in a clash of interests with the dominant state, and ultimately war. These theories assume that as their material capabilities increase, rising powers increasingly chafe under the constraints of a system of global governance established by the great powers. As they become more capable of defending their expanding interests, they start violating the rules and norms of international regimes.

This mechanism does little to elucidate the myriad interactions between great powers and rising powers that occur well before conflict is even on the horizon. War is one possible outcome of a power transition; however, there is much in the process of transition that requires explaining, which in turn is likely to shed more light on why hegemonic wars sometimes occur. Put differently, rising powers do not simply accumulate capabilities and then fight the hegemon. Rather, capability accumulation is a process that involves extensive interactions with the international order analytically and chronologically prior to the potential war outcome. It is precisely these interactions that are embodied in international regimes—established by the great powers—that rising powers encounter during their rise. If we can explain variation in how rising powers interact with the global order, we can get a better grip on why some of them end up in

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conflict with the hegemon. In this sense, revisionism and war can be incorporated into a broader theory of state behavior in power transitions.

Knowing what rising powers want is important for predicting the propensity for conflict during power transition, and opinions on what rising powers want vary. Standard accounts of power transition focus on the inevitable outward drive for additional resources, markets, and influence that accompanies the economic growth of rising powers.\(^\text{12}\) According to these theories, the very phenomenon of increasing capabilities drives rising powers to expand their interests and seek changes in the international system as long as the benefits of these changes outweigh the costs.\(^\text{13}\) Thus rising powers in every situation will harbor similar expansionary objectives that will inevitably lead to backlash from the great powers, resulting in war. As discussed above, the empirical record shows far greater variation on this front than power transition theories would admit.

Some power transition theories distinguish between satisfied and dissatisfied rising powers (in relation to the status quo), and focus on the latter in determining the likelihood of hegemonic war as a result of power transition.\(^\text{14}\) A further distinction between dissatisfied rising powers with limited and unlimited aims helps clarify variation in the extent of a rising power’s efforts at altering the status quo.\(^\text{15}\) However, it is precisely these assumed distinctions that require explanation if one wishes to investigate why rising states and dominant states go to war. We cannot know why revisionist states challenge the international order if we do not know what


\(^{13}\) Gilpin, War and Change.


makes them revisionist in the first place. Systemic theory fails to provide a satisfactory answer to this puzzle, or to a range of other state and inter-state behavior observed during power transitions, including strategic restraint, mutual accommodation, and peaceful change.

**International Organization**

Within the international organization literature, some scholars explicitly study rising powers in international regimes in an effort to unearth the sources of variation in their behavior. Situated largely in the post-Cold War time period, these works emphasize international regimes as the locus of distributional conflict between the United States and rising powers. Implicit in this literature is the assumption that rising powers accept the global order as in their interests and strive to achieve incremental change within it. Differences in their behavior arise from differences across issue areas, regional dynamics, domestic political configurations, and aspects of institutional design. With regard to the last factor, a more macro-level perspective within this literature highlights the unique character of the American world order, arguing that following the Second World War, the United States was able to craft a uniquely liberal and open system of global governance that is both durable and beneficial not just to the hegemon but also to rising powers.\(^\text{16}\)

Another strand of scholarship—not directly focused on power transition—emerges from the literature on commitment and compliance with international organizations. These theories encompass diverse explanations, including hegemonic stability, the functional benefits of international institutions, the domestic politics of credible commitment, and socialization into

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Rising powers can be said to uphold international regimes (i.e. follow their rules or seek to incrementally change them) under various conditions: when they are coerced by a hegemonic power or group of powers into doing so; when—in the absence of hegemony—repeated interactions within international institutions reveal the long-term benefits of cooperation; when domestic politics compel their governments to either lock in their preferences or credibly commit to a certain course of action; or when they pick up habits of cooperation and rule following through increasing interaction with other members of an international regime.

Weaknesses in the Literatures

For the sake of conceptual clarity, the arguments discussed above can be grouped into three broadly conceived theoretical categories: Realist and Institutionalist, Liberal, and Constructivist. Realist and Institutionalist theories treat states as units seeking to maximize their material interests. They include theories of power transition, hegemonic stability, institutions as solutions to problems of strategic interaction, and theories of rising powers seeking incremental change in the global order. This group of theories views deviations from the materialist assumption—moments in which states may cooperate or follow rules despite the prima facie material incentives to do otherwise—as the result of coercion, linkage across multiple regimes, the ability of institutions to facilitate repeated interactions, and the fact that often even short-term interests may favor cooperation under certain conditions. However, these theories are not strictly about deviations from the materialist assumption; rather, they argue that if states conceived or were

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induced to conceive their interests differently, they would fall in line with the behavioral postulates of the materialist assumption. This theoretical shifting of the goalposts does not fully account for instances where material interests clearly dictate a certain policy based on the information available to the state at the time, but the state chooses to act otherwise.

Liberal theories emphasize domestic preferences and constraints. Accordingly, governments cooperate or follow rules in international regimes not because they see their true long-term interest in doing so or because they are coerced, but because they face domestic incentives to either lock in their preferences or credibly commit to a certain course of action that only an international commitment can facilitate.18 This line of reasoning analytically separates the interests of the government from the interests of the state, and argues that governments may sometimes constrain their states due to less than national interests (such as the desire to stay in power). Although this theoretical innovation is productive, it is less applicable in the case of a rising power, in which the government—by virtue of its ability to extract resources and channel them toward increasing material capabilities—is in a relatively stronger position than governments in smaller or less powerful countries. Liberal theories persuasively show how ‘weak’ states or states in turbulent domestic waters (be they democratizing, fighting a civil war, or otherwise lacking in capacity) are the most likely to commit to and comply with international agreements that might aid them domestically. Rising powers by definition are not weak states, and hence less in need of international agreements to serve their domestic interests. Having said that, a small body of scholarship on American grand strategy in the 19th and early 20th centuries suggests that domestic competitors or rivals can often tie down the government of a rising power

18 For an example of the latter type of argument, see Simmons, Beth, and Allison Danner. 2010. “Credible Commitments and the International Criminal Court.” International Organization, 64:2, pp. 225-256.
until it reaches a certain level of domestic authority. Nonetheless, this literature is too narrowly focused on the American experience to yield generalizable hypotheses.

Constructivist theories of international organization are less about commitment and more about compliance. They explain the latter in terms of identity, norms, and socialization. Interests in these theories are intervening variables between ideational factors and state behavior. In other words, ideational factors shape interests and interests shape behavior. A vital contribution of this literature is to show that interests can be defined in non-material terms, thus opening the door to understanding a range of state behaviors that Realist/Institutionalist and Liberal theories struggle to explain in the case of rising powers. Repeated interaction also plays an important role in these theories, but at an ideational level, to socialize states into the norms of international regimes. Thus rule following or breaking that runs contrary to material interests can be explained in terms of changes in state identity, international norms, or the degree of socialization. An important challenge for Constructivist theories is to empirically separate their observable implications from those of Realist or Liberal theory. Part of the problem lies in the challenge of falsifying explanations based on material interest. It is possible to devise plausible interest-based explanations for a decision as well as its opposite. This is why meticulous qualitative research and process tracing accompany the most convincing Constructivist arguments. In sum, Constructivist theories are promising, and I will rely on a variant of them in developing my own explanation for the behavior of rising powers in international regimes.


Aside from their individual weaknesses, the three groups of theories discussed above are together inadequate for understanding the circumstances that changes in the global distribution of power entail. Rising powers constitute a special class of states that are not as powerful as the great powers but more powerful than the majority of states in the international system. In this sense, they cannot uniformly be coerced by a hegemon, they do not experience domestic vulnerabilities that require international commitments, and they are not one among a number of equally placed states seeking to further their respective national interests through mutual adjustment and policy coordination. They are uniquely positioned as states that may not benefit from the status quo, are powerful enough to upset it, and also subject to proportionately greater coercive attempts by the great powers as a result. Under certain conditions, therefore, relative to other states (including the great powers) rising powers may face both greater incentives to break rules and higher costs as a consequence. Similarly, under certain conditions, they may face greater incentives to follow rules and receive greater benefits for doing so relative to other states. The puzzles of cooperation and discord are therefore sharper in a world of power transition, and existing theories are unable to fully explain them.

**Status: An Alternative Framework**

An evolving school of thought in international relations theory, labeled “psychological constructivism,” promises greater leverage on the empirical puzzles laid out above. Delving

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22 The conditions depend on the policies of the great powers toward the rising power in question, which lie beyond the scope of this study but will be discussed in the empirical analysis.
into the psychology of identity and drawing on insights from sociology, anthropology, and psychology, this strand of scholarship gives pride of place to concepts such as honor, status, and prestige (as many Classical Realists such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hans Morgenthau have also done). It is from within this tradition that the most recent wave of research on status in world politics has emerged.

Originating in Marx’s analysis of class and Weber’s qualification of these ideas to introduce non-economic forms of stratification, status entered the modern social scientific lexicon by way of sociological studies in the 1950s that focused on the concept of ‘status inconsistency’ among individuals who rank highly on one dimension of status (e.g. race) but poorly on one or more other dimensions (e.g. wealth, education). Early studies in this vein tried to draw connections between status inconsistency and political attitudes and behaviors, finding that status-incongruent individuals tended to be politically more liberal, to be dissatisfied with the power distribution in society, to show less pro-social behavior, and to even be prone to political violence. Status inconsistency was eventually seen as impacting behavior when there was a marked gap between an individual’s expected status and their actual status. Subsequent studies have measured the impact of status inconsistency on physiological outcomes such as

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stress and general well being, as well as on organizational performance and satisfaction. The critical leap from individual-level analysis to group-level dynamics was made in the mid-1970s and thereafter with the conceptual advent of social identity, or the manner in which an individual’s identity is contingent on their social memberships and allegiances. In this manner, it became possible to think of status as operating at the individual level but being a function of group attributes. An individual’s reaction to status inequalities is thus contingent not just on her individual status but on her group’s status compared to other groups.

It is this central insight that has been recently adopted by scholars of international relations in order to understand state behavior. These attempts constitute what might be called the second wave of attempts to incorporate status into international relations theory. The first wave began in the early 1970s and studied the associations between status discrepancies (measured using an index of diplomatic representation) and conflict at the level of the international system. Sideline by the growing prominence of the structuralism and system-level theorizing of Neorealism and Neoliberalism in the 1980s, status reappeared sporadically in the guise of “prestige” over the following two decades. With the coming to prominence of

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29 Representative works that rely on prestige and related concepts include: Gilpin, War and Change; Markey, Daniel. 1999. “Prestige and the origins of war: Returning to realism’s roots.”
constructivism in the 1990s and what David Lake has called the “social turn” in international relations theory, a renewed focus on questions of identity resulted in the second wave of status research in the early 2000s that sought to apply the findings of identity-related research in social psychology to international relations. The resulting flood of scholarship has focused on how the desire for status has shaped the policies of states of various types, including great powers, rising powers, regional actors, and even all states in the international system (through large-n analysis).

While this body of work has produced numerous new insights into state behavior, it suffers from four principal weaknesses. First, as mentioned above, while scholars have been able

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Lake, David A. 2013. “Great Power Hierarchies and Strategies in Twenty-First Century World Politics.” In Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse & Beth A. Simmons (eds), Handbook of International Relations. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 559-60. Lake acknowledges that the English School had taken the social turn long ago. This is in fact also true of the first wave of status scholarship: scholars such as Wallace, East, and Midlarsky—and even Hans Morgenthau—viewed the international system as a social environment in which status sought status and prestige.

to decisively demonstrate that status matters and often trumps material interest, a systematic theory of *when* status matters is yet to emerge. Second, while some scholars have focused on what social psychologists call “identity management strategies”—efforts by individuals or groups to improve their social identity through various strategies such as social mobility, social creativity, and social competition—research on the factors that shape a state’s choice of strategy is absent from the literature thus far. This omission is vital because social psychology does in fact offer three perceptual variables—the permeability of the status hierarchy, its legitimacy, and its stability—that shape the choices of those in lower-status groups (such as rising powers) who wish to improve their social identity. Third, due to the lack of a systematic application of the socio-structural variables that shape strategic choice when it comes to status-seeking, existing works are narrowly focused on “status immobility” or “status dissatisfaction.” In other words, the causal mechanism in existing theories is the denial of status, which results in behaviors such as revisionism and conflict initiation. While status denial is undoubtedly an engine of international change, a state may also have its status aspirations met, or partially met, or somehow compensated for. Existing research ignores these possibilities. Finally, as a result of this narrow focus, the overwhelming majority of research on status in world politics takes conflict as its dependent variable. Not only does this emphasis, as argued above, severely limit our understanding of power transitions, the inferences we draw from such

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33 Tajfel and Turner, “An Integrative Theory.” As I will show in the next chapter, these three variables have been widely used in social identity research since its inception in the 1970s.
35 Renshon, “Status Deficits and War.”
36 Exceptions include the works of Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko; Steven Ward; and the contributors to Paul et al, *Status in World Politics*. 
studies are also likely to be confounded by selection effects since war has a number of prior conflict-related actions built into it.\textsuperscript{37}

In order to address these shortcomings, I take social identity research seriously and devise a theory that employs perceived legitimacy and perceived openness as independent variables that explain a rising power’s rule-oriented behavior within an international regime (the dependent variable). The causal mechanism relies on a choice of three identity management strategies—social mobility, social creativity, and social competition—which map onto non-conflict-related outcomes, specifically rule-following, rule-shaping, and rule-breaking in the international regime. Status dissatisfaction thus becomes a subset of a larger class of causal mechanisms, and I am able to show that it produces behaviors in a power transition world that are far short of war and conflict. In this manner, the theory and empirical findings of this dissertation make contributions to three literatures that have to this date had no in-depth conversation: power transition, international organization, and status in world politics.

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\textsuperscript{37} Dafoe et al, “Reputation and Status,” p. 27.
Chapter 2

A Theory of Status-Seeking in International Regimes

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter provides the conceptual framework, theory, and hypotheses that will be tested in the following chapters. In this section, I provide definitions of key concepts such as great power, rising power, international regime, and status. I also lay out the assumptions and scope conditions of my theory.

Definitions

While the conceptual category of ‘rising power’ is reasonably clear and accepted in the literature on power transitions, scholars have generally not offered explicit empirical criteria for identifying rising powers. Put simply, how might we recognize a rising power when we see it? This is an important task for case selection.

Great Powers

In order to define a rising power, one must first define a great power. Despite a fairly voluminous literature on the subject, the most widely used list relies on the collective opinions of international relations scholars rather than any theoretically motivated criteria. Nonetheless, sufficient consensus has emerged that great powers must possess three features: military capabilities in excess of the vast majority of states in the international system, geopolitical interests across the international system, and recognition by other states of their great-power

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status. Recent empirical work also measures great-power status in terms of capabilities, foreign policy activity, and status attribution by other states in the international system. Although it is difficult to devise empirical criteria for great powers, with regard to capabilities I adapt Organski and Kugler’s category of “contenders,” which includes the state with the highest level of capabilities (the hegemon) and any other states that possess at least 80 percent of its capabilities.

To measure the scope of geopolitical interests I consider the average number of countries to which the hegemon sends ambassadors in any given time period (taking the average based on the number of years of data available during that period)—the great powers are then the hegemon and those countries with at least 80 percent of the level of diplomatic representation in other countries. Finally, to measure recognition of great-power status by other countries, I look at the top tier of membership in international institutions.

Below, I apply these empirical criteria to the international system from 1815 to the present. This time period can be divided into three chronological sections that mark momentous shifts in the international order caused by war. The first runs from the end of the Napoleonic

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5 Calculated using the Diplomatic Exchange Dataset (v2006.1) of the Correlates of War project. Data are measured at five-year intervals. Diplomatic representation in terms of the number of countries sending ambassadors to a country is often used as a measure of status. Here, however, I reverse the measure and consider the number of countries in which a country has ambassadors to be a measure of the scope of its geopolitical interests.
Wars in 1815 to the eve of the First World War in 1914. The second covers the period between the two World Wars, from 1919 to 1939. The third covers the period from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to the present. In terms of capabilities, therefore the hegemon in the first period is Britain, and in the second and third periods the United States. Thus the measures of capability and diplomatic representation are indexed to those of Britain and the US in their respective periods of hegemony. As for top-tier membership of international institutions, for most of the 19th century, the most prominent and recognizable institution governed by the great powers was the Concert of Europe. For the interwar period, the analogous institution was the Council of the League of Nations. For the period after 1945, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), being the pre-eminent body in charge of maintaining international peace and security during this period, provides a ready measure of recognition by way of permanent membership.

The three criteria of capabilities, scope, and recognition can thus be used to identify great powers in the 19th and 20th centuries. To count as a great power, I stipulate that a state must satisfy at least two out of these three criteria. For example, in the period following the end of the Second World War, although Britain and France do not satisfy the material condition at any point and Russia does not satisfy it after 1992, they possess sufficient scope of interests and recognition by other states to qualify as great powers (Britain and France additionally enjoy strong economic relations and alliances with the hegemon). The United States, the Soviet Union after 1962, and China after 1979 satisfy all three conditions. It becomes evident from this table that international institutions and the recognition they afford certain powers in the modern era contribute significantly to the latter’s great-power status. If it were not for the UNSC, the United States and China would be the only two great powers after 1992. Nonetheless, I count Britain,
France, and Russia among the great powers due to the influence they wield through the UNSC and other international institutions.

For most of the 19th century, almost no countries met the capability threshold (80 percent of the hegemon’s, i.e. Britain’s, capabilities) for being counted as great powers. The exception is the United States after 1886; however, the US did not meet the respective thresholds for diplomatic representation and membership of global governance institutions, therefore I do not consider it a great power in the 19th century. Indeed, the United States only began achieving this status between the two World Wars as President Woodrow Wilson took the initiative to establish the League of Nations with the US as a key player (though this status too was diminished by America’s eventual absence from the institution itself). With regard to other countries, although none meets the capability threshold, one can count Austria-Hungary, Russia, France, and Germany as great powers in the 19th century by virtue of their levels of diplomatic representation in other countries (all at least 80 percent of Britain’s) and their leading role in the most powerful and influential institution of global governance at the time, the Concert of Europe.6

It is worth reiterating that there is no agreed upon definition of great powers in the international relations literature. The generally accepted empirical identification of great powers rests on the Correlates of War (COW) classification of these countries, which relies on “intercoder agreement” and “scholarly consensus” to identify these states.7 According to this consensus, Britain, Austria-Hungary, Prussia (later Germany), Russia, France, and Italy were all great powers (or major powers, to use the COW terminology) during the 19th century; Japan

6 Germany presents an anomalous case by virtue of being the only one among these powers to experience rapid increases in capabilities relative to Britain, eventually overtaking the latter in 1907. In this sense, Germany is both a great power (in terms of scope of interests and recognition by other states) and a rising power (in terms of capabilities).
became a great power after defeating China in 1895; and the United States became a great power after winning the Spanish-American War of 1898. This classification is less rigorous than the one I have put forward here and than efforts by others to systematically define great powers. Italy, for example, does not meet any of the three criteria I have put forward for identifying great powers except in the interwar period. Similarly, China can be counted as a great power only after 1974, contrary to the COW project’s classification of China as a great power after 1949. When discrepancies such as these arise, I choose to adhere to the classification presented in this chapter as opposed to the COW project.

Table 2.1: Criteria for Identifying Great Powers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Industrial and military capabilities</th>
<th>Scope of geopolitical interests</th>
<th>Recognition by other states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threshold</td>
<td>Composite Index of National Capabilities (1816-2007)</td>
<td>Diplomatic representation (1816-2005)</td>
<td>Membership of top tier of global governance institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States meeting criterion 1815-1914</td>
<td>Britain (1887-1913) United States (1887-1913) Germany (1904-1913) Russia (1905-1913)</td>
<td>Britain Austria-Hungary Russia France Germany</td>
<td>Britain Austria-Hungary Russia Germany France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States meeting criterion 1919-1939</td>
<td>United States Soviet Union (1934-35, 1938) Germany (1938-39)</td>
<td>United States Italy Britain France</td>
<td>Britain France Italy Japan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As mentioned above, I only count as great powers states that meet two of the three criteria in each time period laid out above. By this definition, the great powers in the first period from 1815 to 1914 are Britain, Prussia/Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and France. In the interwar period, the great powers are the United States, Britain, Italy, and France. Finally, in the post-1945 period the great powers are the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia, France, Britain, and China after 1974.

**Rising Powers**

I define a rising power as a state that is not a great power, possesses a minimum prior level of capabilities, and experiences a sustained rise in its relative capabilities. I rely only on a material criterion for identifying rising powers, since power transition is primarily about the shifting distribution of capabilities and need not involve expanding interests or recognition (as was the case with the United States in the 19th century). Expanding interests and recognition are likely to occur, but they are not necessary for a state to count as a rising power. A minimum level of prior capabilities is necessary to exclude states that start from a very small base and cannot properly be said to play a major role in world politics until they cross a certain threshold. Not all rising powers become great powers, but all great powers once were rising powers. The scope of this study is thereby limited to states that have not yet broken into the ranks of the great powers, but carry considerable potential to do so.

For empirical identification, therefore, I define a rising power as a state that possesses at least 10 percent of the hegemon’s capability level, and experiences a sustained increase in capabilities for at least a decade. For the increase to count as sustained during this period, the state should not experience a decline in relative capability of more than five percent in any given
year, or experience negative growth over three consecutive years. If as a consequence of its rise a state exceeds 80 percent of the hegemon’s capabilities, then as long as it satisfies one of the other two conditions laid out in Table 2.1 above, it counts as a great power, though it may continue to rise further and potentially even become a new hegemon. If for any reason a rising power’s capabilities fall below the 10 percent minimum, it ceases to count as a rising power.

A potential drawback of the material criterion is that it can be validated only retrospectively, i.e. a state that is at the beginning of a ten-year period of sustained growth cannot know that it is a rising power and therefore the conclusions political scientists or historians might draw many years later from its behavior at this time may be mistaken with regard to assessing motivations.

To address this hurdle, I use a five-year moving average of a state’s relative capabilities as the primary measure, thus capturing a longer-term underlying trend rather than short-term fluctuations in relative capability. The table below lays out the material criterion and its application.

The use of a 10 percent threshold for minimum capabilities produces a larger set of rising powers than is normally found in the literature. Raising the bar to 20 percent leaves only the US as a rising power in the 19th century (though not before 1855), Russia in the interwar period, and China, Japan, and India in the post-1945 period. Nonetheless, I proceed with the more liberal threshold of 10 percent for the sake of case selection, the process of which I will discuss toward the end of this chapter.
Table 2.2: Identifying Rising Powers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Growth in industrial and military capabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Composite Index of National Capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold</td>
<td>(1816-2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States meeting criterion 1815-1914</td>
<td>Turkey (1836-46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States (1827-51, 1855-66, 1872-1914)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy (1860-71, 1882-91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China (1869-78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan (1887-1909)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States meeting criterion 1919-1939</td>
<td>China (1919-1928)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia (1920-39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan (1920-39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States meeting criterion 1945-</td>
<td>China (1958-1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>India (1960-77, 1983-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan (1958-78, 1985-96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy (1985-96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poland (1975-84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brazil (1970-90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International Regimes**

According to one of the most widely cited works on the subject, an international regime is defined as the “principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area.” I adopt this definition, which permits the exploration not just of treaties and institutions but also the norms and principles surrounding a particular issue in the international system. While one could look for the effects of status in various locations, international regimes are a good place to start, for a number of reasons. First, they are institutional microcosms of the social nature of international relations. While the broader international system may be anarchic and lacking any over-arching authority, the conventions

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8. China became a great power in terms of capabilities and membership of the UNSC after 1974.
and multilateral arrangements that states arrive at between themselves create a more social environment populated by norms, institutional cultures, coalitions, and other facets of social life amidst which rising powers and other states operate. Analytically, therefore, international regimes offer a conducive environment in which to observe and analyze the status-based behaviors of states.

Second from the perspectives of states, international regimes are ideal forums in which to seek recognition of one’s status. Because status is a function of community beliefs about a particular actor, the existence of a readymade community that interacts in public or semi-public settings according to pre-established rules and procedures provides a helpful environment for a state to propagate a certain image of itself among other states and thus cultivate the status it seeks for itself. From the researcher’s perspective therefore, status-related behaviors are likely to be more observable in international regimes than say on the battlefield where status takes a backseat to more pressing concerns such as survival or even honor and prestige (both concepts distinct from but related to status, as I discuss later in this chapter).

Third, the rules and norms of international regimes offer a comparatively clear metric by which to measure the behavior of states. Whether a state follows, breaks, or tries to modify the rules of a regime is a fairly straightforward empirical question, both for the state in question and for other states in the international system. Because in international regimes countries must frequently communicate their decisions and reasoning to other countries, there exists a clear understanding on all sides as to the behavior of any particular country. The same might not be true in other areas of state behavior such as military strategy or bilateral diplomacy, both of which lack the publicity inherent in international regimes that sets an observable and clear standard of behavior that members must follow. In this manner, studying international regimes
makes the research problem of identifying the conditions under which status ambitions influence rising powers’ decision-making calculus a more tractable one.

Finally, it is worth noting that while international regimes present a set of easier cases in which to investigate status-related policies compared to other domains such as war, grand strategy, or military decision-making, I focus on the hard cases within the realm of international regimes, i.e. those where security concerns should predominate the decision-making of countries. One should not expect status concerns to play a major role in the calculus of countries within a regime focused on nuclear non-proliferation or the laws of war, for example. If we do find such evidence, then our confidence in the theory and arguments presented in this study is strengthened. Thus to the extent that the behavior of rising powers within international regimes is of interest from both scholarly and policy perspectives, focusing on the hard cases of international security regimes helps to more convincingly establish the effects of status ambitions.

**Status**

In their classic formulation of social identity theory, Henri Tajfel and John Turner defined status as “a group’s relative position on some evaluative dimensions of comparison.”\(^{10}\) Two recent applications of this concept to international relations define status respectively as “collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on valued attributes”\(^{11}\) and “attributes of an individual or social roles, especially those attributes related to position in a deference hierarchy.”\(^{12}\) Three important aspects of status can be gleaned from these definitions. First, status is a *perceptual*

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attribute, i.e. while it may correlate with objective facts, it exists ultimately at the level of beliefs. Second, status is collectively attributed. It operates in the realm of second-order beliefs, i.e. “beliefs that a group of observers holds some belief.” In other words, to say a certain member of a group has a certain status is to say that every member of the group believes that the group assigns that status to that member. Third, status is relative. It is measured in terms of rank along some dimension of comparison such as wealth, military power, culture, political system, etc. In world politics, status is interpreted in two ways: membership of a club (like the great powers, the democracies, the rich countries, or even just statehood), and relative standing within a club.

In the context of power transition, the primary dimension of status is that of joining the great-power club, therefore in this dissertation I focus on the strategies that rising powers use to attain great-power status. By the above definition, a rising power attains great-power status when it perceives that the existing great powers all believe it to be their equal in rank and therefore a member of the great-power club. It is important to note that status equality with the great powers does not entail economic or military equality with them. Rather, it entails symbolic equality in terms of being treated in the way a member of the club would be treated relative to non-members (this definition does not touch on the relative standing of members within the club). As mentioned above, status may be correlated with objective facts but it is ultimately a subjective perception rooted in social interactions. Rising powers are on the path to becoming great powers in terms of their capabilities, and they tend to seek recognition of this fact from the great powers

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14 Ibid., p. 374.
and other states in the international system. The pursuit of material capabilities is therefore entwined with the pursuit of great-power status, but they are not always the same thing.

Status is related to but distinct from various concepts that are part of the international relations lexicon such as power, prestige, honor, respect, and recognition. Power, measured in international relations scholarship purely in terms of material capabilities, is one of the ingredients of status, but sometimes the causality runs in the opposite direction.\textsuperscript{16} For example, membership of the great-power club today affords Britain and France more power in international affairs than they would otherwise enjoy based on their capabilities alone. Prestige is another commonly used term in the literature, defined by Realists to mean a “reputation for power,”\textsuperscript{17} and by reconstructed Realists to mean “public recognition of eminence.”\textsuperscript{18} The latter definition is closer to the one employed here—for a rising power, great-power status entails public recognition of eminence at a level equal to that of the great powers. This relativity inherent in the concept of status distinguishes it from prestige, which can be attained and preserved without making comparisons with other states. Moreover, because status is collectively attributed, it is not directly subject to a state’s control, unlike prestige (especially when viewed as the reputation for power), which can be enhanced through unilateral actions such as building up one’s military or economic capabilities.\textsuperscript{19} Honor, or “the seemingly universal desire to stand out among one’s peers, which is often achieved by selfless, sometimes even

\textsuperscript{19} See Wallace, “Power, Status,” p. 26; Midlarsky, On War, p. 94; Dafoe et al, “Reputation and Status,” p. 10.
sacrificial, adherence to social norms,” is a concept related to status. However, sometimes the dictates of status might require a state to engage in dishonorable behavior. Thus it is only when the status sought by a state happens to be attainable through adherence to prevailing international norms that status and honor overlap in world politics.

Respect is a concept that has recently made its way into international relations research. It can be defined as “appropriate confirmation of one’s rightful position.” Stated this way, an act of disrespect becomes an “unjustifiable denial of social rank.” While respect may in some instances be identical to the conferral of a certain status on a state, the definition of status employed in this dissertation focuses on symbolic equality with the members of a club, and therefore sets a higher standard for status conferral/denial than simply being respected/disrespected. The imperative of equality goes beyond “adequate consideration” of a state’s importance, ideas, and achievements, requiring that the state be treated on the same footing as the members of the club to which it seeks admission. Thus only in certain narrowly defined cases does disrespect lead to status denial.

Lastly, the concept of recognition is perhaps the most fundamentally related to status. Recognition refers to the affirmation of an actor’s identity, and is therefore in some sense a

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20 Lebow, A Cultural Theory, p. 5.
21 Ibid., p. 528. Lebow gives the example of Germany’s willingness in the First World War to violate its decades old commitment to uphold Belgium’s neutrality, which resulted from a “preference for standing over honor.”
24 Ibid., p. 116.
25 Ibid., p. 112.
necessary condition for the attribution of any status to that actor. In the context of this dissertation, one might say that rising powers seek recognition of their symbolic equality with the great powers, or their right to equal consideration with the members of the great-power club. Recognition is thus the means by which rising powers attain their status objectives, and it can be embodied in the words and actions of the great powers and other states in the international system. A denial of this specific type of recognition sought by rising powers is then a denial of the great-power status that they seek.

**Theoretical Assumptions**

The theory in this dissertation is based on the assumption that states are non-unitary and rational actors in world politics. The desire for status is a socio-psychological phenomenon and therefore in order to understand its impact on foreign policy it is important to study the motivations of decision-makers, who may hold different and sometimes contrasting perceptions of the openness and legitimacy of international regimes, and might advocate different status-seeking strategies as a result. The unit of analysis therefore is the small group of leaders that make decisions on a state’s policies toward an international regime in a security-related issue area. Compared to other issue areas, security-related decisions are generally left to the executive branches of government in most countries and also face relatively less involvement from non-state parties such as the media, public opinion, and interest groups. This feature of the empirical domain of this dissertation allows me to focus on a small group of leaders (mostly the senior political leadership

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and diplomatic and military bureaucracy in each case) and their perceptions of the international regimes they face.

Unlike a number of other works on status in world politics, I do not assume any degree of emotionality or irrationality in this process.\textsuperscript{27} It is not necessary to assume that states who are denied the status they feel they deserve “experience frustration…and as a consequence manifest a greater degree of dissatisfaction and aggressiveness in their social and political behavior” in order to explore the conditions under which status impacts foreign policy.\textsuperscript{28} In fact, social identity theory is based on the finding that it is the need for intergroup differentiation rooted in the psychological need for self-esteem rather than frustration or conflict of interest that creates competition between groups.\textsuperscript{29} No doubt emotional reactions are an observable indicator of status denial, but the identity management strategies of mobility, creativity, or competition that states’ leaders choose in order to bolster their status are the result of strategic calculation and not emotional reaction.\textsuperscript{30}

This latter assumption arises from the premise that states pursue status as a basic preference, along with other objectives such as survival, security, and material gain.\textsuperscript{31} Therefore the emotions a state’s leaders feel at the loss of status and the strategies they follow to attain status are qualitatively no different from the emotions they feel at the loss of security and the

\textsuperscript{27} See, for example, Larson, Deborah Welch, and Alexei Shevchenko. 2014. “Russia says no: Power, status, and emotions in foreign policy.”\textit{Communist and Post-Communist Studies}, 47, pp. 269-279. The authors argue that status denial can lead to feelings of anger and shame, which then shape foreign policy.

\textsuperscript{28} Wallace, “Power, Status,” p. 23.


\textsuperscript{31} This assumption can also be found in: Lebow, \textit{A Cultural Theory}, p. 541; Wohlfarth, “Unipolarity,” p. 29; Markey, “The Prestige Motive,” p. 126; Murray, “Identity, Insecurity,” p. 658.
strategies they follow to attain security. In other words, if states do not act emotionally and irrationally to achieve security, there is no theoretical reason why we should expect them to do so to achieve status. Similarly, in line with previous research, I assume that states may pursue status for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons, just as they may pursue material goals for instrumental or intrinsic reasons. As noted above, in some circumstances, status may bring security and economic gain, and in other circumstances the opposite may be true. This indeterminacy does not affect the proposition that states value status and pursue it as part of the basic set of things they care about in world politics.

Lastly, I assume, in line with the English School and the recent so-called social turn in international relations theory, that the international system is a social environment and is in fact structured hierarchically, but not necessarily in a pattern of complete dominance by one actor or group. A long-standing view of international society holds that the existence of great powers implies three things: the existence of a club with a rule of membership, the extraordinary military capabilities of all the members of this club, and the recognition by other states and by the great powers themselves of their special rights and duties with regard to issues of systemic peace and security. In international politics, there is no group of higher status than the great powers. Their status is defined not just in terms of capabilities but also in terms of the special rights and duties that being a great power brings with it, which change over time. Most importantly, great-power status is visibly accorded to them in terms of deference by other states in the international system. The great powers sit atop the international hierarchy and enjoy the benefits of their position, but they do not enjoy authority over the international system in a manner analogous to

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the state in domestic society. As Michael Wallace notes, “The international hierarchy would seem more analogous to the pecking order amongst chickens in a barnyard than the status relationships between individuals and groups in human societies.” Having said that, one can certainly discern patterns of social behavior in inter-state relations and therefore apply insights from social psychology to world politics, as many scholars have done.

**Scope Conditions**

Not all states value status, and not all states that value status, value it equally. My study is focused on a relatively small class of states—rising powers—that all value the status of being a future great power. Compared to other types of states, status dynamics are likely to be more salient in the case of rising powers. In any social system, those at the very top of the status hierarchy have no motivation to change their status and those at the very bottom have no resources to do so. Those in the middle, the ones who have a mix of high and low status attributes, are likely to experience “rank disequilibrium” and possess “both the resources and the inner justification needed for acts of deviance.” In the international system, this is particularly true in situations of power transition, where the capabilities of certain powers are on the rise. These “parvenu powers” seek “acceptance as great powers” and therefore might engage in strategies that increase their status within the system. Social psychologists have found that

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34 Wallace, *War and Rank*, p. 4.
individual ability, or doing better than others in your group by some pre-defined metric, is positively correlated with the desire for upward mobility, and that those who are rising up a status hierarchy are expected by others and themselves to rise even further in the future and are therefore evaluated as having higher status compared to those whose ranks decline or do not change. These findings suggest that the leaders of rising powers are both likely to desire higher status—specifically, great-power status—and their preference for status is likely to be monotonic.

There are of course other countries that are not rising powers that also value great-power status, i.e. the great powers themselves, who value the status of already being in the club and might further value their standing relative to other club members. For example, Russia since the end of the Cold War has struggled to retain its status as a great power against the backdrop of American hegemony. While rising powers and great powers uniquely care about the status of sitting atop the global social hierarchy, other states might care about other types of status in a variety of contexts. As discussed in a recent review essay, a country’s status refers to its position

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within a global deference hierarchy, and this hierarchy can exist along multiple dimensions.40 Countries that care about being recognized as wealthy will value their position in a global deference hierarchy of wealth. Those who care about being recognized as paragons of democracy will care about their ranking among democratic countries, and so on. Thus status is both context-specific and relative to other states within a global hierarchy. In this study, I focus exclusively on the status of being a member of the great-power club, which is something rising powers value. William Thompson labels this status with a “big “S”,” distinguishing it from “small “s”” issues which refer to “the irritations, sometimes trivial and sometimes not, associated with states not acknowledging the status that state agents feel they deserve.”41 He implies that small-s issues are likely to be important primarily when they occur against a backdrop of big-S transition. This formulation neatly captures the importance of rising powers for the study of status in world politics. Status ambitions are most likely to influence foreign policy when rising powers start rubbing shoulders with established great powers. International regimes are an important locus of this phenomenon.

The international regimes I focus on are designed to restrict the use of certain weapons and modes of warfare. Over the last 150 years, going back to the beginnings of international law and multilateral treaties governing relations between states, these “prohibition regimes”42 have dealt with issues such as the use of private armed vessels in naval combat, the use of certain projectiles in warfare, the use of poisonous gases and chemicals, and the spread of nuclear weapons. Other regimes in the same family have aimed not necessarily at prohibition but at the

40 Dafoe et al, 2014.
reduction or limitation of certain types of armaments such as naval warships, nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, some types of conventional weapons, and small arms. In functional terms, these are all regimes that place restraints on states and seek to prevent them from acquiring, developing, or using specific types of warfare and weaponry. In the 19th century, the most prominent of these international regimes was the gradual emergence of a set of rules governing warfare on land and at sea. In the 20th century, these types of regimes have emerged in numerous areas, ranging from the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 (aimed at limiting the construction of new warships) to the Arms Trade Treaty of 2013 (aimed at regulating the international trade in conventional weapons). In this dissertation, I focus on the 1856 Declaration of Paris that was the first multilateral codification of the laws of maritime war; the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty that sought to limit the construction of capital ships; and the 1970 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or NPT. In the concluding chapter of the dissertation, I discuss the generalizability of my findings to international regimes in other issue areas and time periods.

A THEORY OF STATUS-SEEKING IN INTERNATIONAL REGIMES

In offering a new way of thinking about international relations, Richard Ned Lebow argues, “the patterns of interactions among actors is determined not by their number and relative power but by the nature of the society in which they interact.” As I have argued above, the international system is a social environment and the international regimes that comprise the global order are particularly dense hubs of social interaction between states (represented by their respective leaders).

43 Lebow, A Cultural Theory, p. 2.
Social Identity Theory

To develop a theory of rising-power approaches to international regimes, I draw on social identity theory, which focuses on “those aspects of an individual’s self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging.” This body of theorizing has grown out of the finding that individuals, aside from having sources of identity that are unique to themselves, also draw their identity from the groups to which they belong. While traditional social psychology studied “the individual in the group,” social identity theory introduced the study of “the group in the individual.” Given that society is composed of multiple groups, identification with one’s own group (the in-group) leads to certain predictable behaviors with regard to other groups (the out-groups). In-group bias—the favoring of one’s own group relative to out-groups—is a consistent finding in the social identity literature.

Social psychologists have posited three assumptions to account for this phenomenon. First, individuals have an innate desire to maintain or enhance their self-esteem, or “positive self-concept.” Indeed studies show both that individuals need self-esteem and that differentiating one’s own group from other groups bolsters one’s self-esteem. Second, there are multiple groups in society and they are arranged along various hierarchies of power, wealth, status, and other dimensions. Thus in a relative sense, group membership can have a positive or negative connotation. Finally, individuals can only evaluate their own group by comparing it with other groups, therefore intergroup comparison is a frequently occurring social-psychological

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47 Hogg and Abrams, Social Identifications, p. 21.
phenomenon.\textsuperscript{48} Thus through the processes of social categorization (into groups), social identification (with one’s in-group), and social comparison (with other groups), one arrives at the repeatedly observed phenomenon of in-group bias. The critical experimental finding in this regard is that in-group bias arises in the most minimal of experimental settings, from nothing but the random and arbitrary categorization of subjects into two or more groups. This finding leads to the conclusion that “social competition” is empirically distinct from “realistic competition,” the latter arising from genuine conflicts of interest whereas the former is a purely socio-psychological phenomenon.\textsuperscript{49} In-group bias remains entrenched even when two groups of different statuses are brought together and given a common interest (by linking a group’s gains to the overall performance of both groups).\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Identity Management Strategies}

In-group bias and social competition are not the only processes involved in intergroup relations. This is especially the case of groups at different status levels. In such cases, social identity theory does not always predict antagonism and conflict between groups. In fact, lower-status groups engage in a variety of so-called identity management strategies to achieve a positive social identity when faced with a higher-status group. Three strategies in particular have been highlighted in the literature: social mobility, social creativity, and social competition.

\textit{Social mobility} involves efforts by lower-status group members to leave their group and join the higher-status group. This involves psychological dissociation from one’s lower-status

\textsuperscript{48} Lemain, “Social differentiation”; Turner, “Social comparison”.
group and often the emulation of higher-status habits, attitudes, and practices.\textsuperscript{51} In both laboratory and field settings, low-status group members have displayed the opposite of in-group bias, i.e. out-group favoritism.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed many researchers have found that social mobility is the dominant strategy for achieving positive social identity in the presence of group-level status differentials.\textsuperscript{53} An entirely separate branch of theorizing, known as system justification theory, further argues that members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to internalize beliefs that maintain the status quo even though it is against their interests, thereby justifying the position of higher-status groups.\textsuperscript{54}

*Social creativity* involves the redefinition of existing sources of status inequality in an attempt to attain a positive social identity. In other words, when their social identity is threatened, people display “a tendency to differentiate oneself from the other, to be different or to do something else, to invent new criteria of being or doing with others or to combine accepted criteria in an original way.”\textsuperscript{55} There are three ways of engaging in social creativity. First, comparing the in-group and out-group on some new dimension that shows the in-group in a more positive light than before. Second, changing the value of the in-group’s offending attribute(s)

\textsuperscript{51} Tajfel and Turner, “An Integrative Theory,” p. 43.
\textsuperscript{55} Lemain, “Social Differentiation,” p. 17.
such that it goes (they go) from being viewed negatively to being viewed positively. Third, comparing the in-group to a new out-group, one that is not as high-status as the current one. In these ways, members of the lower-status group can attain a more positive social identity when faced with a higher-status group.

*Social competition* involves neither accepting nor redefining the dimensions of status comparison between one’s low-status group and a high-status out-group. Rather, this is a strategy of outright conflict in which the lower-status group tries to outdo the higher-status group on the very dimensions that make the latter superior. Social competition is the only strategy aimed at changing the status quo, whereas mobility and creativity are designed to alter the valence of an individual’s social identity. Another distinction between the three strategies in the social identity literature is that individuals pursue social mobility, whereas groups pursue creativity and competition. I assume that this distinction does not hold in the context of international relations, where it is improbable (and impossible) for the leader of one state (where states are analogous to groups) to seek membership of a higher-status state. A more fruitful distinction is the one between normative strategies, i.e. those that conform to the norms of the dominant social system, and nonnormative strategies, which violate these norms and go beyond what is considered acceptable. This distinction captures the core difference between social competition, which seeks to overturn the status quo, and social mobility and social creativity, which seek to improve one’s status within it.

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56 All three tactics are outlined in Tajfel and Turner, “An Integrative Theory,” p. 43, and are widely accepted in the literature.
Given its overwhelming focus on the relationship between status dissatisfaction and war, international relations scholarship has over-emphasized social competition at the expense of the other two strategies, and thus failed to recognize the various options available to lower-status groups.\textsuperscript{59} In fact, newer research in social identity theory has elaborated a greater number of potential identity management strategies such as superordinate recategorization (re-conceptualizing group boundaries), temporal comparison (comparisons to one’s own past), and denial.\textsuperscript{60} However, given the overwhelming continued emphasis in the literature on the three strategies discussed above, I employ them in this study as well.

\textit{Applications of Social Identity Theory}

Social identity theory has been applied widely in a number of real-world contexts. Researchers have used it to understand and explain second-language acquisition, cultural adjustment, homosexual identity formation, the coping strategies of immigrants, the migration of firms between stock exchanges and college basketball teams between athletic conferences, and a host of other organizational behaviors.\textsuperscript{61} As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the theory has

found increasing acceptance in international relations scholarship since the early 2000s, particularly in the context of status differentials and associated identity management strategies. However, none of the existing scholarship in international relations has explained how states might choose between identity management strategies. Social identity theory in fact offers the answers, but the independent variables in question—which I will discuss in detail below—are yet to find their way into the international relations literature.

Applications of social identity theory to international relations have to contend with a number of potential criticisms. First, as is commonly observed, states are not people and therefore cannot experience identity threats or opportunities. Second, insights derived from intergroup interaction at the level of domestic society, in the shadow of the domestic authority of the state, might be difficult to translate into the anarchic realm of international politics. Third, it may be inaccurate to extrapolate the findings of laboratory and field settings, where only one group membership is salient for the individual, to the level of national leaders who are members of multiple groups—including family, ethnicity, political party, nation, and supranational organizations.

In response to the first objection, it is entirely plausible to assume that national leaders who represent their countries in international regimes identify themselves with their nations and


63 Wallace, *War and Rank*, p. 4.
act in their nation’s interests.\textsuperscript{65} This identification is further strengthened by social and political processes within nations that create “a strong sense of belonging, a “we-feeling”, shared by broad domestic groups [that] can bring about a pervasive homogenization of perceptions, convictions, norms, and political preferences.”\textsuperscript{66} At an even more elementary level, the vast body of international relations literature that ascribes motives such as survival, security, and the pursuit of material gain to states makes precisely the same assumption, that states qua states value these goals.\textsuperscript{67} Of course, what is really meant in these cases—and in the case of status-seeking—is that the state acts as a non-unitary and rational actor where decision-makers arrive at a particular course of action because they value certain things for their states. In other words, decision-makers identify with their states.\textsuperscript{68}

Regarding the second objection, anarchy at the international level may cause intergroup dynamics to operate differently, but not only do most theories of status assume some mix of hierarchy and anarchy in the international system, the minimal group studies of social psychology (discussed above) also suggest that in the absence of any additional conditions other than categorization into groups, people still develop social identities and seek to positively differentiate themselves with regard to relevant out-groups. Therefore while one must be cognizant of the effects of anarchy at the international level, this fact alone cannot preclude the development of status-based theories of international politics.

Finally, regarding the third objection, indeed decision-makers are subject to multiple social identities, therefore any analysis must specify which of these identities is primed at a given

\textsuperscript{65} Larson and Shevchenko, “Shortcut to Greatness,” p. 91.
\textsuperscript{66} Forsberg et al, “Introduction,” p. 264.
\textsuperscript{67} Lebow, \textit{A Cultural Theory}, p. 16.
moment. Priming is likely to be a function of the source of a specific identity threat. If the threat comes from another state and has national implications—as is the case with negotiations in international regimes, particularly over security-related issues—then one can assume that a leader’s social identity rooted in his/her nationality will be activated. Therefore in the context of the present study, I can plausibly assume that the leaders of rising powers, when negotiating with the great powers in international regimes designed to restrain weapons and warfare, will be thinking primarily in terms of their national social identities.

**Theory and Hypotheses**

How do the identity management strategies discussed above—social mobility, social competition, and social creativity—map onto the behavior of rising powers in international regimes? Albert Hirschman, in his classic work on the economics of organizations, suggested that when a firm or organization experiences decline leading to dissatisfaction among its members or customers, the latter have three choices: exit, voice, or loyalty. Each of these strategies essentially signals the need for organizational change and improved performance, but each has its own causal mechanism and outcome. International regimes are akin to organizations that produce status for their members, and those who choose to exit are likely so dissatisfied with their status in the regime that they choose to break or disregard the rules of the regime, and perhaps set up their own arrangements in which they might be the top ranked state—they engage in **social competition**. States that choose voice are those that are dissatisfied with their status but see merit in trying to reframe the rules of the international regime in a way that elevates their status within it—they engage in **social creativity**. Finally, states that choose loyalty are those

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who are dissatisfied with their status but decide that supporting the regime and following its rules are the best ways to earn higher status—they engage in social mobility.

These strategies have clear practical corollaries in international regimes. In a recent study of India’s approach to multilateralism, W.P.S. Sidhu et al ask a question that one might ask of any rising power’s approach to the global order:

Will it be content with rule taking—adhering to the existing and emerging international norms and institutions? Will it focus on rule breaking—challenging the existing order primarily for effect and seeking greater accommodation for itself in existing global institutions?...Or will a more realistic strategy be one that focuses on rule shaping—contributing in partnership with others to emerging norms and building nascent regimes[?]71

In a similar vein, Randall Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu argue that the future of the global order will depend on the foreign policies of “emerging powers” such as China, who could choose to be supporters of existing international regimes, spoilers, or shirkers.72 Richard Ned Lebow argues that there are essentially three strategies that rising powers can follow to “gain entry into the circle” of great powers: emulation, deviance, and challenge.73 Underlying each of these studies is a common set of choices a rising power has with regard to the rules of the global order. It can choose to follow the rules, break the rules, or change the rules. These three categories—rule following, rule breaking, and rule shaping—map neatly onto the respective identity management strategies discussed above, i.e. mobility, competition, and creativity. I therefore adopt them as the different values of the dependent variable in my theory.

73 Lebow, A Cultural Theory, pp. 542-45.
Dependent Variable: Rule-Oriented Behavior

The dependent variable of interest in this study is the behavior of a rising power with regard to the rules and norms of a particular international regime. In this regard, a rising power can adopt one of three strategies: Follow, Challenge, or Shape. A rising power that follows is essentially pursuing a strategy of social mobility and does what the international regime requires or does not do what the regime prohibits. Of special interest are cases where the pre-regime state of the rising power was to either be doing what the regime prohibits or not doing what the regime requires—in these instances, one can examine the role that status and interests play relative to each other in shaping the course of adjustment or non-adjustment to the regime that a rising power takes.

At the other extreme, a rising power that challenges is pursuing a strategy of social competition and does not undertake an adjustment to do what the international regime requires or not do what it prohibits. In other words, it is violating or subverting the regime’s rules. In doing so, it might fall outside the jurisdiction of specific conventions or institutions that govern an international regime, but it does not necessarily fall outside the regime itself since it continues to interact in some capacity with other states that are members of the regime, and because international regimes are broadly defined to include not just institutions but also rules, norms, and procedures that are not necessarily tied to any particular treaty or convention. Thus a rising power may reject a specific treaty while still broadly following the rules of the international regime of which the treaty is one part. In such instances, if the rising power does nothing to try and amend the offending treaty, then it remains a challenger to the regime.
Instead of taking the extreme positions of following or breaking the rules of an international regime, a rising power might choose to shape the rules to its advantage. Rule shaping—the manifestation of social creativity—can take various forms. Social identity theory would predict that rule shaping can mean either trying to find a new dimension of favorable comparison with the great powers, or altering the perception of one’s negative attributes in order to produce a more favorable comparison. In an institutional setting, the former strategy is akin to seeking to modify the rules in a way that creates new criteria for the inclusion of the rising power in the top tier of the international regime. I call this a strategy of Expansion. For example, if an international regime requires a certain threshold of military capabilities for countries to be counted in its top ranks, a rising power that lacks these capabilities might emphasize its diplomatic achievements or economic prowess as a way of expanding the top tier of the international regime to included itself.

The second rule-shaping strategy of redefining a negative attribute is akin to modifying the objectives and goals of an international regime to bring them more in line with the identity and goals of the rising power. I call this a strategy of Redirection. For example, if an international regime contains rules that cast a rising power’s practices and policies in a negative light, the rising power might seek to redirect or reorient the regime’s focus such that these practices are no longer viewed negatively but instead might be included in the regime’s definition of acceptable or desirable behavior. The principle of common but differentiated responsibility that emerged in the global climate change negotiations of the early 1990s is an

According to social identity theory, social creativity can take three forms: finding a new dimension of comparison with the higher-status group, redefining a negative attribute as positive, or engaging in social comparison with a group of even lower status. Since this study is focused on the dynamics between rising and great powers, I ignore the third possibility—that rising powers might engage in social creativity by comparing themselves with countries of lower status—and focus instead on the first two.
example of emerging powers such as India and China redirecting the international regime to take a more holistic developmental approach to curbing carbon emissions and thereby allowing developing countries to shift the onus for climate change onto the developed great powers. In this manner, a negative attribute (high emissions) was redefined as an issue of global inequality thus allowing the rising powers to achieve symbolic equality with the great powers in the international regime.

The observable implications of the four strategies—Follow, Challenge, Expand, and Redirect—are summarized in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach to Rules</th>
<th>Underlying Strategy</th>
<th>Observable Implication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOLLOW</td>
<td>Social Mobility</td>
<td>Cooperate with the international regime, follow its rules, and publicly support its purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHALLENGE</td>
<td>Social Competition</td>
<td>Try to block, undermine, or publicly challenge the international regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPAND</td>
<td>Social Creativity</td>
<td>Introduce new criteria to get oneself counted in the international regime’s top ranks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REDIRECT</td>
<td>Social Creativity</td>
<td>Attempt to alter the goals of the international regime in order include one’s own preferences and practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Independent Variable: Perceived Openness of the International Regime**

A large body of research on social identity has highlighted two primary variables that influence the choice of identity management strategy by members of lower-status groups: the perceived permeability and the perceived legitimacy of the status hierarchy. Permeability, or what I label *openness* in an institutional context, has to do with the belief that the boundaries between groups are sufficiently porous such that actors (in this case states) can move into higher-status groups
“through talent, hard work, good luck, or whatever other means.” Openness can also be understood in terms of “social value efficacy,” or “the degree to which [a group’s members] believe that the group’s social value can be improved by collective efforts within the current social system.” Experimental research has found that members of low-status groups with permeable boundaries identify less with their own group compared to members of low-status groups with impermeable boundaries. Thus when faced with a status hierarchy that is relatively permeable, individuals will opt for social mobility, i.e. they will attempt to leave their own group and join a higher-status group. By contrast, when the hierarchy is impermeable, members of lower-status groups are more likely to engage in social creativity or social competition.

In the context of international regimes, permeability is akin to a relatively open institutional architecture, whereby a rising power can see itself ascending the status hierarchy built into the regime and joining the great powers at the very top. For example, international regimes that by charter institute a great-power club that does not permit easy entry—the most obvious example being the UN Security Council (UNSC)—are relatively closed compared to international regimes that allow for increases in status based on a new power’s rise, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) following recent reforms, where voting rights are now more aligned with the growing economic weight of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries. The existence of a mobility pathway of this nature will make it more likely that a rising power will engage in rule following behavior, and the absence of such a pathway will make it more likely that a rising power will engage in rule shaping or rule breaking behavior. When thinking

78 Boen and Vanbeselaere, “Responding to Membership,” p. 56.
about an international regime’s openness, a rising power’s leaders are essentially contemplating two questions. First, does this international regime have any membership restrictions that would prevent my country from joining it? Second, does this international regime’s top leadership have any restrictions that would prevent my country from someday becoming a regime leader? Naturally, the second question is contingent on the first—an international regime that does not even admit a particular rising power will have no room for it in its top leadership. However, there can be cases where rising powers are admitted into an international regime but cannot break into its top ranks. This is an important concern for states that care about status equality with the great powers.

*Independent Variable: Perceived Legitimacy of the International Regime*

Members of lower-status groups are also influenced by their perceptions of a given status hierarchy’s legitimacy. Legitimacy, or “the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed,” can be a function of substantive outcomes produced by a particular social arrangement, or the procedures by which these outcomes are reached, or both. Although substantive outcomes are not irrelevant, a large literature in social psychology has found that people rely primarily on *procedural fairness* as a criterion for judging the legitimacy of institutions. In the context of social identity, “receiving fair procedures is intertwined with being treated with respect and dignity, feeling that authorities are neutral, and trusting the motives of the authorities with whom one is dealing… In these ways, procedures establish and

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maintain favorable social identities,” and positive social identities are correlated with rule
following behaviors.82 Procedural fairness can include the ability of all parties to have a say in an
institution’s allocation of resources, to have a say in an institution’s decision making process,
consistency in the application of rules across members of an institution or over time, the lack of
bias in decision-making, and even “simple politeness and interpersonal respect.”83 The perceived
legitimacy of a social order — frequently measured in terms of procedural fairness — has been
repeatedly found to render low status more acceptable in social identity experiments.84
Conversely, when lower-status groups view the status hierarchy as illegitimate, they are more
likely to engage in social creativity or social competition.85

In the context of international regimes, therefore, we can expect rising powers that
perceive the rules to be legitimate to act in ways that uphold the regime. A lack of legitimacy, or

82 Tyler, Tom R. 2001. “A Psychological Perspective on the Legitimacy of Institutions and
Authorities.” In Jost, John T., and Brenda Major (eds.), The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging
Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Intergroup Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University
Identity and Self-Categorization Processes for Creating and Responding to Fairness.” In S.
Alexander Haslam, Daan van Knippenberg, Michael J. Platow, and Naomi Ellemers (eds.),
Social Identity at Work: Developing Theory for Organizational Practice. New York: Psychology
Press, pp. 262-3.
84 Caddick, Brian. “Perceived Illegitimacy and Intergroup Relations.” In Tajfel, Henri (ed.).
behaviour.” European Journal of Social Psychology, 17, pp. 277-293; Ellemers, Naomi, Henk
Wilke, and Ad van Knippenberg. 1993. “Effects of the Legitimacy of Low Group or Individual
Status on Individual and Collective Status-Enhancement Strategies.” Journal of Personality and
“Intergroup Perception in Naturally Occurring Groups of Differential Status: A Social Relations
Perspective.” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77:6, pp. 1200-1212; Terry,
Deborah J., and Anne T. O’Brien. 2001. “Status, Legitimacy, and Ingroup Bias in the Context of
an Organizational Merger.” Group Process & Intergroup Relations, 4:3, pp. 271-289.
85 See Bettencourt, B. Ann, Nancy Dorr, Kelly Charlton, and Deborah L. Hume. 2001. “Status
Differences and In-Group Bias: A Meta-Analytic Examination of the Effects of Status Stability,
an order that seems “oppressive or unacceptable,” is likely to result in “revolutionary” action.\textsuperscript{86} For example, although Russia is not a rising power, Anne Clunan argues that the “illegitimate loss of its international status even though it had not been defeated in war, was a persistent theme” in the anti-Western discourse that eventually came to dominate Russian elite circles after the Cold War.\textsuperscript{87} In the present study, I conceive of legitimacy in both substantive and procedural terms. Thus legitimacy has to do with whether a rising power views an international regime as substantively in line with its own views and procedurally fair when compared to the way it treats the rising power’s self-perceived peer group (which includes the great powers). When thinking about an international regime’s legitimacy, a rising power’s leaders are essentially contemplating three questions, all of which indicate whether the regime’s rules should be followed or not. First, is this international regime the most appropriate forum in which my country can earn status within this issue area, or are there other more effective arrangements such as bilateral agreements or unilateral action? Second, is this international regime treating my country in a fair and unbiased manner in terms of according status relative to others in my country’s peer group? This peer group will certainly include the great powers, and it may also include countries that are considered peer competitors for historical reasons, such as Japan for China and Pakistan for India, or Britain for the United States (in the 19th century). Third, even if an international regime’s procedures and rules are biased or unfair, a rising power’s leaders may decide that the issue the regime deals with is so important that it would be better to work within the regime to bring it more in line with what they think should be done about the issue.

\textsuperscript{87} Clunan, “Historical aspirations,” p. 284.
The table below summarizes the observable implications of these variables in the writings, speeches, and diplomatic communications of a rising power’s leaders.

Table 2.4: Observable Implications of the Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Observable Implications (in the reasoning of leaders)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Perceived Openness| - How easy is it to become a member of the regime?  
|                   | - How easy is it to rise to the top ranks of the regime? |
| Perceived Legitimacy| - Is the regime the most appropriate forum for this issue?  
|                   | - Is the regime unbiased and fair toward my country?  
|                   | - Is the issue sufficiently important to warrant working within the regime even if it is biased/unfair? |

Hypotheses and Causal Mechanism

The two independent variables—perceived openness and perceived legitimacy—generate the following hypotheses regarding the status-enhancing strategies a rising power may follow in an international regime.

Table 2.5: Variation in the Status-Seeking Strategies of Rising Powers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED OPENNESS OF INT. REGIME</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
<th>LOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERCEIVED LEGITIMACY OF INT. REGIME</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow (Social Mobility)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand (Social Creativity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redirect (Social Creativity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge (Social Competition)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The core dynamic here is between the “dominant value system and ideology” established by the dominant group (the great powers) in international society, and the “negative social identity and hence lower self-esteem” arising from “subordinate group membership” for rising powers, which mobilizes them to remedy their status deficits relative to the dominant group. A rising power that perceives an international regime to be relatively open and legitimate will engage in a strategy of social mobility—it will by and large do what the regime requires or not do what it prohibits as a way of earning great-power status or symbolic equality with the great powers. Conversely, a rising power that perceives an international regime to be relatively closed and illegitimate will engage in a strategy of social competition—it will by and large challenge the rules of a regime by either not doing what it requires or doing what it prohibits as a way of earning status. In between are two cases of social creativity. First, when a rising power perceives a regime to be relatively legitimate but closed, it will try to expand the membership of the top ranks of the regime to include itself. Second, when a rising power perceives a regime to be relatively open but illegitimate, it will try to redirect the regime’s goals in a manner that fits better with what the rising power considers to be procedurally fair or substantively worth pursuing. These hypotheses may apply to different rising powers within a single international regime, to a single rising power across different international regimes, or to one or more rising powers within one or more international regimes over time.

The conjunction of openness and legitimacy has been found in various social identity studies to impact the in-group vs. out-group biases and identity management strategies of low-status group members. For example, in a study of college students who were members of a Corps of Cadets—a university organization structured along military lines—the existence of a rank

hierarchy and promotion scheme that were known by and acceptable to all members produced out-group favoritism among those lower down the ranks. In a study of former East Germans, researchers found that those who viewed the status hierarchy between themselves and West Germans as stable (i.e. unlikely to change), illegitimate, and impermeable identified more strongly as East German and were more likely to opt for social competition strategies, whereas those who viewed the hierarchy as unstable, legitimate, and permeable were more inclined to dissociate from their East German identity and re-categorize themselves as German. A meta-analysis of social identity studies found that “both perceived legitimacy of the status distinction and the permeability of the group boundaries moderate the effect of relative group status on biased intergroup attitudes.”

It is important to note here that in addition to openness and legitimacy, the social identity literature often highlights a third variable (mentioned briefly above), the stability of the status hierarchy, as having an impact on identity management strategies. A stable status hierarchy is one in which an alternative status position for a group is unlikely to be realized. In this study, I choose not to focus on this variable due to its theoretical and empirical correlation with legitimacy, in that a legitimate order is by definition one that is not prone to fundamental change in terms of reordering the status hierarchy. In the international relations context in particular, as Ian Clark observes, “the degree of legitimacy present in any particular international order…is

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89 Boldry et al, “Intergroup Perception.”
92 Ibid., p. 521.
directly related to the stability of that order." More recent theorizing in social psychology suggests that stability is a second-order consideration after questions of permeability and legitimacy have been answered, and it is only when actors deem a system illegitimate that they will consider the possibility of an alternate system. Empirically, the meta-analysis mentioned above found that the stability of a status hierarchy is highly correlated with its legitimacy, whereas the latter is not correlated with permeability. Moreover, stability appears to have no statistically significant impact on in-group identification. Therefore while we need not be concerned about collinearity between openness and legitimacy, it is a concern in the case of stability and therefore I do not consider it a viable independent variable in the construction of my theory.

Alternative Explanations

A status-based explanation of rising power behavior in international regimes has a fundamentally different teleology from standard explanations that focus on material interests and the

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94 Sweetman et al, “I have a dream,” pp. 300-01.
95 Bettencourt et al, “Status Differences,” p. 531. A later study focused on Dutch and Turkish-Dutch group dynamics in the Netherlands found that among the lower-status group (the Turkish-Dutch), “a legitimate society implies openness and equality,” i.e. there might be a correlation between legitimacy and openness in some settings. See Verkuyten, Maykel, and Arjan Reijerse. 2008. “Intergroup structure and identity management among ethnic minority and majority groups: The interactive effects of perceived stability, legitimacy, and permeability.” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, pp. 106-127. In the international context, however, I assume that it is likely that there will be situations where an international regime may be procedurally fair but still equally exclusionary to all who do not qualify by some metric for top-rank membership. In this case, a rising power is faced with a legitimate but closed regime, and will seek to expand the regime’s top ranks in response. Thus legitimacy and openness are unlikely to be correlated in international regimes, given the small number of great powers that exist in any international system and the highly privileged and prestigious quality of the great-power club, which is not analogous to an ethnic majority group in the domestic context.
distributional outcomes of institutional bargaining, the coercive power of hegemonic countries, and the like. The theory presented in this chapter starts from a different set of assumptions, namely that states do not only seek security and economic gain but also status parity with a certain class of other states that constitute the relevant out-group. For rising powers, the particular status sought is that of symbolic equality with the great powers and the relevant out-group includes the established great powers. Thus a rising power may go to considerable lengths and accept significant costs to uphold the rules of an international regime if doing so confers status benefits; and similarly it might undertake significant costs and risks to break the rules of a regime that does not accord it the status it seeks. In between are situations where a rising power may enhance its status by modifying the rules of the regime in order to make it more legitimate or open.

Based on these considerations, the most obvious alternative explanation for variation in a rising power’s behavior with regard to international regimes is one based on material interest. Put simply, a rising power will break the rules of a regime if doing so is in its material interest, i.e. the material benefits outweigh the costs, and it will uphold the rules of a regime for similar reasons. Material interest can be measured in terms of security created or economic gain achieved. Another group of alternative explanations may arise from the domestic realm, whereby a rising power’s behavior in an international regime may be explained by the pressures decision-makers face from domestic groups with specific interests in supporting or opposing an international regime. In the case studies that follow in subsequent chapters, my analysis will trace the causal chain behind a state’s decisions within an international security regime in order to parse out the different motives that leaders might have, thereby separating material interests and domestic politics from status-related motivations.
In general, the observable implications of status-related factors will lie in the reasoning that decision-makers use to pursue certain policies or courses of action. In analyzing the official and unofficial writing on a particular issue, if it emerges that decision-makers were decisively preoccupied with material factors or domestic lobbies, then this finding would invalidate the theory presented above. However, if it emerges that they were concerned primarily with attaining a certain status in relation to the great powers and that their decision to break or follow the rules of an international security regime were the result of this status being respectively denied or granted to them, then this finding will provide support for the hypotheses outlined above. In all cases, the evidence will be scrutinized carefully in order to weigh considerations of perceived openness and legitimacy of the international regime in question, compared to considerations of national security, domestic politics, or even the individual ideological predilections of decision-makers.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

Existing studies of status in international politics tend to employ dependent variables such as a state’s grand strategy or foreign policy, which lack specificity and can end up being conceptually stretched such that explanations become difficult to falsify. Moreover, the literature to date has not examined the exact mechanisms by which lower-status states choose their identity management strategies. This dissertation overcomes both these weaknesses by narrowing its empirical focus to international regimes, where state behavior is easily observed and can be measured in terms of conformity to a regime’s rules, and by adhering to social identity theory’s two primary independent variables: the perceived openness and perceived legitimacy of the
status hierarchy (which is embodied in international regimes since they are established and maintained by the great powers).

Two factors complicate the research design of this study. First, rising powers in any given time period are not many in number. Hence, in order to maximize leverage over the dependent variable, I choose to study rising powers in three distinct time periods all within the modern era of international law and institutions, i.e. since the middle of the 19th century when the first international laws governing conduct between nations were codified. Second, international regimes exist across a multitude of issue areas each of which may have unique and idiosyncratic features that renders it incomparable to other issue areas. It is methodologically problematic, for example, to compare international regime dynamics in environmental governance to those in arms control. There are of course certain underlying public goods dynamics and issues of monitoring and compliance in common, but there are sufficient intrinsic differences across issue areas to make comparison problematic. Therefore, I restrict the scope of my study to a particular set of international regimes, i.e. those designed to regulate the use of certain weapons and modes of warfare. In this manner, I restrict my focus to a definable set of dynamics that are particularly salient in the case of rising powers. Chief among these dynamics is the asymmetrical disadvantage that any such international regimes would place on rising powers who by definition are weaker than the great powers and seeking to shore up their security relative to the latter. In other words, adhering to the requirements of an arms control regime or to the laws of war would place rising powers at a greater disadvantage than great powers who are more capable of absorbing the cost of the rules in question. Moreover, rules in such institutions are frequently designed to protect the interests of the powerful states that govern them and are thus likely to inherently be disadvantageous to rising powers from a security perspective.
Given the stakes involved for rising powers in international security regimes, one might be surprised to find status concerns and not pure security interests driving behavior. In this sense, international regimes focused on restricting the weapons and methods of warfare of states present a hard case for status-based arguments and are therefore all the more attractive from the perspective of research design. If I can demonstrate that status plays an important role in a realm with stakes as high as that of nuclear weapons, for example, then the case for status becomes easier in other realms such as world trade, collective security, or environmental standards.

Case Selection
As I have already mentioned, comparing across cases of rising powers in any given time period raises problems of unobserved differences between countries due to historical, cultural, and other context-specific factors producing bias in the analysis. Instead, I undertake longitudinal case studies, each one of a single rising power within one international security regime over an extended period of time. In order to do so, I first catalogue the relevant universes of international security regimes and rising powers respectively.

Even though the Concert of Europe was an exclusively great-power institution, I consider it to mark the beginning of the modern era of international multilateral governance. I divide the time since then into three overlapping periods punctuated by the two World Wars, which were systemic events that fundamentally altered the global order. The first period goes from 1815 to 1914, the second from 1919 to 1939, and the third from 1945 to the present. Within each time period, I identify the major international regimes in the area of restraints on weapons and warfare. Empirically, this criterion identifies international regimes focused on arms control and the laws of war. In the pre-1914 period, the most prominent international security regimes in
world politics existed in the realm of the laws of war. In the interwar period, arms control was a major international issue, with the Washington Conference and two London conferences comprising the core of the security order in this period. The post-Second World War order saw a proliferation of international multilateral institutions designed to regulate both the laws of war and the use of certain weapons, particularly nuclear weapons. The corresponding multilateral institutions in each time period are listed below, along with the rising powers identified for each time period, which are listed toward the beginning of this chapter in Table 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>International Regime</th>
<th>Major Multilateral Institutions</th>
<th>Rising Powers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1815-1914</td>
<td>Laws of War</td>
<td>1856 Declaration of Paris&lt;br&gt;1864 Geneva Convention&lt;br&gt;1899/1907 Hague Conventions</td>
<td>Turkey (1836-46)&lt;br&gt;United States (1827-51, 1855-66, 1872-1914)&lt;br&gt;Italy (1860-71, 1882-91)&lt;br&gt;China (1869-78)&lt;br&gt;Japan (1887-1909)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arms Control</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-1939</td>
<td>Laws of War</td>
<td>1929 Geneva Convention</td>
<td>China (1919-1928)&lt;br&gt;Russia (1920-39)&lt;br&gt;Japan (1920-39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the lists of rising powers in the above table, I drop Turkey in 1836-46 since its brief rise occurred prior to the emergence of the first global multilateral institution, the Declaration of Paris. I also drop China in 1869-78 and 1919-28, and Poland in 1975-84, for not being fully sovereign states and therefore constrained in ways that rising powers are not constrained in my
theory or anywhere in the power transition literature. China in the interwar period also witnessed the gradual escalation of a civil war that severely undermined the authority of the state to make significant international decisions. I also drop Russia in the interwar period due to its self-imposed exile from international politics coupled with the great powers not extending invitations to Russia to join any international regimes during this time. Following these deletions, I match the respective periods of each country’s rise to the multilateral institutions that were created during these periods in order to determine the universe of rising power and international security regime pairings.

Table 2.7: Rising Powers and International Security Regimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Potential Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1815-1914  | US: all laws of war institutions  
           | Japan: 1899/1907 Hague Conventions  
           | Italy: 1864 Geneva Convention  |
| 1919-1939  | Japan: all naval arms control institutions + 1929 Geneva Convention  |
| 1945-      | India: all arms control institutions + biological, chemical, and landmine conventions  
           | Japan: all arms control institutions + biological and chemical conventions  
           | China: PTBT, NPT, ABMT  
           | Brazil: NPT, ABMT + biological and conventional conventions  
           | Italy: NPT extension + chemical convention  |

In order to maximize the chances of observing variation in the dependent variable in longitudinal case studies, from each time period I select the country with the longest period spent as a rising power. The longer a country’s rise extends, the more multilateral institutions it is likely to be exposed to within an international regime. In the pre-1914 period, the US has the longest rise. In the interwar period, the only viable rising power case is that of Japan. In the post-1945 period, India has the longest rise. Having selected these three countries, I now select the
optimal institution or set of institutions within each regime that I can examine empirically. In the case of the US in the 19th century, I drop the Hague Conferences since they occurred at the turn of the 20th century, more than a decade after the US had materially surpassed Britain and at a time when by many accounts the US was already a great power (after the Spanish-American War of 1898). Therefore I do not expect to find pronounced rising-power behavior during this period. Between the remaining two institutions—the 1856 Declaration of Paris and the 1864 Geneva Convention—I select the former due to the higher material stakes involved in the maritime laws of war (covered by the Declaration), which laid down principles for the protection of the commerce of neutrals and belligerents in wartime. Compared to the Geneva Convention, which was for the humane treatment of those wounded in land-based combat, the material stakes of compliance or non-compliance with the Declaration of Paris were greater and therefore the latter creates a stronger test of any status-related behavior that might run contrary to materialist expectations.

For similar reasons, I drop the 1929 Geneva Convention from the interwar period and focus on Japan’s approach to the naval conferences at Washington and London, which were all designed to restrict the construction of capital ships. Therefore I focus strictly on the international regime for naval arms control in this period, with Japan as the rising power. Finally, in the post-1945 period, I focus on India and the international regime for nuclear arms control and its associated institutions (the PTBT, NPT, ABMT, and NPT extension), which carry considerably higher stakes than laws-of-war conventions on biological and chemical weapons, and landmines. In this manner, I arrive at three cases of states rising over an extended period of time facing an international security regime containing one or more multilateral institutions: the US and the maritime laws of war in the 19th century, Japan and naval arms control in the interwar
period, and India and nuclear non-proliferation in the latter half of the 20th century. These three international security regimes have important features in common. Each of them represents a multilateral effort at regulating a certain aspect of warfare or weaponry. Each emerged in response to events that were part of a major war in the years prior: the codification of the maritime laws of war followed the Crimean War, naval arms control arose from the naval arms race of the First World War, and nuclear non-proliferation was a response to the invention and use of the atomic bomb in the Second World War. Each international security regime had more than one great-power sponsor: Britain and France sponsored the maritime laws of war, the US and Britain sponsored naval arms control, and the US and the Soviet Union sponsored nuclear non-proliferation. The table below summarizes the cases and their features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary multilateral institution</th>
<th>Maritime Laws of War</th>
<th>Naval Arms Control</th>
<th>Nuclear Non-Proliferation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response to</td>
<td>Crimean War</td>
<td>First World War</td>
<td>Second World War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great-Power sponsors</td>
<td>Britain, France</td>
<td>US, Britain</td>
<td>US, Soviet Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to regulate</td>
<td>Maritime warfare</td>
<td>Capital ships</td>
<td>Nuclear weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising power</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each case, I identify exogenous changes—changes arising from events entirely external to the rising power and beyond its control—that might cause a shift in the rising power’s perceptions of the regime’s openness and legitimacy, and which in turn might lead to a change of identity management strategy and rule-oriented behavior. There is some debate in the social

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97 Some of the potential cases dropped in the selection process are ripe for future analysis, particularly in a cross-country context, e.g. the US and Italy in the 1864 Geneva Convention; and India, China, and Japan’s respective approaches to the NPT and ABMT.
identity literature about the sequence of strategies that a lower-status state might follow in order to attain a positive social identity. Various scholars applying social identity theory to international politics have argued that states will first attempt social mobility and if that does not work, they will switch to a strategy of social competition. However, by not specifying the theoretical conditions under which a strategy can be deemed unsuccessful, they gloss over the intermediate stage of social creativity that sociologists and social psychologists have emphasized for decades. These latter theorists argue that because conflict is costly, individuals and groups will not attempt social competition until all other avenues, i.e. mobility and creativity, are either deemed impossible or have been exhausted. My theory suggests that it is possible to move from social mobility directly to social competition, but only if the international regime goes from being open and legitimate to closed and illegitimate within a very short period of time in the eyes of the rising power. If only one of these perceived attributes changes, then we are more likely to observe social creativity strategies than outright competition.

Methodology

In order to study the causal mechanisms I have posited in my theory, I rely on primary documents in the cases of the United States in the 19th century and India in the 20th century, and on translated documentary collections and secondary sources in the case of Japan in the interwar period. In each case, I study the internal discussions among the rising power’s leaders regarding the optimal policy towards the international regime in question. These discussions are available in the records of meetings, internal memoranda (often secret), instructions to delegates attending

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international meetings and conferences, and memoirs of leaders and senior officials involved in the decision-making process. Having studied the internal deliberations of the government of the day, I then look at its interventions in the international security regime’s deliberations over the issue in question. I thus scrutinize the proceedings of conferences and other meetings relevant to a particular period and international regime. In doing so, I am able to check for correspondence between the internally aired views of elites and their official external positions. A high degree of correspondence helps confirm a particular reading of events and motives. In the event of low correspondence, I seek to corroborate either version by looking at discussions among the wider circle of elites and intelligentsia within the country in an effort to gauge the mood of the informed and influential public. I also look at private correspondences and papers of leaders in order to unearth their true preferences.¹⁰⁰

Through these methods, I recreate the approach of the rising power toward an international regime over time, and I am able to trace changes in the state’s policy toward the regime and the sources of these changes. In the process, I apply the theoretical lens put forward in this chapter as well as the predictions of alternative theories based on external material incentives or domestic politics. A particular challenge with the methods employed here is that concerns of status are not likely to be directly verbalized by elites but rather are latent and influencing the decision-making process in subtle and indirect ways. At times, therefore, in the absence of direct evidence (particularly on sensitive subjects such as nuclear weapons), I proceed by considering all the available evidence in favor of alternative explanations and testing their validity before ruling in favor of the most likely explanation.

¹⁰⁰ Secret memoranda are helpful in this regard, since they are by design meant for internal discussion and hence likely to be more frank (unless designed to be leaked, which is a fact that can also be known from the historical record with some accuracy).
Plan of the Dissertation

Each case study in this dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter sets up the theoretical and empirical puzzle, lays out the predictions of the theory, and provides historical context from the period before the one in focus to demonstrate that the rising power in question does in fact value status as a core objective. Although the theory already assumes this fact, the first chapter for each case seeks to demonstrate it empirically as well. Doing so also addresses the potential criticism that the desire for status is endogenous to the act of entering the social environment of an international regime. In other words, rising powers value great-power status independently of the architecture of global governance. The second chapter in each case study focuses on the particular international regime and its primary multilateral institution, and examines the approach of the rising power to the institution. Thus Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the US and the maritime laws of war in the mid-19th century, Chapters 5 and 6 on Japan and naval arms control in the interwar period, and Chapters 7 and 8 on India and nuclear non-proliferation in the latter half of the 20th century. Chapter 9 provides concluding observations and observed patterns from the cases.

* * *
INTRODUCTION

Prior to the mid-1850s, war at sea was conducted on the basis of a loosely defined and often contradictory set of rules that states chose to follow or abandon at their convenience. Britain, being the dominant naval power, pursued a unilateral policy of targeting the commerce of its rivals in wartime, irrespective of the nationality of the ship in which it was conveyed. This policy meant that if Britain was at war with another country, the commercial goods of that country were open to seizure by the Royal Navy upon the high seas even if the goods were in the ships of countries that were neutral in the conflict. As per the customs of maritime warfare at the time, ships seized in this manner were brought into Prize Courts in the belligerent’s territory, where judges would decide, among other things, which goods belonged to the adversary and which to neutrals. The latter category of goods would subsequently be returned to neutrals as per British policy. Irrespective of this practice, however, the search and seizure of neutral ships by the British in their frequent wars with other powers was a major irritant and impediment to commerce, especially for countries that did not have large navies to protect their commerce on the high seas.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the first attempt at creating a new set of rules for maritime warfare came from neutral countries (during the American Revolutionary War). In 1780, Catherine the Great of Russia declared what was known as the Armed Neutrality, which

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laid down a set of principles that Russia expected all belligerents and neutrals to follow in the ongoing war between Britain on the one hand and the American Colonies, France, and Spain on the other. The principles declared, among other things, “the effects belonging to subjects of the…Powers at war shall be free on board neutral vessels, with the exception of contraband merchandise.”  

In addition, the declaration proclaimed that naval blockades would only be counted as such “where the attacking Power has stationed its vessels sufficiently near and in such a way as to render access thereto clearly dangerous.”  

The empress went further to say that she was preparing “a considerable part of her maritime forces” to enforce these principles if necessary. The Armed Neutrality lasted till the end of the war in 1783, with a number of neutral countries and even France and the United States endorsing its principles, and Britain by and large staying clear of explicitly violating it.  

Although a second Armed Neutrality initiated during the Napoleonic Wars in 1800 by Paul I of Russia and joined by Prussia, Sweden, and Denmark-Norway was much less successful (ending in less than a year with a British retaliatory attack at Copenhagen), the two attempts to assert an alternative set of rights for neutrals laid the foundation for significant changes in the maritime laws of war in the 19th century. The turning point came in the run up to the Crimean War in 1854, at a time when Britain and France had allied against Russia in the latter’s conflict with the Ottoman Empire. In anticipation of the coming war, early in 1854, Sweden and Denmark issued identical declarations of neutrality to France, Britain, and Russia. These were in

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103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
the vein of the Armed Neutralities, and primarily sought the same goal: “respect for the neutral flag.”

At this point, Britain and France maintained opposing policies with regard to maritime warfare. While France followed the principle called for by the neutrals, i.e. free ships made free goods, it also held that enemy ships made enemy goods, i.e. that the goods of neutrals captured in enemy ships belonged to the captors. Britain believed the opposite on both counts, i.e. enemy goods found on free ships were not free, and neutral goods captured in enemy ships were to be returned to their owners. Putting together a joint operational and diplomatic front in the Crimean War required both nations to compromise, hence they declared that for the duration of the war, they would not confiscate enemy goods on neutral ships (a concession to French practice), would return neutral goods found on captured enemy ships (a concession to British practice), and would not resort to the use of private armed vessels in the war. By yielding on the issue of free ships making free goods, London conceded for the first time a principle that it had resolutely opposed and fought ever since Britain’s emergence as the world’s preeminent maritime power.

France and Britain were victorious in the Crimean War, and at the Congress of Paris that concluded the post-war settlement in April 1856, both countries introduced a new code of maritime warfare based on the principles they had adopted during the Crimean War, and invited all the nations of the world to ratify it. The Declaration of Paris, as it came to be called, was a brief document containing four principles: “(1) Privateering is and remains abolished. (2) The neutral flag covers enemy’s goods, with the exception of contraband of war. (3) Neutral goods, with the exception of contraband of war, are not liable to capture under enemy’s flag. (4)

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Blockades, in order to be binding, must be effective—that is to say, maintained by a force sufficient really to prevent access to the coast of the enemy.”¹⁰⁸ The second principle represented the major concession made by Britain to the rest of the world. The third principle represented a similar concession by France. Belligerents and neutrals alike already generally accepted the fourth principle. However, the first principle (on privateering) was by no means a settled matter and became the source of considerable controversy between the great powers and the United States.

The Declaration was ratified by seven major European powers—Britain, France, Austria, Russia, Prussia, Sardinia, and Turkey—on April 16, 1856. By the end of the year, 42 more states had ratified the declaration (making it virtually universal at the time), and eventually it would claim a total of 55 members,¹⁰⁹ making it the first widely accepted instrument of international law in post-Westphalian history. The declaration was also unprecedented in intent, marking “the beginning of modern international law as we know it: multilateral treaties open for accession by all powers with the intention of creating new universal rules.”¹¹⁰ Only a handful of countries refused to sign the treaty. Spain, Mexico, and the United States were prominent among them. By 1909, the United States remained the only major power to not have ratified the Declaration.

THE PUZZLE OF US BEHAVIOR

Among the few social scientists who study the laws of war, a basic puzzle remains in need of a convincing answer: “Why would states think it in their interest to consent to laws of war that confine their choices among weapons and tactics?”¹¹¹ Those working in the rationalist mold have explained compliance with the laws of war as a type of equilibrium behavior whereby self-interested states enter into mutually reinforcing public agreements in which enforcement is reciprocal, hence compliance is ensured under certain conditions, e.g. ratification by both parties to a conflict.¹¹² Based on these considerations, the case of the United States and the Declaration of Paris poses a number of puzzles. First, if the declaration fit the description of a mutually reinforcing agreement with reciprocal enforcement—all the great powers had put their collective weight behind it—why did the US refuse to sign it? The US was a strong supporter of a number of the principles that went into the declaration and stood to gain a great deal from the universalization of the principle of “free ships, free goods,” yet it chose to publicly and firmly oppose the declaration in the form it eventually took. Second, if (as the US leadership at the time argued) the declaration was in fact contrary to Washington’s interests, why did the US comply with the substance of the declaration after 1856 while continually refusing to sign it?¹¹³ The


¹¹³ In 1928, H. B. Learned observed, “In no war subsequent to the Declaration of Paris have we [the US] resorted to the practice of privateering. Hence on the part of expert students of international relations there has been rather a marked trend towards the conviction that the United States might today seriously consider compliance with the Declaration.” See Learned, H.
behavior of the US conformed to the principles of the declaration right until the beginning of the First World War. Third, the main objection of the US to the declaration was the latter’s first clause that abolished privateering, yet many American statesmen and traders’ lobbies had themselves opposed privateering prior to 1856. Moreover, the US later offered to sign the declaration early in the Civil War if doing so would prevent the Confederacy from employing privateers. Why then was privateering such a sticking point for the US in 1856? Finally, if—as argued by US leaders at the time and others since—privateering was a weapon of weaker powers, why did the US not sign the Declaration of Paris once its navy was among the world’s most formidable forces by the late 18th/early 19th century?

To address these puzzles effectively and to understand US decision-making with regard to the Declaration of Paris, one needs to understand the role that the desire for status played in the minds of US leaders. In short, changes in the international regime for the maritime laws of war (and in the global order more broadly) caused changes in American perceptions of the regime’s openness and legitimacy, which in turn led US decision-makers to reevaluate which strategy—follow, challenge, expand, or redirect—would best serve their status concerns. This is of course not to say that security and economic concerns did not matter. Rather, there were times when the US was willing to override these concerns for the sake of status. The following sections will empirically detail the dependent and independent variables, as well as the causal mechanism of my theory.

DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES OVER TIME

This section will provide a narrative of the period under consideration with regard to change in the dependent and independent variables over time. The next section will provide greater detail regarding the causal mechanism that links the independent and dependent variables.

Status-Seeking Strategies

In terms of the four categories of the dependent variable laid out in Chapter 2, the US initially simply followed the laws of maritime warfare from independence until the 1820s, out of a desire to be recognized as an independent member of the civilized world. During this time, the US was an enthusiastic supporter for what it considered to be the law of nations (i.e. the British policy of seizing enemy goods on neutral ships), but was also open to concluding treaties with individual powers that would stipulate alternative rules (such as free ships, free goods). Although the US had its own conception of what the law should have been—ideally providing immunity to all private property at sea—it was in no position to attempt to alter the rules of the international regime at this stage (the regime itself was nothing more than a loose collection of contradictory customs and bilateral treaties). Outside the domain of neutral rights, American lawmakers and judges also based a number of maritime law practices on those of the great powers (Britain and France, primarily), such as the rules and procedures governing the functioning of Prize Courts.

From the 1820s till 1854, American leaders made sustained efforts to expand the international

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115 In his widely cited and applied notes on Prize Courts, Judge Joseph Story of the US Supreme Court observed that his observations were “principally copied from the rules of the British Courts, which, as far as cases have arisen to which they could apply, have been recognised and enforced by the Supreme Court of the United States; and, for the most part, are conformable with the prize practice of France and other European countries…” See Pratt, F. T. 1854. Notes on the Principles and Practice of Prize Courts, by the Late Judge Story. London: William Benning & Co., p. 13.
regime by concluding bilateral treaties with the great powers, but were entirely unsuccessful in their endeavors. Nonetheless, they saw their advocacy of an alternative conception of the laws of maritime war (i.e. immunity for private property at sea) as earning them the status of a liberal and visionary rising power.

British and French agreements regarding neutral rights during the Crimean War and the Declaration of Paris itself posed a major challenge to this self-conception. In the words of one historian, American leaders viewed the declaration as a “shrewd gambit by British statesmen to deprive the United States of the moral high ground.”116 The US briefly challenged the international regime by strenuously opposing the declaration and refusing the make the adjustments necessary to accommodate the new global consensus. However, this challenge was short-lived and the US did not break with the international regime as one might have expected; rather, it sought to redirect the international regime. Washington amplified its criticism of the regime and put forward alternative proposals to change the regime’s goals. These proposals were unsuccessful, but the US continued pushing its alternative framework right up until 1904, when President Theodore Roosevelt proposed a convention to “bring about an understanding among the principal maritime Powers with a view of incorporating into the permanent law of civilised nations the principle of the exemption of all private property at sea, not contraband of war, from capture or destruction by belligerents.”117 Eventually, the exigencies of the First World War would render American efforts obsolete. The table below summarizes the changes in the dependent variable over time.

Table 3.1: US Status-Seeking Strategies and the Maritime Laws of War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1783 – 1823</td>
<td>Follow (Social Mobility)</td>
<td>Law of nations, and treaties tailored to specific countries and their preferred laws of war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823 – 1854</td>
<td>Expand (Social Creativity)</td>
<td>Overtures to great powers for treaties recognizing immunity of private property at sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857 – 1907\textsuperscript{118}</td>
<td>Redirect (Social Creativity)</td>
<td>De facto rule following while attempting to alter the international legal status quo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceived Openness of the International Regime**

Regarding the two independent variables discussed in Chapter 2, the US perception of the openness of the international regime for the regulation of maritime warfare was initially high between the 1780s and 1820s. This is not to say that there were no effective barriers to entry—in order to be a leading state in the regime, a country had to possess a sizeable navy, which the US did not until at least the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Nonetheless, there were no institutional or procedural barriers in the way of any country becoming a member of the international regime through bilateral treaties before 1856, and by signing the Declaration of Paris thereafter.

While membership of the loose international regime that existed before 1856 was open and uncontested, the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the beginning of the Concert of Europe created a formal club of great powers to which the US had no access. As France gradually emerged from defeat and took its place peacefully among the great powers of Europe, whatever little third-party leverage the US had had against Britain was greatly diminished. As with most international rules and customs at the time, the Concert left its imprint on maritime law as well,

\textsuperscript{118} In 1907, the Declaration of Paris was superseded by the Second Hague Convention.
creating a closed group sitting atop the global hierarchy of states. Thus by the 1820s, the US faced a regime whose membership was open but whose top ranks were closed. The Concert eventually caved under the diplomatic pulls and pushes of its members, and by the 1850s two of its members were preparing for war against a third.

While the dismantling of the Concert might have signaled an opening of the top ranks in the international regime for maritime laws of war, the Crimean War ensured that this was not the case. From the American perspective, the period 1854-57 signaled a highly undesirable closure of the international regime that excluded the US and threatened to lock it out of being recognized as a great maritime power in the future. The declaration contained an unexpected provision abolishing privateering, which the US viewed as “a direct and intentional blow” targeted at American ambitions and interests. Given domestic opposition to maintaining a sizeable navy, US leaders during this period—specifically President Franklin Pierce and Secretary of State William L. Marcy—were unwilling to yield their perceived right to resort to privateering (as the first principle of the declaration would have required them to) in the event of a future conflict with a major naval power. In their eyes, the US’s status as an important world power would come from retaining this right even if they never intended to exercise it. They believed naval prowess was a necessary ingredient of being recognized as a great power, and the option to resort to privateering was the only substitute America had for its weakness in this domain. Hence when the declaration was introduced, they viewed it as threatening a vital path to great-power status for the United States.

However, despite their opposition to the declaration, subsequent generations of American leaders played by its rules. By refusing to sign the declaration while still following it, the US

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essentially kept its foot in the door of the international regime without making any adjustments to its policies. The option to use privateers remained open, as did the option of building a world-class navy to match the great powers, which the US eventually did. After the brief interlude of the mid 1850s, therefore, the regime was once again open to America’s rise.

Perceived Legitimacy of the International Regime

Regarding the legitimacy of the international regime from Washington’s perspective, the post-independence phase from 1783-1823 was one in which US leaders viewed the existing rules between different nations as legitimate. They had a clear idea of what they wanted America’s legacy in this domain to be—a provision written into the law of nations giving immunity to private property at sea—and they understood that the existing patchwork of bilateral treaties between powers was the most appropriate realm in which to pursue this objective. American leaders also did not consider the international regime to be unfair in any sense, since at this stage there was no overriding international consensus on maritime laws of war. While they considered the British policy of seizing enemy goods on neutral ships as prejudiced toward British interests, they did not feel unfairly singled out by it and were willing in fact to employ different standards depending on the country they were dealing with. Finally, they considered the issue of neutral rights supremely important in the realm of maritime warfare, since the US was more likely to be a neutral than a belligerent in any European war. Therefore Washington accepted the importance of the maritime laws of war as they existed in the early 19th century.

This perception among American leaders remained unchanged right up until 1854. At this point, it became clear to them that although the Declaration of Paris embodied the very principles the US had stood for since independence and that it considered essential for the civilization of
maritime war, the great powers had essentially crafted a treaty without consulting the US—
American diplomats were not invited to the Paris Congress where the declaration was presented
and ratified by the great powers—and included provisions in it that appeared directly intended to
diminish America’s status in the eyes of the world. In particular, the declaration’s first clause, by
abolishing privateering but saying nothing about the long-cherished US principle of immunity
for private property, betrayed the biased nature of the declaration and its principles. Although the
US considered the “free ships, free goods” principle to be fundamentally important to neutral
rights, the presence of this principle in the declaration could not overcome the procedural and
substantive illegitimacy of the declaration in the eyes of US leaders. In the words of the
biographer of Secretary of State William Marcy who negotiated with the great powers at the
time, “Not only had the [United States] not been consulted in regard to the “free goods” rules, in
which it had shown such a great interest. It had also been affronted by a step which would, if
effectuated, deprive it of what had been its greatest offensive weapon in case of war at sea [i.e.
privateering].”\textsuperscript{120} Subsequent generations of US leaders inherited and maintained this perception
for the rest of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, even as the US grew in power.

\textbf{CAUSAL MECHANISM}

So far I have traced changes in the dependent variable (approach to rules) and independent
variables (perceived openness and perceived legitimacy) over time. At this stage, a clear
correlation exists between the variables, which is summarized in the table below. The causal
mechanism can be summarized in a stylized manner as follows: a rising power first follows the
rules of an international security regime in an effort to be recognized as an upstanding member

\footnote{\textsuperscript{120} Spencer, \textit{The Victor}, p. 382.}
of the international community. Subsequently, exogenous changes in the international regime or the global order more broadly reconfigure the rising power’s perceptions of the openness and legitimacy of the regime with regard to its status aspirations.¹²¹ This leads to a period of challenge that compels the international regime to recognize the rising power’s status parity with the great powers. Subsequently, the international regime and the rising power settle into an equilibrium in which the latter, again keen to have the same status as the great powers, follows the rules of the regime without officially or explicitly signing on and all the while attempting to alter the regime’s goals in a direction more beneficial to its own view of the issue.

Table 3.2: Dependent and Independent Variables Over Time

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<tr>
<td>1783 – 1823</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Follow “Law of Nations” and exceptions by treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No rules of membership</td>
<td>Regime appropriate, unbiased, issue important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exogenous change: Concert of Europe (1815 onward)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823 – 1854</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Expand Attempt treaties with great powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top ranks closed off</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exogenous change: Crimean War (1853-56)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854 – 1857</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Challenge Vigorously oppose Declaration of Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Due to privateering clause</td>
<td>Regime appropriate but biased, issue important</td>
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¹²¹ These changes are not always exogenous to the power’s rise in a systemic sense, but they are exogenous to the rising power’s perceptions and strategy. For example, Malkin (1927) and Lemnitzer (2013) have convincingly argued that the British inserted the privateering clause into the Declaration of Paris in order to preclude an American threat once and for all. Witt (2012: 135) argues that the British celebrated the declaration as “a diplomatic triumph over the upstart United States.” Although the Declaration’s offending provision may have been a result of America’s rise, it can be treated as exogenous because it was dependent on British strategy and is hence outside the bounds of the theoretical model presented here.
The most obvious counter-argument to this narrative is one based on power and interest. A critic might argue that the key shifts in US policy toward the international regime for maritime laws of war is better explained through the lens of security interests or domestic bargaining. I will address this and other alternative explanations in the next section. The remainder of this section is devoted to fleshing out the causal mechanism of my theory in the case of the US and the maritime laws of war.

**SOCIAL MOBILITY, 1783-1823**

The Declaration of Paris was but one component of the international regime for the regulation of maritime warfare, albeit its most concrete and visible component. A number of the principles that went into the declaration, however, were around well before 1856 and can be considered as comprising the international regime prior to its concretization. Prior to 1856, however, there was little agreement over which principles constituted the law of nations, as it were. The main axis of disagreement lay in the domain of neutral shipping: most nations sought to establish the rule of “free ships, free goods” (i.e. the goods of an enemy would not be liable to capture on a neutral vessel, unless they were contraband of war), yet this principle was firmly rejected by the British, who sought to confiscate enemy goods no matter where they might be found. At this stage, therefore, the international regime was an open one—states were free to enter into treaties with other states based on their specific conceptions of the laws of maritime warfare.
The Law of Nations and Treaty Exceptions

The US, being a very weak power in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, moved in parallel between the two conflicting principles mentioned above. As one scholar has noted, “The aim of the [American] Revolution was to establish the membership of the United States in the club of civilized nations,” and American leaders understood that “by displaying respect for the club’s bylaws Americans would move that much closer to an independent seat at the table of nations.” Early America’s respect for the laws of war was thus driven by two types of necessity—the need to not make new and more enemies, and the need to be recognized as an independent member of the civilized (i.e. European) world. The international regime as it existed embodied the notion of war needing to be civilized, and the US agreed wholeheartedly with this proposition.

Consequently, faced with a bifurcated world of maritime laws of war, the US went along with both camps. A Treaty of Amity and Commerce concluded with France in 1778 contained an article stipulating that it was lawful for French and American citizens to continue trading with each other’s enemies, and that “free Ships shall also give a freedom to Goods.” No such treaty was signed with the English, and subsequently during the wars of the French Revolution, when the French Minister to the United States, Edmond Genêt, raised the issue of British ships seizing French property from American vessels in the French West Indies, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson replied, “I believe it cannot be doubted that, by the general law of nations, the goods of a friend found in the vessel of an enemy are free, and the goods of an enemy found in the vessel

of a friend are lawful prize.”¹²⁴ This was essentially a restatement of the British position on maritime warfare. Jefferson went on to explain that while some countries had separately negotiated the principle of free ships, free goods through bilateral treaties with other countries, these treaties were to be considered “special cases” of the “general principle of the law of nations” and therefore applicable only to the states that had signed them (the French having signed such a treaty with the US while the British had not). Two years later, the Jay Treaty concluded between the United States and Britain implicitly recognized the British approach to maritime war by stating that both countries would in future “renew their discussions, and endeavour to agree, whether in any and what cases Neutral Vessels shall protect Enemy’s property.”¹²⁵

Although the United States—no different in this respect from more powerful European nations—had to periodically yield to the British conception of maritime war, this capitulation did not prevent it from pursuing what it considered to be the fundamental tenet of the law of nations as regards war at sea: immunity for private property. Writing toward the end of the 19th century, an American scholar noted, “…the history of American diplomacy, from beginning to end, is full of attempts to abolish the capture of private property at sea.”¹²⁶ Most relevant from the perspective of the Declaration of Paris was that this endeavor of the US included a desire to abolish privateering, which was the very principle in the declaration that the US vehemently opposed in 1856.

The Issue of Privateering

Privateering referred to the practice of governments issuing what were known as “letters of marque” to private vessel owners giving them the authority to sail on behalf of the state and attack the enemy’s naval and commercial vessels. The primary incentive for privateers in this regard was a significant share of the prize that they would collect from each ship they attacked. Unfortunately for most countries not involved in any given war, privateers were not under the command of the navy and hence operated independently, attacking all manner of vessel, including those of neutral countries. Most governments regarded privateers as a major irritant and privateering was increasingly viewed as an uncivilized practice. Edouard Drouyn de Lhuys, the French Foreign Minister who negotiated the Franco-British declaration respecting neutral rights ahead of the Crimean War, wrote in his memoirs:

We thought, as they [the British] did, respecting privateering, a barbarous practice which marked too often, under an appearance of patriotic devotion, violence excited by the allurement of lucre. At former epochs, justified by the fury of war, it was able in the midst of numerous iniquities, to give rise to some heroic action, to transmit even to history some glorious names. But we considered it to be incompatible henceforth with the usages of civilized nations…\(^{127}\)

Nonetheless, privateers had proved immensely successful in inflicting damage on enemy property since the days when Sir Francis Drake had raided the Spanish coast in the late 16\(^{th}\) century. A privateer was in many ways the pre-20\(^{th}\) century equivalent of the submarine—a

weapon of asymmetrical maritime warfare used by weaker powers against stronger ones.\textsuperscript{128} American privateers were used with great effect in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, causing significant losses to British trade.\textsuperscript{129}

Since independence, however, American leaders had advocated the abolition of privateering along with a general immunity for all private property at sea, with the understanding that this would obviate the need for countries to expend resources to protect their international commerce during wartime, and would restrict warfighting to the navies of belligerent nations.\textsuperscript{130} Benjamin Franklin, a towering figure of the American Revolution who had himself championed the use of privateers against the British, preempted Drouyn de Lhuys by seven decades when he wrote to British statesman David Hartley in 1783:

\begin{quote}
I do not wish to see a New Barbary rising in America, and our long extended Coast occupied by Piratical States. I fear lest our Privateering Success in the two last Wars should already have given our People too strong a relish for that most mischievous Kind of Gaming mixed with Blood And that if a stop is not now put to the Practice, Mankind may be more plagued with American Corsairs than they have been and are with the Turkish.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

In 1785, the US and Prussia concluded a Treaty of Amity and Commerce which contained, among other provisions, a pledge that in the event of war between the two nations, “[A]ll merchant and trading vessels…shall be allowed to pass free & unmolested, and neither of the contracting powers shall grant or issue any commission to any private armed vessels

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{130} Stark, \textit{The Abolition}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{131} Benjamin Franklin to David Hartley (unpublished), 8\textsuperscript{th} May 1783. \textit{The Papers of Benjamin Franklin}. The American Philosophical Society and Yale University, http://franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp?vol=39&page=443.
\end{flushright}
empowering them to take or destroy such trading vessels, or interrupt such commerce.”

When the National Assembly of France sent missives to various countries suggesting negotiations on the abolition of privateering and free navigation of commerce in 1792, the US was one of the few countries to respond favorably. Unfortunately for US leaders, their diplomacy as a weak power produced few results.

Despite its weakness, however, the American aspiration to be counted among the civilized nations of the world led US leaders to emphasize restraint even in the use of privateers. The instructions issued by the Madison government to privateers during the war of 1812 with Britain contained the following admonishment.

> You are to pay the strictest regard to the rights of neutral powers and the usages of civilized nations, and in all your proceedings towards neutral vessels you are to give them as little molestation or interruption as will consist with the right of ascertaining their neutral character...Towards enemy’s vessels and their crews you are to proceed in exercising the rights of war, with all the justice and humanity which characterize this Government and its citizens.

During the initial post-independence decades, therefore, the US sought to essentially follow the international rules of maritime warfare as closely as possible, and in a manner that was tailored to the preferences of the great powers it had relations with. While American leaders clearly aspired to an alternative conception of maritime rights, they did very little to act on this conception during this period. The end of the hostilities with Britain and the defeat of Napoleon in Europe would, however, alter the global order in ways that would change American

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perceptions of how best to attain status in the international regime for the regulation of maritime warfare.

**SOCIAL CREATIVITY, 1823-1854**

The end of the Napoleonic Wars brought about a new structure of great power relations in Europe. Austria, Britain, Russia, Prussia, and (eventually) France created an official compact aimed at maintaining stability by ensuring that no single power might rise up in the manner of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France to menace its neighbors. The US was neither present at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15 when this system that would govern European inter-state relations for much of the 19th century was decided, nor was it part of the compact that emerged from the Congress. The emergence of the great-power club that came to be known as the Concert of Europe meant that the international regime for maritime laws of war—like all other sets of loose rules existing at the time that one might group together as international law or the law of nations—gained its substance and authority from the concurrence of the great powers in the Concert. Whereas in previous decades the US had largely accepted the terms of the great powers when it came to the maritime law, in the 1820s, as the American economy began picking up steam, Washington renewed its interest in promoting the protection of private property at sea. Rather than accepting terms, the US actively tried to expand the international regime in a manner that would include the US in its top ranks. When France intervened militarily in Spain in 1823 and declared that both Spanish and neutral commerce would be immune from French depredations, President James Monroe, in his message to Congress, affirmed that this declaration concurred with “principles proclaimed and cherished by the United States from the first establishment of their independence, [and] suggested the hope that the time had arrived when the
proposal for adopting it as a permanent and invariable rule in all future maritime wars might meet the favorable consideration of the great European powers.”135 To this end, the government sought to begin simultaneous negotiations with Britain, France, and Russia that might produce bilateral conventions abolishing privateering and the capture of private property at sea.

**Attempts at Bilateral Treaty Negotiations**

In July 1823, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams issued letters to American Ministers in London, Paris, and Moscow instructing them to begin negotiations with the foreign ministers of their respective posts. The desire for the US to be counted among the civilized great powers was evident in Adams’ letter to Richard Rush, the Minister in London, in which he reasoned that “the pervading principle” of the Holy Alliance and Britain’s “persevering efforts…for the suppression of the African slave trade” suggest that “it is among the most indispensable duties of the rulers of mankind to combine their exertions for the general amelioration of the condition of man.”136 Global trends led Adams to reason that the great powers were increasingly engaged in their true Christian duty, which was to mitigate “the laws and usages of war.”137 It was therefore an opportune moment for the United States to urge the great powers, in the true spirit of Christianity, to take steps toward “the abolition of private war upon the sea.”138 Adams was of course aware that such a measure carried the potential of hurting US interests and depriving it of an instrument—privateering—that had been so useful in past wars. He quoted Benjamin Franklin

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137 Ibid.
138 Ibid., p. 736.
to emphasize that although the US was in a better geographical position to profit from privateering than any European nations, it was pursuing the abolition of privateering and immunity for private property “for the sake of humanity.”\textsuperscript{139} He advised his government’s representative in London to make a similar plea to the British:

We are aware that, in the abolition of private war upon the sea, that nation [i.e. Britain], while yielding homage to the principle of general justice, must abandon the use of a weapon of offence against others which she has heretofore used much to their annoyance. But we are firmly convinced that it will ultimately prove as beneficial to her interests as to that of others; and the magnanimity displayed by her… cannot fail to give energy to her solicitations, when urging upon others the sacrifice of their special interests for the purpose of consummating the triumph of justice and humanity.\textsuperscript{140}

British leaders, however, were unmoved. Rush reported that they were willing to negotiate on all matters proposed by the US except the question of maritime rights.\textsuperscript{141} The Chargé d’Affaires in Paris reported a similar sentiment among French leaders, who were keen to avoid “any direct engagement to enter into stipulations” regarding the protection of private property at sea during war.\textsuperscript{142} Adams was nonetheless keen on making a uniquely American mark on the world, one that would put it at par with the great powers. Later in 1823, as he brought the new Minister in Paris up to speed on the bilateral relationship, he highlighted the importance of the final suppression of the slave trade—which the British had made their international mission early in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century—and “improvements in the general code of international law,” specifically the maritime laws of war. “These two subjects are most

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p. 738. The original source is: Benjamin Franklin to Benjamin Vaughan (unpublished). Monday, March 14, 1785. The Papers of Benjamin Franklin. The American Philosophical Society and Yale University.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p. 739.

\textsuperscript{141} Rush to Adams. October 9, 1823. Documents: 749-750.

\textsuperscript{142} Sheldon to Adams. November 5, 1823. Documents: 750.
intimately connected together,” he wrote. “They both originated in the United States, and both are destined to exhibit memorable examples of their influence upon the history of mankind.”

**A Closed Great-Power Club**

Despite US efforts, however, the Concert remained an important constraint on the policies of the great powers. Each was unwilling to venture into improvements upon international law without firm assurances that the other great powers would do the same. As the Russian foreign minister Count Nesselrode informed the American Minister in St. Petersburg, “as soon as the powers whose consent [the Russian Emperor] considers as indispensible shall have shown the same dispositions, he will not be wanting in authorizing his minister to discuss the different articles of an act which would be a crown of glory to modern diplomacy.”

By August of 1824, in the face of British intransigence, American status-related motives became even clearer. Richard Rush reported his conversation with British diplomat Stratford Canning in London:

> I said that the United States were not behind any of the powers of Europe in wishes, and, moving in their proper sphere, would never be behind them in endeavors to bring about a general melioration in the condition of mankind; that such a principle [of abolishing private war at sea] was eminently congenial to their political institutions, and had always been a maxim of their policy in the whole system of their external relations.

The British, sensing American desperation to seek the moral high ground on this issue, simply stood their ground and refused to open negotiations. Upon replacing John Quincy Adams as Secretary of State in 1825 (while Adams became President), Henry Clay decided to not press the

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issue further, yet he too felt that a treaty on maritime rights would be America’s ticket to great-power status. In a note to the US Minister in London, he wrote:

…it cannot be doubted that, if Great Britain and the United States were to agree to the abolition of privateering, and no longer to consider private property on the high seas as lawful prize of war, their humane example would be generally followed…and that a beneficent channel of the comforts and happiness of nations would remain unobstructed.  

Clay’s successor, Martin Van Buren, held an almost identical view of America’s status with regard to Russia. In a letter to the American Minister in St. Petersburg, he spoke on behalf of President Andrew Jackson:

[The President] flatters himself that the adoption of these enlightened views by two powers [Russia and the United States] exercising in different hemispheres the degree of influence over the councils of their neighbors which necessarily attaches itself to their respective preponderance in the affairs of the two continents, may afford an example which will not be lost upon other nations…If future events should require them again to arm in defence of neutral rights and the freedom of the seas, their combined fleets, sweeping over the inland seas of Europe along the American continent, and reaching across the Atlantic, will give them power and influence adequate to the maintenance of the principles they shall have asserted…

Russia, for its part, prevaricated for months on the question of a treaty with the US. Finally, Count Nesselrode’s response to the American Minister in 1832, James Buchanan, boiled down to a simple question: “What will England say to that?” None of the great powers was willing to upset the delicate balance of the Concert of Europe by admitting a new member to the club, while the US continued belaboring under the presumption that a bilateral treaty on maritime

warfare secured with one of the great powers that eventually found its way into the law of nations (purely by example) was the best method of gaining status in a world dominated by the European powers. Even American leaders such as Buchanan who disagreed with the policy of pursuing these treaties did so on grounds of status. Frustrated with Russia’s stonewalling, he wrote to Secretary of State Edward Livingston, “The days of our feebleness have passed away, and it is perhaps a doubtful policy now to adopt measures in peace, which must arrest the free and vigorous action of our naval power in war.” While his predecessors had viewed US naval power as equal to Russia’s and therefore able to back changes to maritime law with force, Buchanan started with the same assumption but concluded that the US did not need to modify the law because it could simply assert its rights in any future conflict.

Despite his misgivings, however, Buchanan stuck to the official line. Although by 1833 the US had modified its original proposal to Russia by dropping the abolition of private property at sea and emphasizing the “free ships, free goods” principle instead, Buchanan still used the same argument as before. In an informal note to Nesselrode, he wrote:

At the first view there is force in the objection that it would be useless for Russia and the United States alone, without the concurrence of other powers, to establish the principle, by treaty, that “free ships shall make free goods.” But, would the example of two such nations produce no effect upon the rest of the civilized world? Would it not have great influence in finally rendering this principle universal? 

Despite repeated attempts, however, Russia did not agree to sign such a treaty. In the end, after spending over a decade trying to convince the great powers—Britain, France, and Russia—to enter into bilateral treaties that would lead to a fundamental change in international maritime

149 Buchanan to Livingston. October 19/31, 1832. Documents: 794.
150 Buchanan to Nesselrode. May 18/30, 1833. Documents: 799-800.
law, the United States accepted the futility of this enterprise. The great-power club remained closed; as did the international regime that the US had sought to expand in order to earn itself the status of a world power. This state of affairs would not last long, however, as the Concert of Europe gradually unraveled over the following two decades. By the early 1850s, the world was a different place—the great-power club was internally divided, and US economic power was on the rise.

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Chapter 4

_The United States and the Maritime Laws of War:_

_The Declaration of Paris, 1856_

**SOCIAL COMPETITION, 1854-1857**

The events leading up to the Declaration of Paris began with the initiation of the Crimean War in October 1853. As Britain and Russia inched closer to entering the war on the side of the Ottoman Empire against Russia, the northern kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark issued a declaration of neutrality to the great powers early in January, 1854. The declaration demanded that enemy goods (except contraband of war) on neutral vessels be exempt from capture—the free ships, free goods policy followed by the French—and that neutral goods found on enemy ships be returned to their owners, which was British policy. Not wanting to precipitate another Armed Neutrality of the kind they had faced in 1780 and 1800, the British sought a modus vivendi on maritime rights with the French, who were to be an important ally in the war. Britain’s primary concern regarding Russia was privateering, since Russia had a much weaker navy than Britain. In particular, British leaders were afraid that the Russian government would issue letters of marque to American privateers and that Russian privateers would be welcomed in American ports and hence pose a threat to British commerce in North America. Although the US

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152 Regarding the former concern, John Crampton, the British Minister in Washington, wrote to Secretary of State William Marcy on April 21, 1854: “Her Britannic Majesty’s government entertains the confident hope that the United States government…give orders that no privateer under Russian colors shall be equipped or victualled, or admitted with its prizes, in the ports of the United States…” (Documents: 44). Regarding the latter concern, James Buchanan, the US Minister in London wrote to William Marcy on February 24, 1854: “They [the British] are evidently apprehensive that Russian privateers may be fitted out in the ports of the United States, to cruise against their commerce…” (Documents: 50-51).
neutrality law of 1818 forbade US citizens from joining foreign conflicts, Britain was nonetheless keen to include language banning privateering in the joint declaration it would eventually make with the French in response to the Swedish and Danish declarations of neutrality—a proposition that the French vetoed.\textsuperscript{153}

\textbf{A More Status-Conscious United States}

The US response to Sweden and Denmark was positive and Secretary of State William L. Marcy acknowledged that events in Europe would have “a most important ulterior bearing upon the United States.”\textsuperscript{154} James Buchanan, the US Minister in London at the time, was familiar with the issue of maritime rights from his unsuccessful efforts to bring the Russians to the negotiating table two decades prior (see Chapter 3). In a meeting with British foreign secretary Lord Clarendon in February 1854, Buchanan urged upon him the practical benefits to British-American relations that would accrue from adopting the principle of “free ships, free goods” during the Crimean War. He added that if in addition to this rule, Britain adopted the policy of “enemy ships, enemy goods” (which was contrary to British policy), then “the belligerent would gain nearly as much by the latter as he had lost by the former.”\textsuperscript{155} John Mason, the American Minister in Paris, was much more blunt about why the United States preferred the “free ships, free goods” principle. In a report to Marcy, he noted that he had taken every opportunity to impress upon French leaders that

\begin{quote}
…with her vast commercial marine, her enormous surplus products, her export and import trade, and her large investments in the fisheries, in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{153} Lemnitzer, “That Moral League,” p. 1072.
\textsuperscript{155} Buchanan to Marcy. February 24, 1854. \textit{Documents}: 51.
it was impossible that my country could submit to any practical exercise of the rights of war which would subject her citizens, their business, and their vessels to vexatious searches, captures or detentions; that except in cases of contraband, her flag must protect the cargo which it covered, and the high seas must be what the God of nature intended it—a free highway for all nations.156

Contrary to the pleadings of American diplomats in Paris in the 1820s, Mason’s statement to the French came across as a veiled threat, suggesting that US leaders of the 1850s were far more self-conscious of their rise and worthiness of status equality with the great powers. It was clear that the US would challenge any attempt by the great powers to establish a principle other than one that protected neutral rights. Mason concluded his note by observing that the circumstances of the impending war were “most auspicious to the establishment of our cherished principles of neutral rights—the rights of the weaker powers against the aggressive pretensions of the strong.”157

By mid-March, Britain and France had arrived at a compromise for the duration of the impending war. They would adopt the French policy of “free ships, free goods” and the British policy of not confiscating the goods of neutrals found on enemy ships. On March 16, a fortnight before the official announcement was made, Clarendon met with Buchanan in London and discussed, among other things, the issue of privateering. Buchanan sensed the British apprehension that American privateers would accept Russian letters of marque in the coming war. Buchanan reported to Marcy, “[A]lthough his lordship [Clarendon] did not propose a treaty between the two governments for the total suppression of privateering, it was evident that this was his drift.”158 Buchanan’s response to Clarendon constitutes the earliest statement of the eventual American position on the Declaration of Paris’s abolition of privateering. It would not

157 Ibid.: 57.
be possible, he said, “…for the United States to agree to its [i.e. privateering’s] suppression, unless the naval Powers would go one step further, and consent that war against private property should be abolished altogether.” He painted a picture for Clarendon of a future war between Britain and the United States in which Britain, possessing a vastly superior navy, would destroy American commerce unless the latter had recourse to privateers who could do the same to British commerce. He concluded with the trope that his predecessors had employed in the 1820s to reassert America’s place among the great powers. “The genuine dictate of Christianity and civilization would be to abolish war against private property upon the ocean altogether,” he said, “and only employ the navies of the world in public warfare against the enemy.”

**A Brief Window of Opportunity**

On March 28, 1854, Britain and France officially entered the Crimean War against Russia and simultaneously issued a declaration to neutrals stating that free ships would make free goods, and that neutral property found on enemy ships would not be confiscated. On April 13, Marcy replied to Buchanan’s note regarding the conversation with Lord Clarendon on privateering. He observed that while the US had treaties with other countries that explicitly prevented American citizens from accepting letters of marque from foreign powers, the President would be unwilling to enter into any new treaties on the subject. “Our laws go as far as those of any nation—I think further—in laying restraints upon them [American citizens] in regard to going into foreign privateer service. *This government is not prepared to listen to any proposition for a total suppression of privateering.*” This was a remarkable position to hold for a country that over

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159 Ibid.
160 Ibid., p. 53.
the previous seven decades had been publicly and consistently willing to abolish privateering so long as all private property were protected at sea. Marcy’s reasoning was the same as Buchanan’s, that the US would need its privateers in a future conflict. Lacking a large navy, which was viewed as a major attribute of being a great power at the time (and even today), US leaders were unwilling to give up the only instrument in their possession that could keep them in the running to be taken seriously as a maritime power. The US’s future security was of course a consideration, but as I will discuss in the next section, it was by no means the only one. Status equality with the great powers mattered a great deal to the US.

Despite his opposition to any reconsideration of the American right to use privateers, Marcy took Mason’s earlier advice and seized upon the “auspicious moment” afforded by the Crimean War to have the principle of free ships, free goods entrenched in international law. He wrote to the British Minister in Washington, “To settle the principle that free ships make free goods, except articles contraband of war, and to prevent it from being called again in question from any quarter or under any circumstances, the United States are desirous to unite with other powers in a declaration that it shall be observed by each, hereafter, as a rule of international law.” At the same time, Marcy initiated a period of hectic diplomacy with Russia and a number of minor powers to sign bilateral treaties echoing the two principles conceded by Britain and France in their declarations. Underlying this effort was a strand of status seeking similar to that evinced by John Quincy Adams in the 1820s. In his note to the US Minister in St. Petersburg, Marcy observed, “Should Russia, Great Britain, and France concur with the United States in declaring this [free ships, free goods] to be the doctrine of the law of nations, I do not doubt that the other nations of the world would at once give their consent and conform their

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162 Marcy to Crampton. April 28, 1854. Documents: 47.
practice to it.”\textsuperscript{164} Russia, keen to endorse a principle that went against British policy, concluded a treaty with the US on the rights of neutrals on July 22. The treaty contained a provision that would permit other powers to join it by simply announcing their adherence. However, US attempts to bring other countries on board yielded little fruit. The only two countries other than Russia to conclude similar agreements with Washington were the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in January 1855 and Peru in July 1856.

**The Beginnings of US Disenchantment**

By the end of 1854, events in Europe had begun to gradually erode the legitimacy of the international regime for the maritime laws of war in US leaders’ eyes. Attempts to universalize the principle of free ships, free goods were going nowhere; instead, Britain—the hegemonic power of the era—sought to permanently abolish the US’s right to use privateers in wartime. Following the law of nations and attempting to expand the great-power club to include the US had brought few results after decades of effort. In his annual message to Congress at the end of the year, President Franklin Pierce bristled at the overweening attitude of the European powers. “One or another of the powers of Europe has from time to time undertaken to enforce arbitrary regulations contrary in many respects to established principles of international law,” he said. “That law the United States have in their foreign intercourse uniformly respected and observed, and they can not recognize any such interpolations therein as the temporary interests of others may suggest. They do not admit that the sovereigns of one continent or of a particular

\textsuperscript{164} Marcy to Seymour. May 8, 1854. *Documents*: 65.
community of states can legislate for all others.”\textsuperscript{165} He went on to discuss the US proposal for a declaration on neutral rights to the European powers, and reiterated Buchanan’s earlier stance on privateering, i.e. that in a future war with a major naval power, American commerce would be disproportionately damaged relative to the other side in the absence of privateering. Finally, he proposed what US leaders had been proposing since the 1820s, but in a tone that was remarkably different from his predecessors: “Should the leading powers of Europe concur in proposing as a rule of international law to exempt private property upon the ocean from seizure by public armed cruisers as well as by privateers, the United States will readily meet them upon that broad ground.”\textsuperscript{166} Gone was the delicately conveyed hope of James Monroe—himself famous for standing up to the European Concert’s intervention in Latin America—for the “favorable consideration of the great European powers.”\textsuperscript{167} In its place was an assertive and combative American leadership that chafed against the perceived inequity of the global order in which a handful of great powers—chiefly Britain—sought to deprive the US of one of its primary pathways to great-power status.

The Crimean War ended with the Paris Congress and a peace treaty that was signed on March 30, 1856. In the days that followed, the world witnessed an unprecedented event: the emergence of a multilateral treaty open to all sovereign states in the international system and codifying universal principles governing inter-state conduct. As it happened, the issue area this treaty covered was the maritime laws of war. And one of the main backers of this effort was—surprisingly—Britain. Longtime opponents of free ships making free goods, Britain’s leaders

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 269-270.
concluded that their opposition was no longer tenable after the concession made to neutral countries on this principle during the Crimean War. However, in exchange for this concession, the British decided to demand a concession of their own, one that was aimed quite clearly at US interests: the abolition of privateering.

In the first week of April, while the Paris Congress was still underway, Clarendon (the British foreign secretary) wrote to the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, asking if he would object to a resolution against privateering in the Paris Congress. Palmerston replied that given the scale of British commerce on the seas, the abolition of privateering would certainly be helpful. He then turned on its head the very logic that the US had tried to use in the past to expand the international regime to make room for itself: “The United States have hitherto declined, but if all the Powers of Europe, and those not represented in Congress might be invited to join were to unite in such an agreement the United States could scarcely refuse to accede, and the Engagement might ultimately…become universal among all maritime states.” Clarendon concurred, highlighting the irony of the outcome for the US, which had been trying hard for the last two years to capitalize on the Crimean War in order to make its mark on international maritime law:

[The United States] sent a Circular to all Maritime Powers asking their assent to the neutral flag covering the goods. Most of these Powers consulted us as to the answer they should give, and we suggested that they should not agree unless the United States at the same time gave up the system of privateers…Prussia gave that answer, . . . so they [i.e. the US] will be left alone in their system, and have the world against them if the Congress adopts the Resolution.

169 Palmerston to Clarendon. April 5, 1856. Ibid.
The Declaration of Paris

Two days after this exchange, the French foreign minister Count Walewski (who was presiding over the Congress), comparing the Paris Congress to epochal moments in international history such as the Treaty of Westphalia and the Congress of Vienna, made a proposal “truly worthy” of the Congress: the foundations of a uniform maritime law regarding neutrals in wartime. It contained four principles: (1) privateering was abolished; (2) free ships made free goods; (3) the goods of neutrals on enemy ships were not liable to capture; and (4) blockades to be binding had to be backed with sufficient force. On April 16, the seven major powers present at the Congress signed what came to be known as the Declaration of Paris, with two critical provisos. First, the principles of the declaration were *indivisible*, i.e. parties to the declaration could not pick and choose principles of their liking but rather had to implement the declaration in its entirety. Second, the declaration was *universal*, i.e. a country that signed the declaration could not enter into any agreements pertaining to the maritime rights of neutrals during wartime that did not rest on these four principles. The declaration was however open to accession by all states in the international system, and Count Walewski wrote to the French Minister in Washington saying that he attached “peculiar value to the concurrence of the United States…”

The US, having not been invited to the Paris Congress, had no representatives at this gathering and was not consulted regarding the content of the declaration prior to its announcement. On May 6, George Dallas, the US Minister in London had a private meeting with Baron Brunow, the Russian Minister, in which he reproached the Baron for signing the

declaration when the Baron “perfectly knew that it was aimed exclusively at the great defensive
weapon of the United States against British disposition to go to war with us.” The American
feeling of exclusion was palpable, particularly after decades of seeking the moral high ground on
questions of neutral rights. Referring to their treaty of July 1854 in which the US and Russia had
effectively agreed to the second and third principles of the Declaration of Paris, Dallas bemoaned
the futility of “having sympathized with Russia for two years” when “at the very first occasion
Russia throws her weight into the scale of our adversary [Britain], and enables her claim to be
backed by all Christendom!” The weight of all Christendom was precisely what the US had
relied on in past years to stake a claim to status equality with Britain, France, and Russia on
questions of international maritime law. To now hear its claims ring hollow struck a particularly
discordant note with American leaders.

US Opposition to the Declaration

The US responded with a diplomatic offensive aimed at undermining the declaration by
convincing smaller powers not to sign it. William Marcy issued instructions to this end to US
Ministers in Brussels, Naples, Madrid, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Mexico, Nicaragua,
Bogota, Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Lima, Quito, La Paz, and Hawaii.
He pointed out to his envoys that the US had already opened negotiations with a number of
countries on the second and third principles of the declaration (free ships make free goods, and
protection for neutral goods on enemy ships), and that the declaration would “as a necessary

32-33.
175 Ibid.
176 Marcy to Seibels. July 15, 1856. Department of State, Correspondence, p. 6.
consequence, defeat the negotiations of the United States” with these countries.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 5} He argued the indivisibility and universality of the declaration were particularly offensive, requiring nations to surrender an “important attribute of sovereignty,” which was the right to negotiate neutral rights with any nation in an unconstrained fashion. What this basically meant for the US was that it could not undermine the declaration by negotiating separate treaties with its signatories. Referring contemptuously to the “declaration” using quotation marks, Marcy reminded his envoys that the mutual surrender of the right of a state—especially one as heavily engaged in commerce as the United States—to employ privateers would inevitably place weaker nations at the mercy of the strong.

Shortly after issuing these instructions, Marcy wrote a famous note to Count Sartiges, the French Minister in Washington, outlining the US position on the Declaration of Paris. Starting off with the same arguments he had made to the US Ministers in the capitals of the smaller powers, he added that if the declaration’s signatories were to act on its dictates, they would be unable to conclude any agreements on neutral rights with the US without surrendering “\textit{a principle of maritime law which has never been contested}—the right to employ privateers in time of war.”\footnote{Marcy to Sartiges. July 28, 1856. Department of State, \textit{Correspondence}, p. 8. Emphasis added.} Backed into a corner, the US was now arguing in favor of a practice that its Founding Fathers had sought to abolish, not least through a treaty with Prussia in 1785 (the anti-privateering clause was dropped upon the treaty’s renewal in 1799), and successive US presidents since then had sought to end privateering as part of a broader effort to make all private property immune from attack at sea. Nonetheless, Marcy was technically correct in noting that
there had been no arrangements in the preceding half century to abolish privateering,\textsuperscript{179} which made its inclusion in the Declaration of Paris all the more unexpected and galling to the US.

US leaders were greatly in favor of the second and third principles of the declaration. However, the declaration’s indivisibility meant that they could not follow it selectively. Moreover, its universality prevented them from concluding alternative treaties based only on these two principles. Faced with an international regime clearly designed to disadvantage commercially active nations with weak navies such as the US, Marcy revived Pierce’s proposal from two years prior, which was essentially the proposal that American leaders had been making since the 1820s. In keeping with that tradition of appealing to higher principle in order to gain status equality with the great powers, he alluded to “[t]he prevalence of Christianity and the progress of civilization” and called on the great powers to amend the first principle of the declaration to add exemption for all private property (except contraband of war) from seizure on the seas during wartime\textsuperscript{180}—a proposal that has come to be known as the Marcy Amendment. “The reasons in favor of this doctrine,” he argued, “are considered in this enlightened age so controlling as to have secured its partial adoption by all civilized nations”; partial because it applied on land but not at sea.\textsuperscript{181} Marcy offered that the US would sign the declaration if his proposed amendment were adopted. If not, he sought clarification on how American privateers would be treated if they arrived in the ports of signatory states.

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
A Closed and Illegitimate Regime

Marcy’s objection to the Declaration of Paris was visceral because the international regime had completely shut American ambitions out. The US had for a number of decades secured at least symbolic equality with the great powers by engaging in a strategy of social creativity. This strategy involved a focus on regime expansion in a way that would help the US both protect its commerce and take its place at the international high table as a major contributor to international law. The great powers—especially Britain—had responded by transforming the international regime in a way that cut off a major pathway to great-power status for the US. Worse yet, the great powers devised and ratified the declaration without once consulting the US. Decades of rule following and attempted regime expansion had been repaid with a denial of the very status parity that the US had sought all along. It is no wonder then that from the US perspective, “The laws of war suddenly seemed a body of rules for strong European states to manipulate at the expense of the weaker military forces of the United States.”

This feeling of being singled out and isolated cast the international regime in a deeply unfair and biased light in the eyes of US leaders and made them combative. In the aftermath of Marcy’s note to the great powers, George Dallas (the US Minister in London) contemplated the possibility of a European ploy against America in a private note to a Senator back home:

It is barely possible, however, that the late Congress at Paris intended their declaration abolishing Privateering as the ground work of a coercive movement by a confederacy of European sovereigns against America. If so, have at ye all, my lads! Governor Marcy’s letter to Sartiges is unanswerably conclusive, and is a fine platform upon which to fight till doomsday.

While Marcy and his colleagues made arguments about the potential risks to American commerce in a future war with a major naval power, US indignation was rooted at least as much if not more in the notion that the declaration would prevent the US from claiming any sort of great-power status at sea. Marcy observed, “It is, in the opinion of this government, to be seriously apprehended that if the use of privateers be abandoned, the dominion over the seas will be surrendered to those powers which adopt the policy and have the means of keeping up large navies.”

In a world where naval power was a prime indicator of great power, the US had sought to make up for its weakness by maintaining its right to use privateers. The conventional route, of building up a large navy, was not as open to the US as it was to other countries, largely due to domestic opposition to maintaining a large active military. Nonetheless, US leaders were very aware that naval prowess was a necessary ingredient of great-power status. In this regard, a comparison of the annual reports prepared by the Secretaries of War (i.e. the army) and the Navy respectively in 1854 is instructive. Both asked for increases in their respective budgets; however, while the Secretary of War’s justifications for expanding the army were grounded in national security concerns, especially the ongoing wars with Native American tribes, the Secretary of the Navy’s justifications focused on security and status. In pushing for naval expansion, he argued:

The protection of our wide-spread commerce, the guarding of our extended coast, the preservation of our rank as a nation demand that we should not be entirely stationary, and with inactive indifference behold the progress of other powers in naval strength. And it is hardly unwise to glance at the various national navy registers and compare the size of our navy, not merely with that of the mighty nations with whom we claim equal rank, but with that of other nations whom we esteem to be far, far behind us in the race of national greatness.

183 Ibid., p. 15. Emphasis added.
Thus, in keeping with the theory presented in Chapter 2, given that an international regime whose top ranks had remained closed to the US now also singled out the US and denied it a major source of status equality with the great powers, Washington’s response was to challenge the regime with all its diplomatic resources. It soon became obvious, however, that the great powers would not budge and that most other states had ratified the declaration. In February 1857, Dallas submitted to the British government what would be the final US proposal reiterating the Marcy Amendment.\textsuperscript{185} The following month, a new US president—James Buchanan, himself a skeptic of the substance of the proposed amendment (see Chapter 3)—took office and shortly thereafter suspended negotiations on the declaration.

**MOVING TOWARD SOCIAL CREATIVITY, 1857-1861**

The US challenge to the Declaration of Paris gradually subsided in the years following the ratification of the declaration by almost all the states in the international system. Whereas the international regime had appeared closed to US influence during and immediately after the Crimean War, the war itself had signaled the beginning of the end of the Concert of Europe. The great-power club no longer exhibited the cohesion and unity of purpose that it had in the first half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Moreover, the US’s principled opposition to the Declaration of Paris—grounded in the claim that the declaration did not go far enough to reform international maritime law—had the effect of opening up the regime itself to America’s status ambitions once again. By standing outside the regime as a conscientious objector, the US could project the image of a de facto law-abiding nation that refused to sign a convention that unfairly singled out the US for having a small navy and extensive maritime commerce. As noted by one observer, “This letter of

Mr. Marcy’s, at one stroke, took the United States out of the unpleasant position of appearing to obstruct progress, and enabled it, instead of being left an unwilling straggler, to pose as the leader of the van.”186 In effect, the international regime was open to the US in that it could join at any time, but the US chose not to, thus earning itself a certain status in the international community.187

The international regime at this stage enjoyed moderate legitimacy among American statesmen, who were pleased that the rule of “free ships, free goods” had been incorporated into international law but vehemently opposed to the abolition of privateering. Diplomatically isolated, they clung to the position that such a measure would deprive their nation of the only resource available to compete with the great powers in naval terms. In private communications, George Dallas decried the international community’s effort to circumscribe the US’s options:

Our great instruments of war on the ocean are the swarms of volunteer clippers with which we can so harass the commerce of all enemy in all parts of the world as speedily to bring him to terms. We deprecate standing armies, huge navies, and our policy is not only peace but permanent disarmament. What’s to become of us if this last and congenial resource be diplomatized out of our power?188

Dallas, like many American leaders, believed the US stood above the traditional power politics of Europe because it chose not to maintain a large standing army or navy. However, he was also aware—as Franklin Pierce had observed—that Europe’s power politics impacted US interests, and therefore it would be inadvisable to give up what US leaders saw as the only instrument of countervailing the great maritime powers of Britain and France. James Buchanan, a longtime

187 There were other countries—Spain, Mexico, and Venezuela—that did not ratify the Declaration of Paris, but none had consistently championed any alternative principles in the manner of the US.
political rival of Dallas and US President from 1857-1861, shared this opinion. He went further to argue that even if the US were to obtain the Marcy Amendment that would exempt all private property at sea in addition to abolishing privateering, it would still be insufficient to protect US commercial interests so long as the practice of the blockade remained legal. “The truth is that we are comparatively with several of the nations of Europe a weak naval power,” he concluded, “and our deficiency in guns can only be supplied by our Privateers, who would sweep the ocean as they did in our last war with England.”

The last war had ended over four decades ago, and US-Britain relations—while not always amiable—had progressed on an even keel since then. The fear of future conflict remained alive among American statesmen even if reality suggested otherwise.

Buchanan’s presidency was marked by skepticism of the international regime, which albeit open to US membership was only moderately legitimate in the eyes of American leaders, who shelved the project of amending the regime during this period. At the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861, the Lincoln administration even proposed signing the Declaration of Paris in order to pre-empt international recognition of the Confederacy and to outlaw the latter’s use of privateers. Subsequent events, however, would compel the US to reevaluate its stance and would further entrench the illegitimacy of the international regime from the US perspective, pushing Washington from wanting to join the regime to abandoning negotiations within a span of four months. The result was a US strategy of social creativity—specifically redirection—pursued for the rest of the 19th century, whereby the US would follow the maritime laws of war while refusing to sign the Declaration of Paris in the absence of more fundamental changes to the international regime itself.

The US Offer to Sign the Declaration of Paris

The Southern Confederacy’s attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861 marked the official commencement of hostilities in the American Civil War. On April 17, the Confederacy invited applications for letters of marque and reprisal—possessing no navy of its own, privateering was a natural course of action. Two days later, President Lincoln announced a naval blockade of the ports of Southern States that had joined the Confederacy. Soon thereafter, Secretary of State William H. Seward issued a remarkable circular to US Ministers in all major European capitals. President Lincoln, he said, had decided the time had come to bring negotiations over the Declaration of Paris to “a speedy and satisfactory conclusion,” and to this end instructed his envoys to begin negotiations with their respective counterparts in foreign governments regarding the accession of the United States to the Declaration of Paris. Seward added that while “it would be eminently desirable for the good of all nations” for the parties to the declaration to adopt the Marcy Amendment, the impending wars in Europe and the ongoing insurrection in the US suggested that “the right season seems to have passed” and “it is wise to secure the lesser good offered by the Paris Congress, without waiting indefinitely in hope to obtain the greater one offered to the maritime nations by the President of the United States.”

In keeping with American tradition, the Confederacy’s instructions to its privateers mirrored those of the US government’s in the War of 1812—they were directed to “pay the strictest regard to the rights of neutral powers and the usages of civilized nations.” See British and Foreign State Papers, 1864-1865, Vol. LV. 1870. London: William Ridgway, p. 584.


Ibid., p. 36.
willing to sign the Declaration of Paris as it had been presented in 1856, without any amendments, “pure and simple.”

The motivation behind this surprising turnaround was clear. Lincoln’s overriding concern was to preclude any form of external intervention in the Civil War. His administration viewed external intervention not only in terms of material or moral assistance, but also in terms of any sort of recognition accorded to the Confederacy by other governments. Seward put it in no uncertain terms: “British recognition [of the Confederacy] would be British intervention, to create within our territory a hostile State by overthrowing this republic itself.” Given that the Confederacy had declared its intent to resort to privateering and that the US as a whole had objected to the Declaration of Paris in order to retain its right to privateering, Union leaders were afraid that the European powers—fearing threats to their commerce from both Union and Confederate privateers—would recognize the South as a belligerent in order to claim neutrality for their commerce. As Seward pointed out to the US Minister in Paris, “[T]he danger of such a case of depredation upon commerce equally by the [Union] government itself, and by its enemies, would operate as a provocation to France and other commercial nations to recognize the insurrectionary party in violation of our national rights and sovereignty.” If the Civil War were an internal matter, there would be no belligerents to speak of and hence no question of neutral rights. However, the Civil War could only be kept an internal matter if it did not threaten

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194 “Every instruction which this government has given to its representatives abroad, since the recent change of administration took place [on March 4, 1861], has expressed our profound anxiety lest the disloyal citizens who are engaged in an attempt to overthrow the Union should obtain aid and assistance from foreign nations, either in the form of a recognition of their pretended sovereignty, or in some other and more qualified or guarded manner.” Seward to Dayton. June 17, 1861. FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1: 224.
195 Seward to Adams. May 21, 1861. FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1: 89.
the interests of the great powers. The Confederacy, by employing privateers, posed a threat to the
great powers and thereby invited them to recognize it as a belligerent, which was an outcome
that the Union sought to avoid at all costs. Lincoln and Seward reasoned that by signing the
Declaration of Paris as representatives of the United States, they could bind both North and
South to the first principle of the declaration ("privateering is and remains abolished") and
thereby remove the threat to the great powers and preclude their recognition of the South as a
belligerent.

An Increasingly Illegitimate Regime

Unfortunately for Lincoln and Seward, while Britain and France did not recognize the
Confederacy as a state, they did accord it belligerent rights thereby frustrating the underlying
objective behind Lincoln’s offer to sign the Declaration of Paris. In the first week of May, John
Russell, the British foreign secretary, announced in parliament that the Queen’s law officers had
recommended the South be treated as a belligerent. A week later, the day the new US minister
Charles Francis Adams arrived in Britain to join his post, the British government issued a formal
declaration of neutrality with regard to the Civil War that effectively accorded the South the
status of a belligerent. Seward wrote to Adams, “This government considers that our relations in
Europe have reached a crisis, in which it is necessary for it to take a decided stand…”

Especially galling for the Union government was the fact—learned from the American legation
in St. Petersburg—that Britain and France had decided to coordinate their policies toward the

US, reviving the feeling of diplomatic isolation and encirclement that American leaders had experienced in connection with the Declaration of Paris. Seward noted the unfairness of the approach the great powers had taken toward the US: “The United States have been impartial and just in all their conduct towards the several nations of Europe. [We] will not complain, however, of the combination now announced by the two leading powers, although [we] think [we] had a right to expect a more independent, if not a more friendly course, from each of them.”

Given these setbacks, the Union government fell back on an alternative strategy: even if the great powers chose to recognize the Confederacy as a belligerent, the Union could accede to the Declaration of Paris and legitimately expect that the great powers would uphold the declaration’s commitment to abolishing privateering “everywhere in all cases and forever,” which if applied to the Confederacy would make the Union blockade more effective. Any sign of unwillingness to accept the accession of the United States could only be construed as a hypocritical act: “If she [Britain] refuse it, it can only be because she is willing to become the patron of privateering when aimed at our devastation.” The reasoning behind this approach, however, was flawed. William Dayton, the US Minister in Paris, noted that since (1) the declaration was only binding on belligerents that were party to it, (2) it looked like the great powers were going to officially recognize the Confederacy as a belligerent, and (3) the Confederacy was not a party to the declaration (and was unlikely to become one), the Union’s accession to the declaration would not impact the use of privateers by the Confederacy: “The status of these rebellious States as respects privateering will remain where it was; at least that is

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200 For evidence of this decision from British documents, see Lyons to Russell. June 4, 1861. Reprinted in Piggott, The Declaration, p. 419.
201 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
203 Ibid.
the view which I think is and will be taken of this question by England and France.”  

Lincoln and Seward, in their enthusiasm for signing the declaration, seemed to overlook Dayton’s note of caution.

Despite the willingness of the Lincoln administration to ratify the original declaration, however, a number of American statesmen continued to believe that redirecting the international regime in a more legitimate direction was the most appropriate strategy for the US to follow. Dayton decided to propose to the French government that the US would sign the declaration with the Marcy Amendment. “I should very much regret an opportunity lost to obtain such a treaty provision, if possible,” he wrote to Seward, “before we give up that species of volunteer marine by which we are enabled in some degree to affect the commerce of other nations, having a heavier naval marine, while they are destroying our own.” Seward himself backed Dayton’s approach for a time, as did Adams in London (though Adams himself had not proposed the Marcy Amendment to the British). Adams noticed further signs of British hypocrisy, creating a growing feeling among American leaders that when it came to questions of the maritime laws of war, the great powers espoused one set of rules for themselves and another for the United States. Citing criticism of the Union blockade in the British press, he observed, “Great Britain, so long known and feared as the tyrant of the ocean, is now to transform herself into a champion of neutral rights and the freedom of navigation, even into the ports of all the world, with or without regard to the interests of the nations to whom they may belong.”

A Deepening Crisis of Confidence

The Union government’s disappointment with the great powers deepened in mid-June of 1861 when the Ministers of Britain and France met with Seward in Washington to present him with dispatches from their respective governments. Breaking diplomatic protocol, Seward asked to first unofficially read the dispatches in the presence of the ministers. The documents turned out to be declarations of neutrality that officially recognized the Confederacy as a belligerent. Both Britain and France also demanded that the Union government agree to ensure that its naval ships and privateers (none of which had actually been commissioned) follow the second, third, and fourth principles of the Declaration of Paris.207

Having read the dispatches, Seward refused to accept them in his official capacity, for a number of reasons related to the unfair treatment he felt was being meted out to the US by the great powers. First, as had already been made clear by Union diplomats in Europe, the very act of recognizing the South as a belligerent was an “abridgement” of US sovereignty that his government was unwilling to even debate with any other nation.208 Second, echoing a complaint that George Dallas had made with regard to the Declaration of Paris in 1856, Seward felt that his government had not been adequately consulted before the great powers had arrived at a momentous decision affecting its sovereignty.209 Third, as reported by the British minister Richard Lyons, Seward made it clear that “he did not think that two European Powers ought to consult together upon the course to be pursued towards a great nation like the United States, and

207 The British government’s internal reasoning was that if the Union government accepted these demands, “the object of the Declaration of Paris may to a certain extent be attained without the adoption of any new principle” (i.e. the Marcy Amendment). See Russell to Lyons. May 18, 1861. Reprinted in Piggott, *The Declaration*, p. 149.
announce that they were acting in concert on the subject.”

Finally, had the great powers paid closer attention to diplomatic correspondence from the US, they would have noted that Seward had offered to sign the original Declaration of Paris in April, which granted more than the demands made by Britain and France in June.

Although from the American perspective the international regime was clearly governed by the great powers and manipulated to serve their interests (in this case, protecting their commerce by recognizing the Confederacy as a belligerent), Union leaders continued to pursue a conciliatory line in the hope that once they signed the declaration, they could at a future date take leadership of the regime by introducing the Marcy Amendment. Following Seward’s meeting in Washington with the British and French ministers, the focus of negotiations shifted back to London and Paris. The US ministers at these capitals—Adams and Dayton respectively—renewed their offers to open negotiations on the accession of the United States to the Declaration of Paris. Seward instructed Dayton in particular to drop his insistence on the Marcy Amendment and agree to accede to the original declaration. At the same time, both envoys were instructed to remind their interlocutors that the US’s ulterior and ultimate aim was to claim its place among the great powers by redirecting the international regime in a more acceptable direction:

You will, in any case, avow our preference for the proposition with the Marcy amendment incorporated, and will assure the government [of Britain/France] that whenever there shall be any hope for the adoption of that beneficent feature by the

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211 Lyons to Russell (No. 15). June 17, 1861. Reprinted in Piggott, *The Declaration*, p. 422. See also Seward to Adams, June 19, 1861, *FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1*: 107-08, in which he writes, “The British government ask this of us to-day, the 15th of June, in ignorance of the fact that we had, so early as the 25th of April, instructed you to tender, without reservation, to Great Britain our accession, pure and simple, to that declaration.”
necessary parties, as a principle of the law of nations, we shall be ready not only to agree to it, but even to propose it, and to lead in the necessary negotiations.  

The Gradual Breakdown of Negotiations

While the US resumed its overtures to the great powers, two critical events supervened. First, keen on securing its commercial shipping interests in the region, in early July—unbeknownst to the Union government—the British government decided to open a channel of communication with the Confederate government in Montgomery regarding the proper treatment of neutrals. Second, the first major battle of the Civil War—at Bull Run on July 21—saw Union forces suffer a major reversal. For the first time, both domestic and international observers realized that the upheaval in the American South was not going to be a short-term insurrection. Consequently, Britain and France redoubled their efforts to deal directly with the Confederates to secure neutral rights based on the second, third, and fourth principles of the Declaration of Paris. In keeping with their coordinated policy, Britain responded to the Union government’s proposal for a convention to mark the latter’s signature of the declaration by insisting that an identical convention be concluded with France simultaneously on a pre-determined day.

The Marcy Amendment remained a sticking point in the back of the minds of US statesmen. They viewed the declaration’s most far-reaching provision—the “free ships, free goods” principle—as American diplomacy’s contribution to the world (even though France had urged this principle on a reluctant Britain during the Crimean War), and rued their inability to make an even greater impact on the world stage by having the Marcy Amendment included in the declaration. Adams wrote to Seward, “The declaration of the leading powers of civilized

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Europe, made at Paris in 1856, engrafted upon the law of nations for the first time great principles for which the government of the United States had always contended against some of those powers, and down to that time had contended in vain.”

He then pointed out that the “free ships, free goods” principle had reversed many decades of British policy, a “virtual triumph” for American diplomacy “all over the globe.” However, it was precisely this reversal that had made the British jealous of the Americans, contended Adams, and their reluctance to subsequently admit the Marcy Amendment “was calculated only to wither the laurels gained by our victory.”

At no point in the history of international diplomacy over the Declaration of Paris is it clearer that the diplomatic tussle over the maritime laws of war in the minds of US leaders was chiefly a battle for America’s place in the top ranks of the global order. The consistent denial of this place by the great powers had now built up a sense of resentment at the unequal treatment given to the US by those who dominated the system and its rules. In the end, however, Adams reasoned—along with Lincoln, Seward, and Dayton—that it would be better to accede to the declaration in the present and defer the Marcy Amendment to a future date when the world was ready for it.

The British and the French, however, remained deeply skeptical of US intentions, viewing the offer to sign the declaration as a ploy by the Union to get them to recognize Confederate privateers as pirates. While this was undoubtedly initially true, there was a clear legal loophole—the recognition of the Confederacy as a belligerent that was not a party to the declaration—that Britain and France could have exploited to avoid this outcome (as Dayton himself had noted to Seward). Nonetheless, to be doubly sure, Russell (the British foreign

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216 Ibid.
217 Ibid.
secretary) added a line at the end of a letter to Adams at the end of July, which said, “I need scarcely add that on the part of Great Britain the engagement will be prospective, and will not invalidate anything already done.”\(^{218}\) This line greatly perplexed both Adams and Seward. After a long analysis of what Russell could have meant, Seward concluded, “[T]he “thing” which “has been done already,” and which Great Britain desires shall not be invalidated by the convention, must be something which she herself has done.”\(^{219}\)

What Britain had done became clearer in mid-August, when Robert Mure, a colonel of the Confederate army, was arrested in New York trying to leave the country on a British passport and carrying a number of letters and pamphlets addressed to British citizens who were in support of the Confederacy. Among these items was a sealed consular bag containing “voluminous papers” addressed to Russell from Robert Bunch, the British Consul at Charleston, which Seward chose not to open and sent to Adams asking him to hand over to Russell with a demand that if any papers in the bag were found to be “treasonable,” the foreign minister should hand them over to Adams.\(^{220}\) Subsequently, Seward found among Mure’s belongings a number of letters that clearly implicated the British Consul, especially in facilitating the recognition of the Confederacy and laying the groundwork for direct relations between the latter and Britain.\(^{221}\) Seward immediately demanded Bunch’s expulsion and an explanation from the British government, and wrote to Dayton in Paris to pause negotiations over the Declaration of Paris as “our negotiation in England has taken a new phase.”\(^{222}\) The latter step turned out to be unnecessary, because meanwhile the British and French governments submitted to the US

\(^{219}\) Seward to Adams (No. 61). August 17, 1861. *FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1*: 130.
\(^{221}\) Seward to Adams (No. 64). August 17, 1861. *FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1*: 133.
\(^{222}\) Seward to Dayton (No. 41). August 17, 1861. *FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1*: 240.
ministers in London and Paris respectively a declaration that they sought to make in addition to signing the conventions with the US. Both great powers declared that by accepting the accession of the US to the declaration, they did not intend “to undertake any engagement which shall have any bearing, direct or indirect, on the internal differences now prevailing in the United States.” In other words, Britain and France would not treat Confederate privateers as pirates. The French foreign minister went as far as to say that Britain and France would rather not have the US join the declaration than get involved in its domestic controversies.

**Failure of Negotiations**

This stance smacked of hypocrisy in Washington. Britain for one was already involved in the Civil War and preparing to deal directly with the Confederates. Moreover, the Lincoln administration viewed the great powers as imposing unequal conditions on the US’s accession to the declaration compared to the conditions imposed on all its other signatories. The international regime in their eyes went from being moderately legitimate to completely illegitimate. Given the delays in correspondence with Washington, Adams and Dayton both took the initiative to suspend negotiations and reply to their respective counterparts’ proposals. In reply to Britain, Adams wrote:

> Rather than that such a record should be made, it were a thousand times better that the declaration remain unsigned forever. If the parties to the instrument are not to sign it upon terms of perfect reciprocity, with all their duties and obligations under it perfectly equal, and without equivocation or reservation of any kind, on any side, then is it plain that the proper season for such an engagement has not yet arrived.

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Dayton, in his reply to the French government, was more circumspect:

I can scarcely suppose [the United States] will assent to the execution of a convention adopting the declaration of Paris, except upon terms of entire reciprocity, and subject to no other condition than those existing by and between the original parties…It will…exact no more and be content with no less than it would have been entitled to had the convention been executed in advance of its present internal controversy.\textsuperscript{226}

At the end of August, Adams pronounced the negotiations a failure.\textsuperscript{227} Shortly thereafter, Seward reported to his envoys that the president considered the additional declaration proposed by the great powers “inadmissible,” adding that this view was “in harmony equally with a prudent regard to the safety of the republic and a just sense of its honor and dignity.”\textsuperscript{228} One of Seward’s primary objections to the proposed additional declaration was that it was not mutual:

It proposes a special rule by which her Majesty’s obligations shall be meliorated in their bearing upon internal difficulties now prevailing in the United States, while the obligations to be assumed by the United States shall not be similarly meliorated or at all affected in their bearing on internal differences that may now be prevailing, or may hereafter arise and prevail, in Great Britain.\textsuperscript{229}

While a situation of insurrection in Britain may not have presented itself at any time in the near future, the point was one of principle and a way for the US to put itself in the same category as Britain. At other points in correspondences with his envoys, Seward had emphasized that Britain’s recognition of the Confederacy was akin to the US recognizing Scotland, Ireland, or

\textsuperscript{226} Dayton to Thouvenel. August 26, 1861. \textit{FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1}: 246-47.
\textsuperscript{227} Adams to Seward. August 30, 1861. \textit{FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1}: 135.
\textsuperscript{228} Seward to Adams, September 7, 1861; Seward to Dayton, September 10, 1861. \textit{FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1}: 142, 249.
\textsuperscript{229} \textit{Ibid.}: 142.
any other part of the British empire that might choose to rise up in insurrection.\textsuperscript{230} American statesmen cared as much about being treated as equals of the great powers as they did about the substantive outcomes of the negotiations they were engaged in on a diverse range of issues with the great powers. In the present context, they once again felt unfairly singled out. By imposing this additional declaration on them, the great powers were denying the US the same status as themselves and all the other parties to the Declaration of Paris. Consequently, the Union government decided, “the United States must accede to the declaration of the congress of Paris on the same terms with all the other parties to it, or that they do not accede to it at all.”\textsuperscript{231}

Given the circumstances, accession was impossible. However, the US chose not to break with the regime but rather to wait for “a happier time” when “the important objects of the proposed convention may be fully secured,” including the Marcy Amendment.\textsuperscript{232} This was in the end a strategy of redirection when faced with a regime that was open to the US joining it, but entirely illegitimate in the eyes of American leaders due to the unequal footing on which they were being invited to join.\textsuperscript{233} The US thus remained a non-signatory of the declaration but decided to follow its rules:

\begin{quote}
We have always practiced on the principles of the declaration. We did so long before they were adopted by the congress of Paris, so far as the rights of neutrals or friendly States are concerned. While our relations with France remain as they now are we shall continue the same practice none the less faithfully than if bound to do so by a solemn convention.\textsuperscript{234}
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{230} For example, Seward to Adams. April 10, 1861. \textit{FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1}: 79.
\textsuperscript{231} Seward to Adams. September 7, 1861. \textit{FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1}: 143.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{233} “If we should accede to that condition, it manifestly would not be the declaration of the congress of Paris to which we would be adhering, but a different and special and peculiar treaty between France and the United States only. Even as such a treaty it would be unequal.” Seward to Dayton. September 10, 1861. \textit{FRUS, 1861, Vol. 1}: 250.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.: 251.
US policy toward the declaration would remain in this mold for the remainder of the 19th century. So long as the international regime did not fully incorporate America’s conception of the law of maritime warfare (i.e. the Marcy Amendment, protecting private property at sea), the US would abide by the Declaration of Paris but refrain from signing it. This stance remained ingrained in US policy even after the US had become much more powerful—with a much larger navy—by the end of the 19th century. In advance of war with Spain in 1898, President McKinley announced that the US would not resort to privateering and would adhere to the rules of the Declaration of Paris. The international regime for the maritime laws of war, while completely open to the US joining its top ranks, lacked the legitimacy that American statesmen had sought to endow it with by exempting private property from capture at sea right from the days of President Monroe.

**ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS**

In Chapter 3, I posed four puzzles with regard to America’s behavior in the international regime for the maritime laws of war. Revisiting these puzzles at this stage helps to clarify the role that status plays relative to other explanations grounded in material interest and domestic politics. The first puzzle relates directly to rationalist explanations for why countries follow the laws of war: why did the US refuse to sign the Declaration of Paris? Eric Posner and James Morrow have separately depicted the laws of war as mutually reinforcing agreements with reciprocal enforcement, arguing that countries are more likely to consent to these laws when mutual

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compliance carries sufficient benefits and mutual non-compliance carries low costs.\(^{236}\) In the case of the Declaration of Paris, mutual compliance would have meant that since the US was almost always a neutral in European wars, its commerce would continue unabated during these wars had the US decided to sign the declaration. Although the declaration’s almost universal acceptance meant that even without signing it, America’s neutral commerce would be protected by the second and third principles of the declaration, the declaration was by no means universally accepted at the time that the US decided to challenge it. More importantly, not signing meant that the US would not enjoy the protections of the declaration as a belligerent. If the US were fighting a war, its commerce in neutral ships would be liable to capture, as would the commerce of others in ships flying the American flag. Given the US’s extensive commercial interests abroad, this was a decidedly negative outcome, yet American leaders chose to challenge the declaration. Material interest alone fails to explain this outcome.

The second puzzle relates to the reason for not signing the declaration offered by the US, i.e. why was privateering such a sticking point for American leaders? In terms of material interest, Franklin Pierce, William Marcy, James Buchanan, and others argued that if the US agreed to the abolition of privateering, it would have no weapon to fend off attacks on its commerce in a future war with a major naval power such as Britain or France. In 1856, America’s last war had been against Mexico—a weaker power—in 1846, and before that against Britain in 1812. As it happened, America’s next inter-state war would be against Spain in 1898. Moreover, US-Britain relations improved considerably after the claims over British support to the Confederacy during the Civil War were settled in 1872, yet the US refused to give up its right to use privateers. Most importantly, given the value Pierce and Marcy placed on privateering, it

is remarkable that none of their successors issued letters of marque in any subsequent conflicts that the US was engaged in, not even an internal one as existential as the Civil War. During the Civil War, although Lincoln and Seward worried about the damage Confederate privateering would cause to Union commerce, their response was not to commission privateers of their own but rather to offer to sign the Declaration of Paris. The fact that they were willing to sign the original Declaration of Paris suggests that American leaders were willing to live in a world where their commerce might be destroyed by a superior naval power during wartime, so long as signing the declaration would keep the United States united. Even Dayton’s warning that signing the declaration would likely have no impact since the South was recognized as a belligerent by the great powers did not dampen Lincoln and Seward’s desire “of placing the loyal States and his government in the most favorable and conciliatory light to European states and to their interests afloat during the war for the Union.”237 Finally, domestic groups such as chambers of commerce and merchantmen, as well as major intellectuals starting with Benjamin Franklin, had been against privateering for both commercial and normative reasons.238 Therefore Pierce and Marcy’s objection to the declaration on grounds of the merits of privateering was far from being uncontroversial or unambiguously valid. It could also be argued that the protections offered by the declaration to belligerent goods in neutral ships and neutral goods in belligerent ships outweighed the commercial argument made by American leaders against the declaration. In the event of a war between the US and a superior naval power, American commerce would in fact be

secure in neutral ships if the US had signed the declaration. Taking all these considerations into account, a strictly materialist account does not explain why the abolition of privateering was such a sticking point for American statesmen with regard to the Declaration of Paris.

Equally if not more puzzling from this perspective is the dogged adherence of the US to the Marcy Amendment. As Buchanan had noted in the 1830s, an amendment that exempted private property at sea and abolished privateering would still lead to a resounding American defeat at the hands of a stronger naval power so long as the practice of the blockade remained alive. The French and Germans knew that the only answer to British naval power was to build a strong and powerful navy of one’s own. Yet the US did not pursue this path and instead chose to repeatedly propose an amendment to the Declaration of Paris that, if passed, would have produced the same outcome as the abolition of privateering alone.

The final puzzle relates to the aftermath of the declaration: why did the US follow the rules of a declaration it did not sign, and if privateering was truly a major weapon for a weak power such as the US, why did the US not sign the declaration once its navy was among the world’s most formidable forces by the late 18th/early 19th century? On a strictly materialist interpretation, the US would have every interest in benefiting from the principles of the declaration once it was sufficiently strong enough to not rely on privateers. And if the declaration was truly against American interests, then a materialist explanation does not explain why the US followed the rules of the international regime by not issuing letters of marque in subsequent international conflicts (which were, in any case, few in number).

Another potential critique of the analysis over time is the role of the US’s changing material capabilities as an omitted variable. Arguably, a state’s conception of its national interest
changes as its relative power in the international system increases over time.\textsuperscript{239} As they grow in power, states might start to define their interests more expansively or start to act more assertively with regard to preferences they already hold. In the US case, one might argue that changing material capabilities impacted both the choice of strategy Washington adopted with regard to the international regime, as well as its perception of the openness and/or legitimacy of the regime. In other words, an increasingly powerful US would have both cause and ability to push back against an international regime that did not embody its preferences over the maritime laws of war. It is no doubt true that self-conceptions of greatness tended to creep into the language US leaders used to describe their relationship with the international regime from the 1820s onward. However, for much of the 1820s, growth in US capabilities was either negative or negligible. Moreover, by the logic of capabilities, the US ought not to have been as confident in rejecting negotiations over the declaration of Paris with the great powers as it was during the Civil War, when American capabilities suffered a major blow and were at risk of being seriously diminished. Changing power is undoubtedly important, but this is precisely what is being assumed in a study of rising powers and their status concerns. It is the growth in capabilities that creates a situation where rising powers begin to value symbolic equality with those who sit atop the social hierarchy of the global order and the international regimes within it. And it is also rising powers that are able, because of their increasing capabilities, to push back against international regimes. The question, however, is \textit{when} and \textit{why} do they push back? A strict focus on capabilities does not help us answer this question.

As argued in this and the previous chapter, the desire for status equality with the great powers often drove the decisions of US statesmen with regard to the international regime for the


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maritime laws of war, to the extent that they took steps—such as not signing the Declaration of Paris, proposing the Marcy Amendment, de facto following the rules of the international regime—that were not in the US’s material interests, particularly from an economic perspective.

As argued above, the choice of status-seeking strategy—follow, challenge, expand, or redirect—depended on the extent to which American leaders perceived the regime to be legitimate and open. In this manner, behavior that is otherwise problematic from the perspective of security, economic gain, or domestic politics is made intelligible by studying the problem through the lens of status.

**CONCLUSION**

To summarize the findings of the case study, the US began its independent existence in the late 18th and early 19th centuries engaging in social mobility within the international regime for the maritime laws of war. International regime membership at the time was relatively open, and the US accepted the legitimacy of both sides of the global debate on whether free ships made free goods or not. In the 1820s, as the Concert of Europe took hold, the US found the international regime’s (and the global order’s) top ranks to be closed to its rise. Since it considered the principles governing the international regime to still be legitimate, it adopted a strategy of social creativity, seeking to expand the membership of the regime’s top ranks by introducing a new principle (the exemption of private property) in bilateral treaties with the great powers that would allow the US to attain global recognition as a visionary, humane, and progressive nation. When the Crimean War occurred in the 1850s, the great powers—primarily Britain and France—responded by crafting a convention that essentially excluded the US and rejected its cherished principle, which the US subsequently enshrined in the proposed Marcy Amendment to the
Declaration of Paris. Faced with a closed and illegitimate international regime, US leaders chose to challenge it by trying to undermine the declaration. Subsequently, US rejection of the declaration and the emergence of major fissures in the Concert of Europe opened up the international regime to America’s rise once again. For a brief period of four months at the beginning of the American Civil War, the Union government even offered to sign the original Declaration of Paris. However, they withdrew this offer when they realized that the great powers sought to undermine the US by recognizing the Confederacy and refusing to treat the latter’s privateers as pirates. Once again, the US discovered that the international regime worked to serve the interests of the great powers in a manner that was biased against the US. Faced thus with an illegitimate but essentially open regime, the US decided to adopt a strategy of redirecting the regime, in effect following its rules without signing the Declaration of Paris until the great powers were ready to admit the Marcy Amendment. The latter outcome never came to pass, and consequently the US spent the rest of the 19th century in this position. At each state, the causal mechanism was one of exogenous changes to the international regime or global order more generally that impacted US perceptions of the regime’s legitimacy and openness, which in turn caused American leaders to adjust their status-seeking strategies, going from social mobility to creativity to competition and back to creativity.

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INTRODUCTION

Various studies of international order between the two World Wars have emphasized the central role of the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22, in which the three foremost naval powers of the interwar period—the United States (US), Britain, and Japan—agreed to a system of limitation on naval armaments and resolved a number of emerging geopolitical controversies in the Far East.\(^1\) Following on the heels of the Paris Peace Conference and the formation of the League of Nations, the conference and its resulting treaties famously capped the construction of capital ships (i.e. battleships) using a ratio of 5:5:3 for the US, Britain, and Japan respectively. The three countries, along with France, also signed an entente that sought to maintain the status quo in the Far East by privileging cooperative diplomacy over the use of force. Finally, there was broad agreement in principle among participants regarding the territorial and administrative integrity of China (whose delegates also participated in the conference).

In a broader geopolitical sense, the conference served to cement “a new order of sea power” after the great turbulence of the First World War, which led to the eclipse of naval powers such as Germany and France alongside the rapid rise of American and Japanese sea

The Great War had revealed the United States’ vast industrial potential and US leaders themselves sought to build “a navy second to none,” a development that posed a threat to both British naval primacy worldwide and Japanese interests in the Far East. The fear of major conflict was heightened in all three capitals by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, in place since 1902 and renewed in 1911. The conference, which was held at the behest of both the British and the Americans, served to allay the specific fear of a trilateral conflict, though it did less to address bilateral issues of potential friction, especially between the US and Japan.

Nonetheless, historians have generally viewed the Washington Conference as a positive development even in the trajectory of US-Japan relations in the early 20th century. Asada Sadao describes it as a “happy interlude,” one that temporarily dispelled fears of a Pacific war and created a framework for naval arms reduction and control among the three main naval powers (and France and Italy). Taking a slightly wider view, Iriye Akira labels the period from the end of the First World War till 1931 “the brief period of peace between the US and Japan,” which was undergirded by what William Braisted calls “the Washington Conference system of naval power.” Various commentators at the time highlighted the spirit of cooperative diplomacy

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driving this system, and this notion has foregrounded historical retellings of the period ever since.

The Washington system was in the end just an interlude. Subsequent naval conferences at Geneva in 1927, London in 1930, and again at London in 1935 were but a shadow of the original, eliciting little cooperation, much recrimination, and general bitterness between the powers, especially the United States and Japan (but also the US and Britain at Geneva). In 1931, Japanese soldiers in China engineered what is now known as the Mukden incident and used it as a pretext to take control of Manchuria. The diplomatic fallout of this incident eventually led Japan to leave the League of Nations in 1933. The following year, Japan gave notice of its abrogation of the Washington Naval Treaty, which took effect in 1936. As is well known, during this period Japan grew closer to Germany and Italy and eventually joined the Second World War on their side. The brief window of cooperation that had opened at Washington in 1921 was shattered.

Japan between the World Wars was a rising power (see Chapter 2). Although many scholars consider Japan’s victory over Russia in the war of 1905 the moment in which Japan joined the ranks of the great powers, Japan’s aggregate industrial and military capabilities remained far below the levels of the great powers—even in 1939 as Japan mobilized for total war, its material capabilities were less than one-third those of the United States. This chapter therefore considers the case of Japan as a rising power and its approach to the international

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regime for naval arms control—the Washington system—that lasted from the end of the First World War till the early 1930s.

THE PUZZLE OF JAPAN’S BEHAVIOR

Japan’s approach to the rules of the Washington system, especially in the realm of naval arms control, raises two related puzzles. First, why did Japan cooperate extensively with the great powers during the Washington Conference and make numerous concessions on various issues? Analysts have generally explained Japan’s cooperation through a Realist lens. As one scholar has noted, “The Washington Conference is generally viewed as a success precisely because it improved the security of the three powers [the United States, Britain, and Japan] by decreasing the probability of conflict through formal negotiation and the settlement of difficult issues that could have, if left unaddressed, precipitated a war in the Pacific.”

If the goal was to avoid an arms race and conflict with the US, however, Tokyo’s naval strategy after the conference did not suggest so. Although Japan’s naval budget did decrease considerably after 1922—and remained relatively low for a decade thereafter—the navy sparked off a new arms race in the construction of heavy cruisers, which were not regulated by the

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8 Kearns, Great Power Security Cooperation, p. 49.
treaties signed at Washington. It also invested a great deal in technological advancements that could make up for the limit on capital-ship tonnage imposed by the conference. Aside from naval limitation, it also remains unclear why Japan made various other concessions such as the replacement of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with a loose four-power entente, the preservation of the US’s ‘open door’ policy in China, and the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Shantung in China, which they had occupied during the First World War. It is difficult to explain Japan’s level of cooperation based on standard materialist accounts of the naval arms race, fear of war with the United States, and postwar economic troubles.

The second puzzle arises from Japan’s decision in the early 1930s to renege on its commitments to the Washington system. Beginning with the unprecedented domestic political crisis precipitated by the London Naval Treaty of 1930, Japanese decision-makers began a steady process of unraveling the Washington system. The Manchurian crisis, withdrawal from the League of Nations, and abrogation of the Washington treaty itself are all puzzling if one considers the security environment facing Japan, which if anything was worse than the one facing it in 1921 given the significant increase in US military power and the deterioration of US-Japan relations during the course of the 1920s. On the economic front, the Great Depression had created economic conditions in Japan that called for curtailing military expenditure, and yet Japan’s naval budget increased by 49 percent between 1931 and 1932, and by the following year

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10 Marriott, Leo. 2005. *Treaty Cruisers: The World’s First International Warship Building Competition*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword, pp. 58-68. Cruisers in general were smaller than battleships, with a displacement of approximately 5000-8000 tons. The Washington Treaty did not regulate the construction of ships of less than 10,000 tons displacement and guns of less than 8-inch caliber. Japan began to build “heavy cruisers” to these specifications soon after the conference.
was higher than pre-Washington conference levels.\textsuperscript{11} Material factors alone therefore cannot explain Japan’s break from the Washington system.

\textbf{The Importance of the 1920s}

Taken together, these two puzzles raise an important question about the period as a whole. In both 1921 and 1931, Japan faced a depressed economy at home, the threat of war with the United States abroad, and a navy that considered the US its primary adversary. The material cost of opposing the international regime in both cases was high. Yet in one case Japan chose to cooperate with the international regime for naval arms control, and in the other it violated the regime’s rules. What changed? The major difference between these two periods was, of course, internal to Japan. As many scholars have noted, domestic politics in Japan veered increasingly to the right and public opinion became increasingly anti-American during this decade.\textsuperscript{12} In the navy, there were always those who opposed the constraints of the Washington system. By 1931, these individuals—also known as the “fleet faction”—were vocal, organized, and powerful; and they would take complete control of naval policy very soon thereafter.\textsuperscript{13}

In studies of interwar Japanese domestic politics and foreign policy, both historians and political scientists focus on the 1930s as the period of increasing militarism. Few have focused on changes in Japan’s approach to international order during the 1920s. Jack Snyder, for example, views Japan in the 1920s as “relatively liberal democratic” and not prone to overexpansion, whereas the 1930s were a time when the strategic myths of the army and navy took hold and led to a series of irrational decisions and absence of learning from strategic

\textsuperscript{11} Asada, From Mahan to Pearl Harbor, p. 297.
\textsuperscript{12} For example, Iriye, Akira. 1965. \textit{After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East 1921-1931}. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 36.
mistakes. Historians who write about the 1920s have focused on the international naval
conferences and the role of political rivalries and intrigues within the civilian leadership and the
military respectively, and between civilian and military leaders. In all cases, the role of the
Japanese bureaucratic and military elite is uncontested. As Richard Samuels notes, unlike in
Germany and Italy, Japanese authoritarianism was not the product of a social movement led by a
charismatic leader: “Italian fascism was built from the outside, without the support of a coherent
bureaucracy and even in the absence of a strong military. Japanese authoritarianism was built
from the inside out—by a strong military with powerful bureaucratic allies.”

While these accounts are undoubtedly valid, by focusing on the 1930s as the key period
of revisionism, they tend to conflate the rise of authoritarianism at home with the rise of
militarism in Japan’s external relations. In doing so, they miss the deeper sources of Japan’s
growing disenchantment with the international order of the postwar world. As a result, key
questions remain unanswered or only partially answered. For example, what gave right-wing
groups and militarists the upper hand? Why did that type of thinking emerge in the first place?
Why did some political and naval leaders who took a relatively sanguine approach to the
Washington Treaty—such as Fleet Admiral Togo Heihachiro, the “Nelson of the East”—
dramatically change their opinions by the time of the Geneva (1927) and London (1930)
conferences? As I argue below, the roots of the 1930s in fact lie in the 1920s, and the

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international order—specifically the Washington system—plays a vital but traditionally underappreciated role in shaping Japan’s internal politics and external policies during this period.

Japan’s Quest for Status

Explanations for Japan’s approach to the rules of the international regime for naval arms control in the 1920s fall short in the absence a focus Japan’s consistent quest for great-power status since the mid-19th century. An assumption of the theory presented in Chapter 2 is that the great powers in world politics constitute a club whose membership rising powers strive to attain, even if symbolically (i.e. even if they cannot actually match the material capabilities of the great powers). While this description can be applied to any international system, following the Treaty of Westphalia, the great-power club was exclusively European and it was European countries that established the rules of membership and the standard that potential entrants had to meet in order to be included in the so-called “family of nations.” Over time this standard became one of “civilization,” and those not in the club were by implication barbaric or uncivilized nations.

The impact on Japan of its first encounter with and submission to US naval power in 1854 is well documented. In the ensuing five decades, Japanese leaders deliberately emulated Western political institutions, social customs, economic practices, and military techniques in order to gain entry into the great-power club. Japan worked hard to develop the markers of civilization, and using the “advantages of followership,” in a very short period of time its leaders were able to accomplish what took European nations centuries—the creation of a modern

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bureaucratic state, industrial economy, and powerful military.\textsuperscript{21} Ito Hirobumi, four times the prime minister of Japan between 1885 and 1901, observed that Meiji Japan strove “to attain among the nations of the world the status of a civilized nation and to become a member of the comity of European and American nations which occupy the position of civilized countries.”\textsuperscript{22} Japan’s leaders sought not just the status of being civilized but of being a civilized great power, and this was a consistent theme in Japanese policies at home and abroad from the Meiji period up until the Second World War.\textsuperscript{23} Throughout this period, Japanese leaders “were openly determined to “catch up and surpass” (oitsuku, oikosu) the West and become a “first-class nation” (itto koku).”\textsuperscript{24}

Given this consistent desire for great-power status, Steven Ward argues that in addition to security and economic concerns, one must understand Japan’s sense of “status immobility” as a contributing factor to its foreign policy in the interwar period.\textsuperscript{25} He argues that the persistent diplomatic failure to gain recognition as an equal of the Western great powers altered the preferences of the Japanese leadership and public in the early 1930s, and changed the domestic discursive environment in ways that favored revisionists.\textsuperscript{26} The precipitating event, according to Ward, was the League of Nation’s condemnation of Japan’s actions in Manchuria. This status immobility theory at once explains too little and too much. One the one hand, it does not provide a theoretical account of when the denial of status will result in revisionist behavior, and hence

\textsuperscript{24} Samuels, Machiavelli’s Children, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 613.
cannot explain why instances of status denial prior to the League’s motion against Japan in February 1933 did not result in revisionism among Japanese leaders. On the other hand, in seeking to explain a variable as broad as revisionism, it reduces a complex and multi-causal phenomenon to a question of whether or not Japan was accorded the status it sought.

As the theory presented in this dissertation shows, compliance and revisionism are two ends of a spectrum, with at least two intermediate strategies that rising powers may pursue in order to earn great-power status. A more nuanced understanding of the role played by status concerns in Japan’s behavior during this period is therefore possible through some theoretical refinement and empirical scoping that seeks to rule out confounding factors such as material interests and domestic politics.

**DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

The dependent variable in this case is Japan’s approach to the rules of the international regime for naval arms control—the Washington system—over time. As discussed in Chapter 2, this variable can take four distinct values depending on the type of strategy pursued by a rising power.

**Status-Seeking Strategies**

A rising power that *follows* is essentially pursuing a strategy of *social mobility* and does what the international regime requires or does not do what the regime prohibits. This is essentially a strategy of cooperation with the great powers that have created the international regime and are its self-appointed managers.
A rising power that *challenges* is pursuing a strategy of *social competition* and does not undertake an adjustment to do what the international regime requires or not do what it prohibits. This is essentially a strategy of conflict with the great powers and can take the form of rule breaking or exit from the international regime.

A rising power that seeks to *expand* an international regime is pursuing a strategy of *social creativity* and tries to modify the membership rules of the regime (or a particular group within the regime) in an attempt to get itself counted in the regime (or sub-group) without having to make any major adjustments to its own policies.

Finally, a rising power that seeks to *redirect* an international regime is also pursuing a social creativity strategy and seeks to alter the goals of the regime itself in a direction that is more in line with what the rising power seeks within that issue area. In such a scenario, the rising power is neither a follower nor a challenger, and neither does it have trouble being counted as a member of the regime. However, it might have fundamental disagreements with the goals of the regime and its strategy is to steer the regime in a more acceptable direction.

**Variation in Japan’s Strategies**

Keeping the above in mind, it is possible to briefly chart the variation in Japan’s approach to the Washington system over time. The analysis in the next chapter focuses predominantly on the period between 1921 and 1931. In this chapter, I examine Japan’s approach to the global order in the period from 1894—when Britain first revoked extraterritoriality in Japan—till the end of the First World War. I choose 1894 as the starting point because Japan’s rise can be traced to sometime in the late 1880s as per the definitions provided in Chapter 2, and many countries
considered Japan to have joined the Euro-centric family of nations in 1894. The changes in the dependent variable over time are depicted in the table below.

**Table 5.1: Japan’s Status-Seeking Strategies and Naval Arms Control**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Policy with respect to global order / international regime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894 – 1919</td>
<td>Follow (Social Mobility)</td>
<td>Follow international laws, expand beyond national borders, develop military power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919 – 1922</td>
<td>Follow (Social Mobility)</td>
<td>Agree to unequal tonnage ratio, withdraw from Shantung, Four-Power Treaty, &amp; Open Door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 – 1930</td>
<td>Expand (Social Creativity)</td>
<td>Emphasis on auxiliaries, technological sophistication, training, and tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930 onward</td>
<td>Challenge (Social Competition)</td>
<td>Abrogate treaty, resume building at pre-treaty levels, exit League of Nations, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the years presented in the table above are not rigid markers and that the causal effects of the independent variables—the perceived openness and legitimacy of the international regime—entail significant lags such that an event in one year make take a number of years to effectively alter the country’s strategy. Thus events and strategies may bleed across time periods to some extent, but by and large this periodization reflects the manner in which Japan’s approach to the Washington system changed over time. A fuller explication of the causal mechanism is contained in the next section. A brief account of variation in the dependent variable is presented here.

From the Meiji Restoration onward, Japan pursued a strategy of social mobility, which entailed emulating the rules, institutions, and practices of the great powers. This strategy lasted all the way until the First World War, which was for all intents and purposes an event entirely external to Japan. At the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Japan was a minor player. Although its
delegates negotiated and won partial victories that allowed them to retain in some form the
former German possessions in China and the Western Pacific that Japan had occupied during the
war, they proved willing to sacrifice one of their primary objectives, which was to have a racial
equality clause inserted into the Covenant of the League of Nations. At the Washington
Conference (1921-22), Japan again made various concessions as detailed above, notably
acquiescing in a capital-ship tonnage ratio of 5:5:3 for the United States, Britain, and Japan
respectively. In return for this concession, Tokyo was able to secure a freeze on the construction
of naval bases and fortifications by the US and Britain in the western Pacific.

Following the conference, Japan sought to make up for its unequal ratio by focusing on
qualitative improvements in its naval armaments and tactics, and by constructing auxiliary
vessels such as cruisers and submarines that were not regulated by the naval treaty. In doing so,
Japan sought two objectives. First, in a classic move of social creativity, to redefine the metrics
by which naval prowess could be measured. Second, to build sufficient strength in auxiliaries so
that Tokyo could claim a fairer tonnage ratio in a future conference that might seek to extend the
Washington principles to these vessels (all parties to the Washington Treaty anticipated such a
conference). Both objectives were designed to attain some form of parity in naval capabilities
with the great powers and thereby expand the top ranks of the Washington system to make room
for Japan as an equal player.

With the signing of the London Naval Treaty of 1930, to which Japan was an extremely
reluctant party (and which caused a political crisis in Tokyo), Japan switched its strategy from
one of creativity to outright challenge. The aftermath of the London Treaty saw divisions in the
navy and between the civilian leadership and the navy boil over, and this crisis was only
worsened by the actions of the army in Manchuria. In 1934, following a purge of pro-treaty
officers from the navy, Japan gave formal notice of abrogation to the great powers and began preparing to exit the Washington system, which it did in 1936 according to the treaty’s terms. The events that followed are well documented as part of Japan’s road to the Pacific War and are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

**Perceived Openness and Legitimacy**

The two independent variables that drive a rising power’s status-seeking strategies in an international regime are its perceptions of the regime’s openness and legitimacy respectively. Openness is a question of both regime membership as well as present or future membership of its top ranks. In other words, an international regime is perceived to be more open when a rising power can see a clear institutional pathway by which it can be counted as an equal of the regime’s leading powers. This equality may take time to actuate, but so long as there are no countervailing factors that make membership of the international regime’s top ranks excessively difficult or impossible, a rising power will view it as relatively open. Perceived legitimacy is more a question of the ‘oughtness’ of an international regime’s rules. In other words, does the rising power feel the international regime’s normative pull? The answer will depend on the extent to which the rising power considers the issue to be a vital one, the regime to be the best forum for addressing the issue, and—most importantly—the rules and procedures of the international regime to be fair and unbiased. In forming this last judgment, the rising power will evaluate the regime’s treatment of itself in comparison to the great powers and any other countries that it may consider a comparator for historical, cultural, or other reasons.

It is worth noting that international regimes are often part of a larger complex of regimes that comprise a global order that is invariably established, underwritten, and managed by one or
more great powers. As a result, critical changes in the broader global order—for example, as a result of major wars—may impact the manner in which a rising power perceives an international regime that is embedded within the order. Equally, the bilateral policies of great powers toward a rising power may play a role in the latter’s evaluation of the international regimes managed by the former.

**Variation in Japan’s Perceptions**

From the mid-19th century till at least the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, Japanese leaders viewed the global order as open and legitimate. They saw the pursuit of “Rich Nation, Strong Army” (*fukoku kyohei*) as a worthy cause, and believed that victory in war would definitively establish Japan’s status as an equal of great powers such as Britain, Germany, France, Russia, and the United States. To their disappointment, neither victory against China in 1895 nor the even greater victory against Russia a decade later brought them the recognition they sought. While the world certainly considered Japan to be a major power following the Russo-Japanese War, the great powers felt threatened by Japan’s rise as a non-European and non-Anglo-Saxon great power and displayed varying degrees of racial antipathy toward the “plucky little island nation” that had managed to defeat Russia.28

The First World War was momentous in its shaking up of the global order—in its aftermath, the United States and Japan saw their reputational and financial stocks rise, momentarily eclipsing the European powers (chiefly France, Germany, and Italy). The global order was even more open than before to Japan’s rise, and Japanese leaders had few qualms with

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the manner in which it was managed by Britain and the United States. The Washington Conference reinforced this notion as both the great powers undertook to make significant reductions in their naval armaments alongside Japan. The unequal ratio in capital-ship tonnage, however, led some Japanese naval leaders to perceive the system as closing off Japan’s pathway to status equality with the great powers.

While disagreements in the Japanese navy over the capital-ship ratio began brewing after 1922, they were greatly exacerbated by a singular event that poisoned US-Japan relations for years to come. In 1924, the anti-Japanese movement on the US Pacific coast scored a major victory by having included in a federal immigration law a clause that in effect banned Japanese nationals from immigrating to the United States. This development had a profound effect on the perceptions of the Japanese public and elites with regard to the hostility of the great powers toward Japan’s rise, and the implications this had for Japan’s desire for great-power status. Not only did the top ranks of the Washington system suddenly appear a lot more closed, a perception of the entire system being illegitimate—rigged to unfairly restrain Japan’s growth—emerged and grew over the following years, permeating many Japanese leaders’ assessments of the concessions Tokyo had made at Washington (especially the unequal capital-ship ratio). By the early 1930s, this perception mixed with Japan’s reaction to US sympathy for growing nationalism in Japan’s colonies in China and Korea to produce a feeling that the great powers had closed off the global order and the Washington system to Japan’s rise and harbored deep racial antipathy toward the Japanese. At this point, the dynamics of “status immobility” took over and, to echo Ward’s argument, Japanese elites realized that “Japan’s claims to equality of status with Western great powers could not be fulfilled within the constraints of a Western-
dominated status hierarchy premised upon racial considerations.”

It is important to remember that status immobility here is a function of both the perceived openness and legitimacy of the global order. Had either of these variables taken a different value—for example, if the London conference of 1930 had permitted Japan a more equal ratio in auxiliaries—the reaction of Japanese elites would likely been very different.

CAUSAL MECHANISM

Japan’s approach to the Washington system can be explained in terms of the perceptions of its leaders as to the openness and legitimacy of the international regime, as presented below.

Table 5.2: Dependent and Independent Variables Over Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Perceived Openness (L.V.)</th>
<th>Perceived Legitimacy (L.V.)</th>
<th>Approach to Rules (D.V.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894 – 1919</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear standard of civilization as path to great-power status</td>
<td>Global order unbiased, but less so after 1900</td>
<td>International law, imperialism, military prowess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919 – 1922</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Japan’s inclusion in the League Council and Big Three at Washington</td>
<td>Regime appropriate, unbiased, issue important</td>
<td>Make concessions at Washington Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 – 1930</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Expand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navy’s perception of unequal ratio</td>
<td>Same as above, but gradually changed after 1924</td>
<td>Heavy cruisers, technology, training, tactical proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930 onward</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unequal ratio</td>
<td>Regime appropriate but racially biased</td>
<td>Domestic crisis over London Conference, beginning of revisionism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Endogenous change: Civilian-naval divide emerges over unequal ratio

Exogenous change: 1924 immigration law in United States

Japan’s strategy at the Washington Conference starts to make sense once Japan’s status-seeking efforts from 1894 onward are included in the analysis. During this period, Japan viewed the global order as open to its rise and a legitimate one whose rules it should follow. Despite initial hints that the global order was in fact racially biased against non-white great-power aspirants, Japan opted for a social mobility strategy through the First World War, the Paris Peace Conference, and the Washington Conference. In their desire to gain status within the new international regime for naval arms control, Japanese civilian delegates at Washington accepted the conditions of the naval treaty, which included an unequal ratio in capital ships. However, naval leaders within Japan began viewing the international regime as less open than before—so long as Japan was subject to a lower tonnage limit, it could never be the equal of the great powers. Thus they undertook a series of steps to improve aspects of their naval power other than capital ships so that they might in the future be considered equal to the US and Britain.

The legitimacy of the international regime remained high in both civilian and naval circles in the immediate aftermath of the Washington Conference, but it would take a substantial hit in 1924 with the passing of the immigration law in the United States, which many saw as the culmination of anti-Japanese sentiment that had first appeared in the US in 1900. The simmering resentment against the racially biased and unfair nature of the global order influenced Japanese perceptions of the Washington system and eventually led to an internal crisis over the signing of the London Naval Treaty, which continued to impose an unequal ratio on Japan in the realm of auxiliary ships and resulted in the navy’s chief of staff Kato Kanji resigning in protest. By 1930, many Japanese political and military leaders viewed the Washington system and the global order in which it was embedded as both closed to Japan’s rise and deeply unfair. While some influential civilians—led by foreign minister Shidehara Kijuro—still sought a modus vivendi
with the great powers, the military and large sections of the media and the public increasingly took an antagonistic stance toward the international regime and the United States in particular.

The next chapter will discuss in detail the evidence and alternative explanations for Japan’s behavior during this period. In order to provide a more complete account of Japan’s quest for status, I will begin the analysis below with Japan’s transformation into a modern state in the late 19th century. It is only when placed in the proper historical context that Japan’s relationship to the Washington system becomes comprehensible as part of a broader effort at achieving great-power status.

**SOCIAL MOBILITY, 1894-1919**

The oligarchs that orchestrated the Meiji Restoration were explicit in their desire to emulate Western institutions and practices as a means of gaining status equality with the great powers. In the late 1880s, foreign minister Inoue Kaoru articulated the ambition of his generation: “The nation and the people must be made to look like the European nations and the European peoples.” Internally, this meant building a strong industrial base, an efficient and powerful bureaucracy, and a well-equipped and capable military. Externally, Japan sought to rise up the global status hierarchy by carefully following the international norms of the period.

After decades of followership, Japan was rewarded in 1894 with the revocation of the unequal treaties that the Western imperialist powers had bound it with since the 1850s. After Britain became the first nation to renounce extraterritoriality in 1894, the Japanese diplomat Aoki Shuzo who signed the agreement in London wrote to his foreign minister that their nation could now “disregard the insults we have suffered over the last thirty years and at one go enter

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the “Fellowship of Nations.””\(^{31}\) In 1899, when US extraterritoriality was finally abolished, Prime Minister Yamagata Aritomo declared, “[That the] revision of the treaties in the sense of placing on a footing of equality the intercourse of this country with foreign States…conduces to enhance the prestige of the Empire and to promote the prosperity of the people, is a proposition not requiring demonstration.”\(^{32}\)

Once Japan was admitted to the club of civilized nations, it began a new period of followership, one designed to attain great-power status. This objective entailed following international laws and conventions, building an empire, and demonstrating Japan’s military prowess through war.

**Adherence to International Law**

Japan demonstrated rigid adherence to the European standard of ‘civilization’, which Gong demonstrates had taken on an “explicit juridical character.”\(^{33}\) Over the course of the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century, the European great powers had established a framework—albeit a thin one by 20\(^{\text{th}}\)-century standards—of international laws, agreements, and treaties by which the intercourse of the so-called civilized states was governed. Looking back, the scholar Kemuriyama Sentaro wrote, “Just as she did in the introduction of Occidental civilization in its various aspects, Japan has exhibited her characteristic assimilability in adopting divers institutions of Europe relative to


\(^{33}\) Gong, The Standard of ‘Civilization’, p. 5.
international law.” Japan prioritized joining international organizations such as the International Postal Union (in 1877) and Telegraph Union (in 1879), as well as signing the Declaration of Paris in 1887.

Having assiduously followed the laws of maritime warfare as a neutral in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, Japan was a keen participant at the international conferences at the Hague in 1899 and 1907 that the great powers convened in an effort to inject ‘civilization’ into warfare. Referring to Tokyo’s by-the-book prosecution of the Sino-Japanese War, a Japanese diplomat famously remarked to his Dutch counterpart prior to the first Hague Conference, “We show ourselves at least your equals in scientific butchery and at once are admitted to your council tables as civilized men.” Japanese leaders were also “scrupulous in their adherence to international humanitarian law” with regard to Russian prisoners of war in 1905 and German and Austrian prisoners during the First World War. Particularly in the war against Russia, Japan took great care in ensuring that military operations were prosecuted according to the 1899 Hague Convention, to the extent of placing international legal advisers within each army in the field.

**Imperialist Expansion**

Iriye Akira notes that in their studies of the West’s sources of power, Japan’s leaders saw economic expansion as a key factor. He argues:

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35 Ibid.


Of all aspects of Western life and institutions, ranging from modern armament, constitutionalism, and factories to schools and churches, none impressed the Japanese more than the phenomenon of expansion... In their eagerness to equal the West, the Japanese were curious to know what lay beneath its power. Their conclusions... all pointed to the phenomenon of expansion: the West’s ability to let its resources and energies overflow national boundaries and reach far corners of the earth.\textsuperscript{39}

Japan began its expansion with the acquisition of the Ryukyu Islands and the opening of Korea to Japanese trade and influence in the 1870s, much in the manner of the United States’ opening of Japan. The 1895 Sino-Japanese War was fought over Korea and brought the latter more firmly within Japan’s orbit, while also giving Japan control over Taiwan. By the early 1900s, Korea was a Japanese protectorate, and formal annexation followed in 1910. The driving ideational force behind Japanese imperialism in Asia was the notion that Japan could only be an autonomous equal of the great powers if, as a leading Meiji intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi put it, Japan “left Asia.”\textsuperscript{40} This meant adopting Western civilization wholesale and—more importantly—acting toward Asian nations in the manner that Western countries did.

**Military Prowess**

Leaving Asia also meant not being treated by the West as an Asian country, and this meant possessing the military strength to be an equal of the great powers and thereby chart an independent course in world affairs. Japan’s first major military conflict was an imperialist war with China. Victory allowed Japan to impose on China the types of conditions that the West had imposed on Japan, in addition to expanding its empire. Most importantly, it brought Japan

\textsuperscript{39} Iriye, Pacific Estrangement, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{40} Quoted in Iriye, Across the Pacific, p. 65.
recognition for the remarkable achievements of the Meiji Restoration. Fukuzawa summarized the crowning achievement of his era:

One can scarcely enumerate all of our civilized undertakings since the Restoration—the abolition of feudalism, the lowering of class barriers, revision of our laws, promotion of education, railroads, electricity, postal service, printing and on and on. Yet among these enterprises, the one thing none of us Western scholars ever expected, thirty or forty years ago, was the establishment of Japan’s imperial prestige in a great war . . . When I think of our marvelous fortune, I feel as though in a dream and can only weep tears of joy.  

The Japanese public took great pride in the result of the war. An editorial in the Mainichi newspaper said, “hitherto Europe was blind to Japan’s true greatness and apt to slight her…[This] is the beginning of a new era of Japanese greatness.”

External recognition did not take long to follow. Not only did the era of unequal treaties come to a close at the turn of the 20th century, but Britain—at that point still very much the global hegemon—also ended its policy of ‘splendid isolation’ and entered into alliance negotiations with Japan, driven largely by the expansion of Russian power and interests in China. Kemuriyama Sentaro noted retrospectively that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 “came upon the whole world as a surprise…especially when it is considered that Japan had so far been generally regarded as a contemptible upstart in the East.” The alliance itself had little material value—Britain was not obliged to aid Japan in the event of war. Kawakami Kiyoshi, a prominent English-language Japanese journalist in the United States later wrote, “As far as Japan was concerned, the value of the alliance was moral rather than material. Unquestionably it elevated

41 Quoted in Samuels, Machiavelli’s Children, p. 103.
42 Ibid.
Japan’s prestige among the nations, for it was the first recognition of the fact that an Asiatic nation was capable of rendering assistance to a foremost Power of the West.”

The subsequent Russo-Japanese war, in which Japan successfully demonstrated its military prowess against a great power, heralded yet another “new era” in Japanese history and is often taken as the point at which Japan did in fact join the great-power club. However, Japan’s capabilities were far below those of the United States and Britain and it was not widely recognized as a great power in the sense of the term used in this study—Japan did not have preponderant capabilities, it did not have global interests, and it was not involved in the management of the global order. In fact, the war’s main impact was on the psyche of the Japanese public and elites. The public felt that Japan could have secured greater gains out of the war settlement, and that it had somehow been slighted by a defeated Russia in this regard. Iriye notes, “The glory [of victory in 1905], however, did not end the quest for great-power status abroad and social order at home that would be commensurate with each other. If anything, a new search began almost instantaneously after the end of the war, a search that in many ways would continue for several more decades.”

Reactions to Japan’s Rise

Japan’s continued search for status is in some respects unsurprising in view of the reactions of the great powers—specifically Britain and the United States—to the emergence of Japan as a

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45 Iriye, Pacific Estrangement, p. 126.
46 Samuels, Machiavelli’s Children, p. 23.
‘civilized’ and militarily powerful country. As with most clubs, the rules of membership of the great-power club were written by the great powers themselves, and they were as yet unwilling to consider a non-European and non-Anglo-Saxon nation a full member. Following the Sino-Japanese War, many American newspapers and magazines admired the progress Japan had made, but a number of them were careful to note that despite possessing the markers of civilization, Japan was still an Asian nation. Worse yet, in what is known as the Triple Intervention, Russia, Germany, and France collectively threatened Japan with military action if the latter did not return the Liaotung peninsula—conquered in the war—to China. Japanese leaders began to suspect that as their country grew more powerful, the West (including Russia) would push back harder and harder against granting them equal status. Yamato Ichihashi, a Japanese-born academic in the US, later wrote of the Triple Intervention, “Peking diplomacy invited the European powers to interfere in its affairs. Russia, France, and Germany took advantage of this invitation and humiliated Japan.”

The reaction to Japan’s victory in 1905 against Russia was even stronger. According to one historian, at this point “the United States changed from a quiet admirer of Japan to a vocal critic.” In military terms, Japan’s defeat of Russia meant that Japanese naval power was now the “bogey” that Western leaders feared threatened their interests in East Asia. Japanese leaders for their part were quick to see the Western reaction as primarily a racial issue. Responding to Western apprehensions over the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, Ito Miyoji, a politician and

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48 Iriye, Across the Pacific, p. 63.
49 Iriye, After Imperialism, p. 6.
52 Asada, Mahan to Pearl Harbor, p. 18.
member of the emperor’s Privy Council complained to a German friend, “Of course, what is really wrong with us is that we have yellow skins. If our skins were as white as yours, the whole world would rejoice at our calling a halt to Russia’s inexorable aggression.” Ito was not wrong. There existed a strong racial undertone to the West’s perceptions of Japan as an Asian nation that was trying to make it to the big leagues. Willard Straight, an American war correspondent who while covering the war was made the United States’ vice-consul in Seoul, wrote in his diary in August 1904, “They [the Japanese military] have been the underdog till now, they have been the scholars, we the masters and now they’re going to show us a thing or two if it can be done. They hate us. God knows the feeling is mutual.” Straight noted that despite the “thin veneer of European life,” the Japanese were essentially the same as they had always been: uncivilized.

Emergence of the US Anti-Japanese Movement

Japanese perceptions of how the West perceived them were greatly influenced by one critical factor—the emergence of a strong anti-Japanese movement on the US Pacific coast, mainly in California, at the turn of the 20th century. The ban on immigration of Chinese labor, in effect since 1882, had led Californian landowners to hire increasing numbers of Japanese farm workers who were as willing as the Chinese had been to work for wages lower than what their American counterparts were paid. In due course, Japanese workers emigrating to the United States inherited the resentment to which their Chinese predecessors had been subjected. In 1900, a public meeting held for the purpose of advocating stricter methods of excluding the Chinese

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54 Quoted in Iriye, Across the Pacific, pp. 103-4.
55 Ibid.
adopted a resolution urging Congress to exclude all Japanese (other than diplomatic staff) as well.  

The following years witnessed anti-Japanese messages issued by the Governor of California, and resolutions of the California State Legislature calling upon Congress to extend the Chinese Exclusion Act to all Asian peoples.

In May 1905, the San Francisco Board of Education declared the establishment of separate schools for Chinese and Japanese students, “not only for the purpose of relieving the congestion at present prevailing in our schools, but also for the higher end that our children should not be placed in any position where their youthful impressions may be affected by association with pupils of the Mongolian race.” Although no immediate action was taken on this score, the San Francisco earthquake of 1906—which resulted in the destruction of many school buildings—created the necessary pretext for the policy’s advocates to press for its implementation. In response to the Japanese government’s strenuous objections, President Theodore Roosevelt intervened in the matter and negotiated the decision’s reversal.

In order to avoid further embarrassments of this nature, and to head off the possibility of any legislation that might explicitly exclude Japanese immigrants, the Japanese government proposed to voluntarily restrict the flow of immigrants to the United States in exchange for no explicit restrictions on Japanese immigration. The diplomatic notes exchanged to this effect came to constitute an informal agreement between the US and Japan known as the Gentlemen’s Agreement. Although the agreement was bilateral in nature, given the paucity of American

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58 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
emigration to Japan, it was in fact a face-saving measure for Japan.\textsuperscript{61} The agreement, however, did not prevent the anti-Japanese movement in California from progressing. In 1913, the State of California passed an “Alien Land Act” that prohibited aliens ineligible for citizenship—a category applicable to all individuals born in Japan, as per US law at the time—from owning agricultural land or leasing it for more than three years. It was no secret that the Japanese were the primary target of this law.\textsuperscript{62}

*The Racial Glass Ceiling*

Although there were economic dimensions to the anti-Japanese movement, it had clear racial overtones. The question was not one of immigration broadly speaking, but of Japanese immigration. In a debate in the House of Representatives in March 1906, Representative Everis Hayes from California asked if allowing the Japanese to settle in America in the way Caucasians were allowed would be desirable. The question, typical of the era and exemplary in the way it illustrated the racial glass ceiling that blocked Japan’s rise, came down to this: “What stamp of civilization will these people bring to us when they come to our shores?”\textsuperscript{63} Hayes went on to provide the answer, accusing the Japanese of “prodigious lying, commercial dishonesty, and awful licentiousness,” as well as “Phallus worship.”\textsuperscript{64} California, he argued, was already feeling “their contaminating influence.”\textsuperscript{65} In a similar vein, Albert G. Burnett, a district court judge, wrote, “The Japanese laborer is not as honest as the Chinese. He has no scruples about violating

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\textsuperscript{63} Hayes, “Japanese Exclusion,” p. 4.

\textsuperscript{64} *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
a contract with his white employer.” The San Francisco Chronicle editorialized that Japanese immigrants—“the little brown men”—were as much of a menace as Chinese immigrants had been, if not worse.

A number of themes ran through the US anti-Japanese movement of this period. The Japanese were viewed as racially inferior and uncivilized. It was argued they would be unable to assimilate into American society, “their children incapable by education of true loyalty to our country,” especially since the Japanese state continued to legally treat them as subjects even if they took up the citizenship of a foreign land. Consequently, they did not deserve the same treatment that the US gave the European races. In fact, they were frequently portrayed as equal to or worse than the Chinese, which in Japan’s eyes amounted to a blunt and insulting denial of its great-power status ambitions. Even Americans sympathetic to Japan’s cause displayed a certain racial bias. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, was careful to argue that just as it would be unwise for Japan to admit “masses of immigrants” (i.e. workers) from the United States, it would be unwise for the US to admit “similar groups” from Japan. “This does not mean that either side is inferior; it means that they are different.” What difference meant to Roosevelt he clarified in his private correspondence, in which he argued that Japan would develop into a “great civilized power” someday but “with motives and ways of thought which are not quite those of the powers of our race.”

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The Japanese elite for their part viewed the American movement with outrage and disappointment. The former manifested as a more immediate reaction to events in the US, while the latter underscored a realization of the long-term implications of Western racial prejudice for Japan’s status aspirations. In the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco school segregation decision, the *Kokumin* newspaper declared it an offense to Japanese pride that threatened to undermine everything Japan had achieved since the Meiji Restoration.\(^{71}\) Following the enactment of the 1913 California Alien Land Law, the *Nichibei*, a prominent Japanese newspaper in the US, called it the “height of discriminatory treatment” and complained that the Japanese were “accorded worse treatment than people of third-rate southern and eastern European nations living in the United States.”\(^{72}\) In an address to a national conference on US foreign policy organized by the Academy of Political Science in May 1917, Japanese scholar Iyenaga Toyokichi (then a lecturer at the University of Chicago) criticized discrimination against Japanese immigrants in the US:

> You may well appreciate how a nation that has, by dint of energy and perseverance, raised itself from being a negligible influence in world politics half a century ago to the front rank of nations – a nation that after hard struggle won its complete political independence and full recognition of equality with great powers of the world – would feel toward the discrimination meted out to its own people residing in America.\(^{73}\)

Iyenaga argued that although Japan and the US may be different in terms of race and religion, “the essentials of civilization they have developed in the past are nowise dissimilar. American

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\(^{71}\) Cited in Hirobe, *Japanese Pride*, p. 4.


ideals are what the Japanese hold before their eyes. The virtues personified in Washington and Lincoln are what the Japanese are anxious to emulate.”

The outrage of the Japanese press, intellectuals, and diplomats did not translate into concrete policy change. The military—especially the navy—was an exception, mainly because it was closely observing US naval plans and strategy at the time. In 1906, at the height of the controversy over school in San Francisco, the US Navy began preliminary studies on what would eventually become War Plan Orange, which dealt with the possible scenario of a war with Japan. The following year, prior to the exchange of notes that became the Gentlemen’s Agreement, Roosevelt sent sixteen US battleships—the “Great White Fleet”—on a cruise around the world. The Japanese navy was quick to connect the dots between the treatment meted out to their nationals in the US and Roosevelt’s show of force in the Pacific. Commander Taniguchi Naomi, naval attaché in Washington, wrote to the chief of the general naval staff Admiral Togo Heihachiro that the Great White Fleet was, among other things, aimed “implicitly at intimidating Japan” and that US naval officers “secretly regard our Empire as an enemy.” That same year, the Japanese navy’s Imperial National Defense Policy (INDP) for the first time identified the United States as a possible future enemy and laid out plans for fleet expansion. Ian Gow notes that “American naval expansion plans and anti-Japanese agitation in the United States all helped

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74 Ibid., p. 44.
77 Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan*, p. 19. Primary source: Report from the United States, No. 86, No. 89, Taniguchi to Togo, 29 April 1907 (No. 11, secret), Papers of Saito Makoto.
to increase tension and limit opposition [in Japan] to such military planning and increased budgetary allocations.”

As Japan approached the First World War, its leaders remained firm in their strategy of social mobility that entailed broadly following the rules of the Britain-led global order. However, since the turn of the century there was a creeping sense in which Japanese leaders felt that no matter how much their nation progressed, how many wars it won, or how great its civilizational achievements were, they would never truly be equal members of the great-power club, which was entirely composed of white-skinned nations.

SOCIAL MOBILITY, 1919

The First World War altered the global balance of power and saw the United States step into the role of great power and guarantor of the interwar global order. The US under President Woodrow Wilson played a leading role at the Paris Peace Conference and in the establishment of the League of Nations, though the US did not end up participating in the League itself. Japan for its part had benefited economically during the war by becoming virtually a “monopolist supplier” of manufactured goods in Asia Pacific markets ranging from India and China to the Dutch Indies and Australia. Japanese leaders had also committed their nation to the war in aid of Britain and the Allies and used this opportunity to expand their empire at the expense of Germany and post-revolution Russia. By the end of the war, Japan controlled the Marshall, Caroline, and Marianas islands in the western Pacific, Germany’s holdings in Shantung, and Russia’s sphere of influence in Manchuria, in addition to having troops stationed in Siberia. The United States and Britain

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viewed this expansion with deep suspicion and the US in particular began devising diplomatic plans to counter Japan’s growing footprint in the Far East.⁸¹ American antipathy did not go unnoticed in Japan. A working paper prepared by the Japanese Naval Staff College in 1918 maintained the designation of the US as Japan’s “foremost hypothetical enemy” and added:

The United States has excluded Asiatic immigrants and clamored for the Open Door in China. More recently there are many among its intellectual classes who violently oppose Japanese occupation of South Sea [German] islands and openly call Japan their hypothetical enemy. Also the United States is rapidly expanding its navy, carefully preparing for [a Pacific] campaign. These facts obviously bespeak its policy of intimidation in the Orient.⁸²

The Paris Peace Conference

It was against this backdrop of mutual suspicion that Japan joined the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Japan’s status at this conference was unclear—as Margaret MacMillan has noted, Japan was primarily a regional power that had made a comparatively marginal contribution to the Allied effort in the Great War, and yet it had emerged from the conflict greatly enriched and possessing one of the world’s largest navies. Canada’s prime minister, Robert Borden, believed there were “only three major powers left in the world: the United States, Britain and Japan.”⁸³ And yet Japan was ranked fifth in terms of financial contributions expected from members of the League of Nations. At the Paris conference itself, Japan received the same number of delegates as Britain but in the Supreme Council—composed of the senior-most representatives of the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan—MacMillan observes that “the Japanese were

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⁸² Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan*, p. 53.
generally ignored or treated as something of a joke.”

This confused status was reflected in the thinking of the Japanese as well, who viewed themselves as a “have-not” nation that had to compete for resources, territory, and recognition with the “have” nations such as Britain and the United States. Despite their pride in their successes in the First World War, the Japanese felt insecure about their place in the world.

Senior Japanese leaders in Tokyo had misgivings prior to Paris, worrying that it might turn out to be a ploy by the great powers to arrive at agreements that would lock-in Japan’s second-rank status relative to the great powers. The instructions given to the Japanese delegates attending the conference made it clear that status in Tokyo’s worldview was tied to racial differences.

The Japanese Government is in favour of the ultimate aim of the League: but, in view of the racial prejudices which have not yet entirely been banished from among the nations, there is a danger, depending upon the nature of the measures taken to secure the objects of the League, that its establishment will in practice produce results gravely detrimental to Japan.

From the Japanese perspective, it was not the economic or security interests of the great powers that conflicted with Japan’s actions in the Far East, but rather the status inequality resulting from being a non-white rising power. The instructions went on to direct the delegates to “make efforts

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84 Ibid.
85 Nish, Interwar Period, pp. 13-14.
87 Quoted in Shimazu, Naoko. 1998. Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919. London: Routledge, p. 113. The author notes (p. 191): “The original Japanese version can be found in doc. 538, Nihon gaiko monjo, 1918, vol. 3. This is an English translation of the original, which was found in the British Colonial Office files. It came with the following note: ‘These excerpts are from a document which is believed to represent the intentions of the Japanese at the Peace Conference’. See Foreign Office to Colonial Office, 13 January 1919, PRO, CO 532/139, f 2719.”
to secure suitable guarantees against the disadvantages to Japan which would arise as aforesaid out of racial prejudice.”

One of Japan’s chief goals at the conference therefore—in addition to retaining the German islands in the Pacific and German territories in Shantung—was to have a clause on racial equality included in the Covenant of the League of Nations.

The Racial Equality Clause at Paris

In February 1919, the Japanese delegates Makino Nobuaki and Chinda Sutemi circulated a draft proposal for a clause on racial equality. Despite resistance from the British delegation, they presented the following text at a meeting of the League of Nations Commission on February 13:

“Equality of nations being a basic principle of the League of Nations, the High Contracting Parties agree to accord, as soon as possible, to all alien nationals of States members of the League equal and just treatment in every respect, making no distinction, either in law or fact, on account of their race or nationality.”

Makino spoke at this session and argued that since the members of the League “constitute a great family of nations” that undertake to defend each other with armed force if necessary, “each national would like to feel and in fact demand that he should be placed on an equal footing with people he undertakes to defend even with his life.”

Although a number of countries responded positively to the Japanese proposal, Britain remained opposed, largely due to the fear of Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes that the clause would open the floodgates of Asian immigration to Australia. After discussing the Japanese proposal with US representative Edward M. House a couple of days before it was

88 Ibid.
90 Ibid., p. 399.
91 Young, Japan in Recent Times, pp. 160-1.
introduced in the Commission, British delegate Arthur Balfour observed that the proposal seemed to imply “a sympathy on the part of the League of Nations with the principle of equal and unrestricted immigration laws, which it was not the present intention of either the United States or the British Dominions to carry into practical effect.” His personal view was that “[none] of the English-speaking communities would tolerate a great Japanese flow of immigration.” Immigration was in fact far from the minds of the Japanese delegation, and Makino and Chinda emphasized to Hughes that Japan cared about the principle of racial equality and was happy to let the League’s members work out the practicalities according to their respective domestic political constraints.

Hughes, however, was adamant, and after being repeatedly rebuffed by him, the Japanese chose to water down their proposal to one that would include the words “by the endorsement of the principle of equality of nations and just treatment of their nationals” in the Covenant’s preamble. Presenting this proposal to the League on April 11, Makino stated, “If this reasonable and just claim is now denied, it will, in the eyes of those peoples with reason to be keenly interested, have the significance of a reflection on their quality and status. Their faith in the justice and righteousness, which are to be the guiding spirit of the Covenant, may be shaken.” The proposal went to a vote and secured the support of 11 out of 16 members of the Commission. However, Wilson, presiding over the session, declared that the importance of the motion required it to have unanimous support in order to pass, even though there had been cases

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93 Ibid.
in the past when matters in the Commission had been decided by a majority vote.\textsuperscript{97} Defeated, Makino made a closing speech on the subject at the plenary session of April 28, in which he lamented the “poignant regret” felt by the Japanese people at the failure of the Commission to “approve of their just demand for laying down a principle aiming at the adjustment of this long-standing grievance, a demand that is based upon a deep-rooted national conviction.”\textsuperscript{98}

It was evident that the great powers had used unfair methods to block Japan’s legitimate desire for the principle (not substance) of racial equality to be acknowledged officially by the League. This outcome was seen as a defeat for the Japan at the conference, despite the fact that the great powers had acquiesced in Japan retaining the German islands in the western Pacific as League Mandates and that Japan was able to hold out on the question of withdrawing from Shantung. When the Japanese delegation arrived in Tokyo after the conference, it found a crowd protesting their inability to secure the racial equality clause.\textsuperscript{99} Many saw this failure confirm their original fears, that the great powers would use the League to maintain Japan’s second-class status as a non-white great-power aspirant. Indeed, this view colored perceptions of Japan’s gains at the conference, and many viewed the delegation’s inability to secure outright ownership of the Pacific islands and a firm resolution of the Shantung question in Japan’s favor as resulting from the failure of Japan to secure equal status with the great powers.\textsuperscript{100}

This perception of unfair treatment and continuing second-class status ought—according to the expectations of the theory presented in Chapter 2—have led Japan to change its status-seeking strategy to one of breaking with a global order that momentarily appeared neither open

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., p. 414.
\textsuperscript{98} Quoted in Ibid., p. 418.
nor procedurally fair. However, Japan maintained its social mobility strategy because the great powers had done enough to give Japan confidence that it might be able to secure racial equality in the future. As Hirobe Izumi notes, “While the failure of the Versailles Conference to insert a racial-equality clause into the League of Nations Covenant shocked the Japanese, they nevertheless gained confidence in their position as one of the great world powers by securing status as a permanent member of the Council of the League.”\(^{101}\) In his final words on the issue of racial equality to the conference, Makino stated that the Japanese government “will continue in their insistence for the adoption of this principle by the League in future.”\(^{102}\)

Racial inequality at Paris and in California continued to play on the status-conscious minds of Japanese leaders. Goto Shinpei, a senior statesman and public figure, wrote, “At bottom, the California question is one of principle. Nothing less than the principle of equality is involved, and no other solution than the one that will preserve this principle in its essential features will satisfy us.”\(^{103}\) It was easy for Japanese leaders to see the link between US racism and “the interference of American politicians” and the “discourteous propaganda conducted by some Americans” in the Far East.\(^{104}\) The double standard applied to Japan’s great-power aspirations in particular rankled them. Goto observed, “In all such [Far Eastern] questions America is applying to us the most perfect and saintly canons of international dealings, which are observed nowhere else in this troubled world and which America herself failed to observe in almost everything that concerns her.”\(^{105}\) Okuma Shigenobu, another highly respected politician,

\(^{101}\) Hirobe, *Japanese Pride*, pp. 5-6.
\(^{102}\) Quoted in Kajima, *Diplomacy of Japan*, p. 418.
\(^{105}\) Ibid.
argued that despite the best efforts of the white races to diminish Japan’s achievements, Japan had proved that non-white races could “rank with the white peoples if only they exert themselves.”\textsuperscript{106} He warned, however, that even though most Asiatic nations were “fully peers” of the Europeans, they were discriminated against because of “the color of their skin” due to the “perverted feeling of racial superiority entertained by the whites.”\textsuperscript{107} He warned that if things were to continue in this manner, “there is every likelihood that the peace of the world will be endangered.”\textsuperscript{108} Okuma died in 1922, and did not live to see his prediction come true over the course of the following decade.

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\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 170.

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid.}
Chapter 6

Japan and Naval Arms Control:

The Washington Naval Treaty, 1922

SOCIAL MOBILITY AT THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

Soon after the Paris Peace Conference, another major opportunity for Japan to assert status equality with the great powers presented itself in the form of the Washington Conference. The conference was the result of two factors related to the First World War. The first was the question of naval supremacy. Since the early stages of the war, Japan and the United States were increasingly involved in a naval arms race. Japanese naval planners in 1907 had advocated the so-called “eight-eight fleet” of eight battleships (approximately 20,000 tons each) and eight heavy cruisers (approximately 18,000 tons each).1 After much wrangling in the Diet and a setback in the form of a corruption scandal in naval procurement in 1913, the onset of the First World War provided the necessary impetus to the Japanese building program, though it was scaled down at first to an eight-four program.2 On the eve of entering the war in 1916, the US launched a construction program of 156 vessels, including 16 capital ships.3 With an eye on US plans, in 1917 the Japanese Diet correspondingly authorized the construction of 63 warships, including three battleships and ten cruisers.4 When the Japanese navy heard in 1918 that the US Congress was going to approve a bill that would add ten new battleships to those already under construction, it proposed the eight-eight-eight plan of building three battle fleets of eight

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1 Gow, Military Intervention, p. 71.
2 Takenob, Japan Year Book, p. 300.
warships (battleships and cruisers) each.\(^5\) Keeping financial constraints in mind, the Diet approved only an eight-six fleet.\(^6\) In 1919, Wilson sought Congress’ authorization to construct ten battleships and six cruisers in addition to the numbers authorized three years earlier. The Diet responded the following year by finally authorizing the construction of the eight-eight fleet—still less than the navy desired—slated for completion over a seven-year period.\(^7\) These policy measures and counter-measures, while mostly on paper and primarily of signaling value, gave pause to politicians, planners, and strategists on both sides, who feared an escalating naval race between the two Pacific powers.

Japanese naval leaders were quick to point out the double standards of the great powers when it came to Japan’s growing naval capability. Vice Admiral Sato Tetsutaro hit back at those who had clubbed Japan with Germany during the First World War as a “militarist” country. Now that the war was over, he wrote, “the ill-wishers of Japan are haunted with another bugbear. This time it is not militarism, but navalism.”\(^8\)

It must be remembered that Japan is not the only nation constructing warships. England and America, too, are building warships. In spite of the fact that they have far stronger navies than Japan. Therefore, if any nation in the world is guilty of navalism, it is not Japan, but rather England and America…So it is preposterous to say nothing against the big navies of England and America, and to hold up Japan’s small navy, and accuse her of aggressiveness.\(^9\)

\(^6\) Gow, Military Intervention, p. 72.
\(^7\) *Ibid*.
Many naval and civilian leaders saw Japan as a rising power in an Anglo-Saxon global order, in which there was one set of rules for the great powers and another for Japan, which had developed many of the attributes of great power but was not accorded the recognition of being one.

The second factor that led to the conference was Washington’s growing unease at the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Established in 1902 primarily to hedge against Russia’s growing power in Asia, the alliance had been repurposed in subsequent years to also focus on Germany’s growing footprint on the continent. The First World War and the Russian Revolution had removed these two threats for the time being, and given growing tensions between the US and Japan, and Britain’s wary eye on American naval expansion, decision-makers in Washington felt they might soon become the target of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. A draft naval construction program prepared by the General Board of the US Navy in 1919 estimated that in the event the British felt threatened by US naval expansion, they would not hesitate to enlist Japanese support in a war against the United States.\textsuperscript{10} In May 1920, Washington instructed its ambassador in London to suggest changes in the content of the Anglo-Japanese alliance—up for renewal in 1921—that would maintain the US’s Open Door policy in China and safeguard the latter’s territorial integrity. “Since the orientation of Japan’s foreign policy is seemingly unstable,” he was also asked to suggest that the renewal be limited to five years so as to avoid giving Japan too much room for its aggressive policies in the Far East.\textsuperscript{11}

The British themselves were lukewarm toward the alliance’s renewal. In February 1920, a secret memo prepared by the British Foreign Office listed six areas of conflict between Britain and Japan. These included Japan’s preference for a weak China; Japan’s preference for a closed-


door policy in China; Japan’s “selfish and opportunistic” desire to control the Far East; competing economic interests in India, China, and the Pacific; Japan’s expansionist agenda in China and the Pacific; and the diplomatic controversies between Japan and the British Dominions over the latter’s racial policies.\textsuperscript{12} Charles Repington, a former British soldier and influential war correspondent during this period, noted prior to the Washington Conference that “Japan seems to…have constantly infringed both the letter and the spirit of her alliance with England, and has been almost openly aiming at the protectorship of China, whereas we stipulated together in 1902 for the independence and integrity of China and Korea and the open door.”\textsuperscript{13} Despite these misgivings, the British government decided it would be best to maintain the alliance with Japan lest Tokyo decide to ally with Berlin or Moscow instead.

Japan too believed in the continued utility of the alliance. According to historian Kajima Morinosuke, there were four reasons behind this decision. First, Japan would benefit from British assistance in a dispute with a third country (though the alliance had been amended in 1911 to preclude the possibility of Britain aiding Japan in a war against the US). Second, abrogating the alliance would invite a stronger British naval presence in the Far East, which was undesirable for Japan. Third, since Japan was the only non-white major power, “foreign countries might manifest anti-Japanese sentiments more plainly” in the absence of the alliance.\textsuperscript{14} Finally, given that Britain’s designs in the Far East were mainly economic, maintaining the alliance would promote peace in the region. Journalist Kawakami Kiyoshi suggested a deeper reason: “[Japanese leaders] know that Japan’s continued association with the foremost Power of Europe

\textsuperscript{13} Repington, Charles à Court. 1922. \textit{After the War}. Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 398.
\textsuperscript{14} Kajima, \textit{Diplomacy of Japan}, p. 442.
will be an asset to her yet uncertain prestige among the nations. To put it plainly, Japan is afraid of isolation.\textsuperscript{15} As the Washington negotiations would bear out, fear of isolation was perhaps the most important factor driving Japan’s social mobility strategy that dictated cooperation with the great powers on naval arms control.

**Initial Steps**

The US-Japan naval arms race was unfolding in a climate of postwar economic recession, which led to significant public pressure for disarmament.\textsuperscript{16} In December 1920, Senator William Borah introduced a joint resolution in Congress calling on the president to invite Britain and Japan to a naval disarmament conference. In January 1921, Representative Hamaguchi Osachi (Yuko)—a member of the opposition in the Diet—requested Prime Minister Hara Takashi (Kei) to state the government’s position on the reported negotiations in progress between Washington and London on a naval conference.\textsuperscript{17} Although Hara evaded the question, the following month Representative Ozaki Yukio—also in the opposition—introduced a resolution in the Lower House of the Diet calling on the government to collaborate with Britain and the US in order to reduce naval armaments. The resolution was defeated by a vote of 258 to 38, but Ozaki took the issue to the public and traveled around the country making more than 70 speeches on the need for arms limitation. He distributed a total of 100,000 postcards at these meetings in order to gauge public opinion—of the 30,000 replies received, 93 percent favored his proposal.\textsuperscript{18} Germany’s ambassador in Tokyo reported to Berlin: “Spurred forward by Borah, this question has here

\textsuperscript{15} Kawakami, Japan’s Pacific Policy, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 229-30.
awakened in public opinion and undoubtedly great and—apart from a very few imperialistic voices in the press—favorable echo…Japan’s largest newspapers [have]…without reserve adopted Borah’s point of view.”

Meanwhile, in his inaugural address as the 29th President of the United States on March 4, 1921, Warren G. Harding—whose campaign had repeatedly hinted at undertaking an international agreement on naval arms control—said that the US would consult other nations in order “to recommend a way to approximate disarmament and relieve the crushing burdens of military and naval establishments.” In April 1921, the Imperial Japanese Navy issued a statement containing an interview given by Minister of Navy Admiral Kato Tomosaburo to the Tokyo correspondent of the Associated Press of America in which the minister said that although the eight-eight fleet was a modest scheme and essential for Japan’s security, “Japan is nevertheless prepared to carry out the limitation of armaments to a certain extent in case any reliable agreement is concluded among the leading Powers for the restriction of armaments. Japan does not want to insist on the maintenance of her eight-eight fleet under all circumstances.” On May 26, the US Senate took up Borah’s resolution and adopted it in a 74-0 vote. On June 29, the House passed it in a vote of 330 to 4.

Harding was less convinced about the need for naval expansion than his predecessor Wilson, and also more sanguine about the Anglo-Japanese Alliance—while he saw it as a tool used by Japan to make gains in Asia with the tacit support of the British, he did not fear that the

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alliance would result in a war between the US and Britain. Nonetheless, his Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes pressured the British to abrogate the alliance. The issue came to a head at the Imperial Conference of Great Britain and its Dominions, which convened in London between late June and early August. Although the British government was in favor, Canadian Prime Minister Arthur Meighen—fearing that his country might unduly suffer the brunt of a potential war between the US and Japan into which the alliance drew Britain—strongly advocated for the abrogation of the alliance in favor of better relations with the US. In an official statement at the conference on June 29, Meighen opposed the renewal of the alliance on grounds that it was incompatible with the spirit of the League of Nations and that it would suggest to the US and China that Britain condoned Japanese aggression in the Far East. His statement was well timed—a day earlier, before British Foreign Secretary George Curzon presented his government’s case at the conference for the alliance’s renewal, Auckland Geddes, the British ambassador in Washington, had informed him that Charles Hughes was strongly against renewal and preferred some form of tripartite arrangement instead. No one at the conference could deny that the US was more important to Britain than Japan was. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George in the opening session of the conference had declared that “friendly cooperation with the United States” was for Britain a “cardinal principle” dictated by “the proper nature of things.”

As it appeared that there could be no decision on the alliance without the involvement of the US, Meighen suggested a conference of Pacific powers to resolve the matter. Given that Washington was already keen on a naval disarmament conference, the British proposed a

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28 Quoted in Galbraith, “The Imperial Conference,” p. 145.
conference on both disarmament and Pacific questions. On July 8, Curzon informed the Japanese Ambassador in London, Hayashi Gonsuke, that Britain had proposed a Pacific conference to the US and the latter had accepted. On July 11, the American chargé in Tokyo called on Foreign Minister Uchida Kosai to informally extend Harding’s invitation to a conference at Washington.

**Japan’s Initial Hesitation**

Tokyo was initially deeply skeptical of what it viewed as an Anglo-American effort to curtail Japan’s rise and territorial expansion. According to Kawakami, Harding’s invitation aroused a feeling of “uneasiness and suspicion among the Japanese.” Acutely aware of the hostility that American public opinion and media had expressed toward Japan, “Some Japanese went as far as to say that America summoned Japan much as a judge would summon a defendant.” Yamato Ichihashi, secretary to Kato Tomosaburo, the head of the Japanese delegation at Washington, explained Tokyo’s hesitation:

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30 George Riddell, an influential newspaper owner, public figure, and friend of Lloyd George, recorded in his diary an evening at Chequers (the prime minister’s country retreat): “Before dinner L. G. took me aside to explain that President Harding was about to convene a Conference on the limitation of armaments and that the announcement was to be sent out to-night by the American Government. He said the idea had originated in the Imperial Conference, and that on behalf of the Conference he had addressed letters to the United States, Japan and China asking for their views.” See Riddell, George. 1933. *Lord Riddell’s Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., p. 305.


35 Ibid.
Japan was a new international power and as such she had been subjected to severe criticisms by the more established nations. Her activities had been looked upon with suspicion. Her recent blunders had been magnified beyond their merit. In short, Japan had been made the “goat” of all international ills in the Pacific region and, in particular, of those which had obtained in China. Of this attitude of the Occidental powers Japan was wholly conscious. In these circumstances it was but natural for her to manifest anxiety to a degree unwitnessed either in England or America when the American proposal for a Pacific conference was proclaimed.  

Upon receiving the informal invitation from Washington, foreign minister Uchida convened a number of meetings of senior officials in the foreign policy and military establishments in Tokyo. At a meeting on July 12—the very next day after Uchida received the informal invitation—the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs (Gaiko Chosakai) discussed the American proposal and made two observations. First, the limitation of naval armaments was an increasingly popular issue with the governments and publics of the US and Britain. Second, in the words of one historian, “should Japan not comply with the United States proposal, she could not escape responsibility for interrupting a plan to secure international peace.” For these reasons, the members of the council concluded that Japan should participate in the conference but that Shidehara Kijuro—the ambassador in Washington—should find out the exact agenda intended by the great powers under the rubric of Pacific questions.

Through a series of exchanges and meetings with Shidehara, US Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes insisted that agreement on an agenda should not hold up the Japanese government’s response to the US invitation. He also assured Shidehara that the US would not use the conference to “drive Japan into a corner”. The Japanese government officially accepted the US invitation on July 27, with one proviso: “introduction [in the agenda] of problems such as are

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38 Shidehara Kijuro quoted in Asada, “Japan’s “Special Interests”,” p. 64.
of sole concern to certain particular Powers or such matters that may be regarded as accomplished facts should be scrupulously avoided.” With this exception, Japan sought to exclude discussion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Shantung, Siberia, and the Pacific islands.

It was important to Japanese leaders that their country be treated on an equal footing with the US and Britain. In case the conference turned to sensitive subjects such as Manchuria and Mongolia, the plan was to embarrass the great powers by raising issues pertaining to the status of the Philippines and Hawaii, the Monroe Doctrine and the Panama Canal, and economic barriers in India, French Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies—the common thread running through these issues was the inability of Japan to enjoy fair and equal opportunity to benefit from the global order.

Despite reassurances, Japanese apprehensions about American and British intentions did not fully abate. In early August, in a long summary of negotiations with the great powers conducted until then, Ambassador Hayashi wrote from London, “the Japanese Government appears to imagine that the original British initiative in calling the conference was due to some negotiations between Great Britain and America, as if there was a plan for these two Powers to agree to oppress Japan…” Although the Japanese government eventually corrected this view, Foreign Minister Uchida’s instructions on behalf of the government to the delegates—handed over on October 14—suggested that Tokyo remained worried about being unfairly singled out at the conference. The delegates were reminded that “there have been misunderstandings or prejudices of various degrees about Japan’s national policy in the past,” and were asked to “strive at this juncture to make clear Japan’s true intention and to enhance Japan’s reputation

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40 Nish, *Interwar Period*, p. 27.
41 Asada, “Japan’s ‘Special Interests’,” p. 64.
42 Quoted in Yardley, *The American Black Chamber*, p. 298.
among nations.” Regarding Pacific questions, the Japanese government softened its stance and instructed the delegates to be open to discussing *faits accomplis* or issues concerning specific countries but in a way as “not to give rise to a situation where Japan’s past actions and policies alone are likely to be criticized.” The delegates were also asked to propose a “triple entente between Japan, Britain and the United States designed to bring about permanent peace in the Pacific and the Far East”—if Britain desired that this entente supersede the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Japan would not object. It was clear to Tokyo, however, that Pacific and Far Eastern questions should only be discussed insofar as they related to the more important question of naval arms control.

**The Hughes Proposal**

The opening day of the Washington Conference—November 12, 1921—is well documented. Although all the delegations were vaguely aware that Hughes had a bold proposal in mind, he surprised everyone by offering a detailed and ambitious plan for the reduction of naval armaments in the opening plenary session itself. The plan required that all capital-ship building programs be abandoned; that the three naval powers—Britain, the US, and Japan—scrap their older ships in order to arrive at a specific ratio of tonnage in capital ships; that the existing strength of the three powers be used to determine the appropriate tonnage ratio; and that the same ratio be applied to auxiliary vessels. Hughes went on to propose scrapping specific numbers of capital ships built, being built, or authorized for building: 30 ships for a total of 845,740 tons for the US, 23 ships for a total of 583,375 tons for Britain, and 25 ships for a total of 448,928 tons

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44 Ibid., p. 460; Nish, *Interwar Period*, p. 27.
for Japan.\textsuperscript{47} In the words of one observer, “Mr. Secretary Hughes sunk in thirty-five minutes more ships than all the admirals of the world have destroyed in a cycle of centuries.”\textsuperscript{48} In addition, Hughes proposed a ten-year shipbuilding holiday for capital ships. After this period, ships could be replaced only when they were twenty years old and new ships would be capped at a maximum individual displacement of 35,000 tons. If the plan were accepted, the US would emerge from the conference with 18 capital ships at 500,650 tons, Britain with 22 ships at 604,450 tons, and Japan with 10 ships at 299,700 tons.\textsuperscript{49} Due to the lack of naval construction in postwar Britain, London’s higher tonnage was deemed qualitatively equivalent to Washington’s and therefore Hughes proposed that the future ratio for capital ship tonnage between the US, Britain, and Japan should be 5:5:3, which he contended was also the ratio of existing naval strength in capital ships.

Given the manner in which Japanese naval planning had progressed since 1907 and Japanese leaders’ fears of being locked into second-tier status by the great powers at Washington, the Japanese delegates adopted a surprisingly cooperative approach toward the Hughes plan. Navy Minister Kato Tomosaburo, the chief delegate, stated in the opening plenary that he agreed in principle with Hughes but that some specific aspects of the proposal may require adjustment.\textsuperscript{50} The following day, at a reception hosted by the Japanese embassy for the press, Kato stated, “It has never been the policy or intention of Japan to attempt to rival the two greatest navies of the world.”\textsuperscript{51} He reiterated this claim at the second plenary session on November 15 and followed it up with three proposed revisions to the Hughes plan. First, the ratio

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., pp. 154-6.
\textsuperscript{48} Repington, \textit{After the War}, p. 432.
\textsuperscript{49} Sprout and Sprout, \textit{Toward a New Order}, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 161.
\textsuperscript{51} Quoted in Yamato, \textit{The Washington Conference}, p. 40.
of capital ship tonnage ought to be 10:10:7 and not 10:10:6 (or 5:5:3). Second, Japan would retain the ships *Mutsu* and *Aki*, which were due to be scrapped under the Hughes plan. Finally, Japan desired parity in naval aircraft carriers with the great powers.\(^{52}\)

**Japan Concedes the Capital-Ship Ratio**

Japan’s insistence on the 70 percent ratio was driven by security concerns. It grew out of Japanese naval thinking over the decade-and-a-half prior to the conference. Three basic doctrines governed Japanese naval strategy during this period. First, the US navy was the hypothetical enemy. Second, a 70 percent fleet ratio against the US navy was imperative if the Japanese navy was to stand a chance against it. Third, in order to defeat the US Pacific fleet, Japan would need an eight-eight fleet (as discussed earlier).\(^{53}\) Senior Japanese naval leaders reasoned that a 70 percent ratio against the US would give the Japanese navy a 50-50 chance in a defensive battle.\(^{54}\) According to historian Asada Sadao, “The notion of the 70 percent ratio…was reinforced by “war games, tabletop maneuvers, and fleet exercises, and it crystallized into a firmly held consensus—even obsession—within the Japanese navy until the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack.”\(^{55}\)

In June 1919, Kato Tomosaburo had authorized the establishment of a naval research committee on matters pertaining to the League of Nations. The committee in its report recommended that the navy settle on a fleet strength somewhere between eight-eight (16 ships) and eight-eight-eight (24 ships), and it advocated for equality in naval armament with the United

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\(^{52}\) Kajima, The Diplomacy of Japan, p. 471.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., p. 47.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 48. US navy planners arrived at a similar ratio by assuming fleet efficiency losses of 10 percent per 1000 miles in the 3000 miles the US fleet would need to traverse from Hawaii to the Philippines, which was assumed to be where Japan would strike first. See Ibid.
\(^{55}\) Asada, From Mahan, p. 48.
States and Britain. In October 1920, the Japanese navy obtained a copy of a US war plan for an attack across the Pacific in which a three-to-two superiority over the Japanese navy was deemed necessary for success. Kato Kanji, president of the Japanese Naval War College (and subsequently chief naval adviser at the Washington Conference), took note of how precisely US and Japanese estimates overlapped—both recognized that a 70 percent ratio would give Japan a fighting chance in a defensive battle against a US attack across the Pacific. Subsequently, as Japan became aware of Western efforts to organize an arms limitation conference, the naval research committee produced another report in July 1921 in which it essentially relaxed the absolute minimum of the eight-eight fleet in exchange for an “absolutely necessary” emphasis on a minimum ratio of 70 percent with regard to the US fleet, arguing that “there can be absolutely no room whatsoever for compromise on this ratio.”

At Washington, the US and Britain were unyielding on the capital-ship ratio, and since the ratio was to determine the allocation of auxiliary tonnages, they were also unyielding on Japan’s desire for parity in aircraft carriers (then a very new and untested technology). The main axis of contention was the definition of what counted as existing strength—the basis for computing the ratio—as per the Hughes plan. The US’s definition included ships that were already built or under construction; Japan’s definition included only ships that were capable of fighting in a naval battle, i.e. not ships under construction. The US definition put Japan’s existing strength at 60 percent of US strength, whereas Japan’s definition put it at 70 percent or

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56 Gow, Military Intervention, p. 79.
58 Ibid., p. 150
59 Ibid.
60 Asada, From Mahan, p. 61.
61 Ibid., p. 472.
more. As Asada notes, “To the Japanese navy, the seemingly minor margin between 60 and 70 percent made the difference between victory and defeat.”

Technical negotiations between the naval experts of the three powers yielded little. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Assistant Secretary of the US Navy and Kato Kanji’s counterpart in the conference’s naval subcommittee, noted that Kato Kanji made Japan’s case “on two thoughts: a) that each nation had the right to determine what was necessary for her defence; b) that this navy was her minimum requirement.” On November 28 1921, less than two weeks after the naval subcommittee was convened, Kato Kanji publicly declared, “Japan is unable to accept the ratio of 60 per cent, because she considers it impossible to provide for her security and defense with any force less than 70 per cent.”

Meanwhile, the chief delegates of the three powers—Charles Hughes, Arthur Balfour, and Kato Tomosaburo—held private meetings on the ratio question. Hughes was intransigent on the US definition of existing strength, and Balfour agreed with Hughes. After more than twenty such meetings, Kato Tomosaburo relented, securing approval from Tokyo for the 5:5:3 ratio in exchange for an important concession: the US and Britain would maintain the status quo with regard to defensive fortifications on islands in the western Pacific, effectively allowing Japan to remain dominant in its maritime region. Furthermore, in exchange for Japan retaining the Mutsu, which would cause a quantitative and qualitative imbalance in the ratio, the US and Britain

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62 Asada, From Mahan, p. 48.
63 Quoted in Gow, Military Intervention, pp. 113-14. Official minutes of this subcommittee were never released.
66 Ibid., p. 47.
undertook to construct two new ships each and commensurately scrap older ships.\textsuperscript{67} By December 12, the three powers had arrived at an understanding, though it would take another two months for the exact details of the non-fortification zone in the western Pacific to be worked out, and for France and Italy to be brought on board such that the so-called Five-Power Treaty—the cornerstone of the conference—was eventually signed on February 6, 1922. Japan had ultimately made a major concession on the naval ratio.

\textbf{Japan Concedes the Anglo-Japanese Alliance}

The Washington Conference achieved a number of important outcomes in addition to naval arms control. One of them was the Four-Power Treaty, which superseded the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with an entente between Britain, Japan, the US, and France that pledged the four countries to consult with each other in the event of any controversies that may arise in the Far East.\textsuperscript{68} In these negotiations too the Japanese delegation—led by Shidehara Kijuro—conceded to US and British demands. At issue was the membership and geographical jurisdiction of the treaty. It was no secret that Japan desired a tripartite agreement.\textsuperscript{69} In a meeting with Maurice Hankey, Secretary General of the British delegation, Saburi Sadao, Counselor at the Japanese embassy in Washington, stated that only a tripartite agreement could supersede the alliance because a larger agreement would dilute the original purpose of the alliance and the Japanese would consider it

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\textsuperscript{68} Negotiations over this treaty took place behind the scenes and the treaty came as a surprise to the rest of the conference when it was announced on December 9, 1921.
\textsuperscript{69} When the Japanese delegation first arrived in Washington, Prince Tokugawa—the nominal head of the delegation (which was de facto headed by Kato Tomosaburo)—when asked by a journalist if Japan would prefer the abrogation of the alliance, replied, “It would be highly beneficial to the maintenance of the world peace, if, for instance, America, Great Britain, and Japan could form an entente cordiale in one form or another.” Quoted in Yamato, \textit{The Washington Conference}, p. 120. Primary source: \textit{New York World}, November 4, 1921.
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equivalent to abrogation.⁷⁰ The US, however, pushed for France to be included in the entente, and Japan agreed.

With regard to jurisdiction, the preamble of the treaty stated its objective as “the preservation of the general peace and the maintenance of [the four powers’] rights in relation to their insular possessions and insular dominions in the region of the Pacific Ocean…”⁷¹ The term “insular possessions” quickly became controversial because, according to Hughes, it included the islands of Japan proper.⁷² As journalist Kawakami Kiyoshi reported at the time, this provision raised serious objections in Tokyo:

The more serious-minded patriots…are inclined to take it as an affront to Japan’s dignity that the treaty should be interpreted as obligating the other contracting parties to extend even a moral assistance to the safeguarding of the territorial integrity of Japan proper. Quite properly they think that Japan can take care of herself as far as the protection of her main Islands is concerned, and that no outsider need worry about it.⁷³

In response to the objections of the Japanese delegates in a meeting on December 8,⁷⁴ Balfour argued that it would be hard to explain to the British public why Australia was included in the treaty and Japan proper was not. The Japanese immediately resented being equated to a British Dominion and turned the question around, asking if Washington and London would not mind having the continental US and Canada be covered by the treaty. Hughes replied that doing so

⁷² According to Kajima, The Diplomacy of Japan, p. 572, “The Japanese argued that Japan Proper could be interpreted to be the center and main body of the Japanese Empire and not the possessions of Japan…”
⁷³ Kawakami, Japan’s Pacific Policy, p. 66.
⁷⁴ For a complete account of these negotiations, see Kajima, The Diplomacy of Japan, pp. 565-84.
would necessitate expanding the entente to include many more countries, which the Japanese clearly did not want.

Finding themselves thus cornered, the Japanese delegates agreed to the text of the treaty, but subsequently faced considerable backlash from Tokyo. After deliberating the matter for over a week, the government sent a stern message to its delegates that clearly outlined the importance of equal treatment with the great powers. A treaty that obligated Japan when facing a threat to first consult the other powers but did not place the same obligation on any of them to consult Japan in a similar situation was fundamentally unequal. “We would not be free from the criticism of accepting inequality,” the government’s response argued, “if Japan alone should be made to bear such an obligation.”

Tokyo refused to accept the treaty as signed and instructed its delegates to renegotiate it such that either Australia and New Zealand were also excluded from the treaty’s jurisdiction in exchange for Japan proper’s exclusion (as per Balfour’s logic), or to “find some other means of saving the situation which we consider is very serious.” Ultimately, after “much begging” with the great powers, the Japanese delegates were able to clarify in a supplementary treaty that the Four-Power Treaty did not include Japan proper.

**Japan Concedes on Pacific and Far Eastern Questions**

Negotiations on Pacific and Far Eastern questions took place in parallel with negotiations on naval arms control and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance at Washington. Going into the conference, the US wanted to get Japan to withdraw from Siberia, return Shantung to China, scale down its presence in Manchuria, acknowledge the Open Door principle and China’s territorial integrity,

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75 Quoted in Ibid., p. 582.
76 Quoted in Ibid., p. 588.
and cede communications cable privileges to the US on the island of Yap. Remarkably, Tokyo conceded almost all these demands. Japan agreed to withdraw from Siberia, agreed bilaterally with China to return Shantung, granted the US cabling privileges on Yap as well as commercial access to former German islands under Japanese mandate, and while maintaining special economic rights in Manchuria, scaled down its military presence there and signed the Nine-Power Treaty, which formalized Washington’s Open Door policy in China and required signatories to respect China’s territorial integrity.

The Washington Conference produced three landmark multilateral treaties: the Four-Power Treaty on naval limitation, the Five-Power Treaty to replace the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and the Nine-Power Treaty on China. Japan’s cooperation was critical to each of these treaties, and for a few years after the conference Japan diligently followed the rules of the resulting Washington system.

**Explaining Japan’s Concessions at Washington**

What explains Japan’s sweeping concessions at Washington? In this section, I focus primarily on the issue of naval arms control because it was the raison d’etre of the conference and a necessary condition of its success. However, the argument I present here—that key features of the conference led Japan to view the Washington system as both open and legitimate—is applicable to concessions made by Japan in other areas such as the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and Pacific and Far Eastern questions as well. The key question therefore is: Why did Japan agree to a capital-ship ratio of 60 percent instead of 70 percent when the Japanese navy clearly viewed the latter as absolutely necessary for Japan’s security? The literature on the conference offers two

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78 Sprout and Sprout, *Toward a New Order*, p. 252.
overlapping sets of answers: external constraints and domestic politics. I argue below that these arguments fall short of a complete explanation.

External Constraints

The primary external constraint driving Japan’s naval decision-making was the growing naval arms race with the US, which had both economic and security implications. On the economic front, the main benefit of an agreement on naval limitation was the financial resources Japan would gain from halting (even temporarily) the race for naval armaments. Soyeshima Michimasa, a senior Japanese politician, put it simply in October 1921, three weeks before the conference opened: “Japan cannot engage in an unrestricted naval race. It is preposterous for a nation like Japan to spend so much on arms... America’s proposal to curtail armaments is a national blessing.”

As early as February 1919, Kato Tomosaburo and his subordinates had estimated that a fully realized eight-eight fleet program would consume one-third of the public budget. He told a budget subcommittee meeting of the Diet, “Even if we should try to compete with the United States, it is a foregone conclusion that we are simply not up to it.” In his remarks to the press after the first day of the conference, Kato emphasized the heavy cost of armaments and said, “Japan, like other countries, rejoices at the prospect of relief that is now offered.” Although Japan had prospered during the First World War, by 1920 its wartime industries were in a slump and the country was headed into economic depression. Tokyo’s predicament was exacerbated by the realization that Japan’s postwar recovery would largely

80 Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan*, p. 57.
81 Ibid.
depend on expanding economic relations with the US. Kato’s message to Tokyo was simple: 
“[W]e cannot fight a war without money. The United States is the only country with which war is probable, but it is also the only country where we can float foreign loans. Therefore, the conclusion is that we cannot fight a war with the United States.”

Cooperating on arms control would also bring Japan greater security, because it was not just the case that Japan was suffering the economic burden of a naval race, its competitor was also flush with the financial resources required to vastly outstrip any capability Japan could muster. Even if both countries followed through on their respective naval building plans, by 1927—when Japan’s eight-eight program would have been completed—the Japanese navy would still trail the US navy by 200,000 tons, a strength much lower than 70 percent. An agreement on arms control was the only way to restrain US building. As far as accepting the lower treaty ratio of 60 percent was concerned, arguably it was a small price to pay for preserving the status quo on fortifications in Japan’s neighborhood. The inability of the US to fortify the Philippines and Guam would fatally weaken the thrust of any attack the US Pacific fleet could make from its base in Hawaii. Moreover, it would render these islands vulnerable to Japanese capture and fortification if hostilities were to break out between the two powers. As US naval officer and analyst Dudley W. Knox observed, “Weeks before our fleet could possibly reach the Orient the Japanese may easily seize all weakly defended American bases, as well as occupy and defend strongly all bases and other positions suitable for such use already in their possession.”

Ian Nish notes that Japan made concessions at Washington because its position

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84 Iriye, After Imperialism, p. 7.
85 Quoted in Asada, From Mahan, p. 84.
86 Evans and Peattie, Kaigun, p. 192.
87 Knox, The Eclipse, pp. 53-4.
was “fairly successfully safeguarded by the non-fortification agreement.”\textsuperscript{88} Relatedly, Downs et al argue that the agreement on arms limitation was made possible by the addition of other dimensions to the negotiation such as the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and non-fortification.\textsuperscript{89}

The above arguments mirror existing theoretical work on the ability of arms control to reduce the risk, scope, and cost of war.\textsuperscript{90} As Schelling has argued, arms control works best when it produces “stabilized mutual deterrence” and for this to occur the states participating in arms control negotiations must have a common interest in reducing the dangers of war.\textsuperscript{91} This condition certainly holds in the case of the Washington Conference. However, while it may have played a role in bringing Japan to the negotiating table, it does not explain the extent or nature of Japan’s concessions. Although Japan had an interest in reducing expenditure on naval armaments and its naval budget fell precipitously in the decade following the conference (see figure below), this decline was a function of the ten-year shipbuilding holiday imposed by the Five-Power Treaty and not the result of a desire to lower spending on armaments. In other words, although Japan benefited from the cost reducing aspect of the treaty, that was not why it went to such great lengths to ensure the success of the conference. This is clear from the fact that in 1922, “almost as soon as the ink was dry on the treaty,” Japan began constructing heavy cruisers and submarines, which were not covered by the treaty and had considerable value in a defensive battle.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{88} Nish, \textit{Interwar Period}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{92} Marriott, \textit{Treaty Cruisers}, p. 12.
By mid-1928 the Japanese navy had 12 heavy cruisers, while the British navy had seven, and the US navy had none.\textsuperscript{93} Moreover, although the ten-year shipbuilding holiday was extended by seven years at the London Conference of 1930, Japan’s naval expenditure rose sharply in the years following 1931—even earlier by some estimates\textsuperscript{94}—again driven by the construction of heavy cruisers and other auxiliaries. Finally, even if Japan did participate in the conference to reduce the financial burdens of an arms race with the US, a 70 percent ratio would have helped it achieve this goal just as well as a 60 percent ratio. The ratio was not a fixed requirement but an

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 63.
upper limit, therefore Japan could have chosen to construct below quota for the sake of economic gain, but naval planners chose instead to construct up to treaty limits.

As for security considerations, it is certainly true that the fear of war with the US brought Japan to Washington and the agreement on non-fortification proved to be a blessing for Japanese strategists. However, immediately after the conference, the Japanese military undertook a revision of the Imperial National Defense Plan, in which it again designated the US as the navy’s primary hypothetical enemy—and, for the first time, the army’s too—and the navy laid out an ambitious armaments plan to build auxiliary vessels in order to make up for the Washington ratio. Although Tokyo feared war with the US and followed the Five-Power Treaty, it was willing to risk a race with the US in the acquisition of defensive weapons that, as the decade progressed, began losing their defensive character as they acquired longer and longer cruising ranges. If Japan had cooperated with the great powers at the Washington Conference to increase its security, its naval policy suggested otherwise.

While many at the time viewed the agreement on non-fortification of western Pacific islands as an advantage for Japan, this was not entirely clear even from the perspective of someone such as Roosevelt, Jr., who had negotiated with the Japanese over the Five-Power Treaty. He wrote in his diary about the non-fortification clause:

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95 Gow, *Military Intervention*, p. 153. The new defense strategy highlighted the growing division between the navy and the civilian leadership over the Washington conference. Kato Tomosaburo, appointed Prime Minister after Washington and in poor health at the time, was excluded from this process by Kato Kanji, who had become Vice Chief of the Navy General Staff after Washington.

96 For example, after 1924 Japan built a large number of long-range submarines with a cruising radius of 20,000 miles and a surface speed of 20 knots. See Asada, *From Mahan*, p. 108. (As a point of reference, the top speed of a heavy cruiser was around 35 knots).
[It] leaves us, in my opinion, in a slightly better position than Japan. We trade certain fortifications which we would never have completed [Guam, the Philippines, and the Aleutian Islands], for fortifications which they would have unquestionably completed. We retain one outpost in the Pacific of great importance [Hawaii] and they give up all but their mainland.97

More importantly, there was no mention of island fortifications in the instructions handed over by Foreign Minister Uchida to the delegates prior to the conference. The issue was first mentioned in a cable from Tokyo to Kato Tomosaburo on November 28, well into the latter’s negotiations with the great powers. Facing consistent opposition from both Hughes and Balfour, Kato had asked Tokyo for flexibility on the ratio. The reply, while urging him to “redouble your efforts to carry out our policy,” granted that

If, in spite of your utmost efforts, it becomes necessary in view of the situation and in the interests of general policy to fall back on your proposal No. 3 [to accept the 60 percent ratio and keep the Mutsu], you will endeavor to limit the power of concentration and maneuver of the Pacific by a guarantee to reduce or at least to maintain the status quo of Pacific defenses and to make adequate reservation which will make clear that [this is] our intention in agreeing to a 10 to 6 ratio.98

Far from being an initial objective of the Japanese (let alone the primary one as some have argued), island fortification only entered the equation when they realized that they would be unable to obtain the ratio that they considered indispensible to their national security, i.e. it was a second-best option. It was also not the case that the non-fortification clause enabled Japan to feel secure in making other concessions. Many of the issues that were discussed at the conference—such as the Open Door, Shantung, Yap, Siberia, and even arms limitation—were ones on which

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97 Quoted in Sprout and Sprout, Toward a New Order, p. 251.
Japan was already prepared to make concessions going into the conference.\textsuperscript{99} The non-fortification clause therefore does not account for Japan’s rule following behavior at the Washington Conference.

\textit{Domestic Factors}

Some authors have pointed to divisions within the Japanese leadership at the conference, among Japanese decision-makers in Tokyo, and between Tokyo and its delegates, over the question of arms limitation as a potential explanation for Japan’s cooperative approach to the conference. Kawakami, for example, observed that Kato Tomosaburo favored accepting the Hughes plan “without modification,” which in fact ran counter to the “public sentiment at home” that influenced the thinking of leaders in Tokyo.\textsuperscript{100} While this depiction of Kato’s position was not entirely accurate, it was certainly true that the two most important Japanese delegates at Washington, Kato and Shidehara, were both personally in favor of rapprochement with the US and used their authority at various points to compel Tokyo to accept concessions it would not otherwise have agreed to. The two leaders were part of a larger qualitative change in Japanese leadership in the immediate postwar period, which witnessed the “political ascendancy of internationally-minded civilians…and the acceptance of the tenets of Wilsonian Internationalism, particularly those principles emphasizing mutual trust and the peaceful arbitration of disputes.”\textsuperscript{101} Scholars use the term “Shidehara Diplomacy” to describe a strand of Japanese foreign policy in the interwar years that entailed “progressive views on internationalism and

\textsuperscript{100} Kawakami, Japan’s Pacific Policy, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{101} Makela, “Japanese Attitudes,” p. 44.
strong advocacy of good relations with the United States.” At Washington, Kato and Shidehara were at times successful in their attempts to present Tokyo with accommodative stances as *faits accomplis*, as in the case of the capital-ship ratio; at times they failed, as in the case of the definition of Japan proper during the Four-Power Treaty negotiations.

Arguably, had different leaders represented Japan, the outcomes at the conference would have been very different. This point is vividly illustrated in the person of Kato Kanji, chief naval adviser to the Japanese delegation, who staunchly opposed accepting a lower ratio at the conference and communicated to Tokyo his fundamental disagreement on this point with Kato Tomosaburo. Kato Kanji was a rising star in the Navy General Staff and along with like-minded colleagues would increasingly influence the course of Japanese naval policy toward the Washington system after 1921. However, as I will demonstrate later, his opposition to the ratio did not arise from a sense of militarism as many have portrayed him and his colleagues to possess. Rather, his opposition was on grounds of fairness and equal treatment for a sovereign nation such as Japan, i.e. it was grounded in status concerns. Thus while there was a growing civil-military divide in Japan, the basis of the division lay in differing perceptions of how open the Washington system was to Japan’s rise. Indeed the very appointment of Kato Tomosaburo and Shidehara to represent Japan shows the importance that Japanese leaders in Tokyo placed on improving relations with the US. Domestic politics therefore did play a role in Japan’s approach to the Washington Conference, but as a vehicle for differing conceptions of Japan’s status within the Washington system.

*Japan’s Social Mobility Strategy*

While external constraints and domestic politics can help clarify the context in which Japan came to the negotiating table, the concessions Japan made at Washington are best understood by viewing Japan as a rising power that pursued a strategy of social mobility, or rule following, when faced with what it perceived to be an open and legitimate international regime.

That the great powers—the US and Britain—were willing to open up the regime’s top ranks to include Japan was evident in the way in which they treated Japan at the conference, suggesting that Japan was considered more important than countries such as France and Italy, and that if it played its cards right, Japan could remain in the top ranks of the Washington system. This was a welcome change from Paris in 1919, where the great powers had effectively relegated Japan to second-class status. Although the Japanese were initially hesitant about Washington based on past experience, Hughes was quick to assure Shidehara in July 1921 that the most important powers at the conference would be Japan, Britain, and the US. He added that although France and Italy had hardly any interests in the Far East, they were invited so as to not hurt their feelings.\(^{103}\) In his opening speech at the conference, Hughes emphasized that his proposal “immediately concerns the British Empire, Japan and the United States” and deferred the discussion of tonnage allowances for France and Italy to “the later consideration of the Conference.”\(^{104}\) All the vital discussions on naval limitation took place in private between the chief delegates of the so-called Big Three.\(^{105}\) Such was the impression made on the Japanese by their inclusion in the top ranks of the conference that after a month of negotiations it was

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104 Quoted in Conference on the Limitation, p. 60.
105 In a speech to the committee on limitation of armament on December 24, 1921, the French delegate Albert Sarraut said the members of the committee were sometimes called “the Big Three” (*Ibid.*, p. 534).
reported that “The general feeling among [the Japanese delegation] is one of gratification and confidence. They are especially gratified that the American Government, as well as the American public, has been exceedingly generous towards them.”

Even Kato Kanji, a vocal opponent of the lower tonnage ratio for Japan, remarked to the press upon his return to Tokyo in March 1922, “The adoption of the ratio, the status quo for the Pacific Islands and the Four Power Pact meant the placing of Japan among the leaders of twentieth-century civilization.”

The Washington Conference’s legitimacy in Japan’s eyes came from the perceived fairness of the Hughes plan, which eliminated vastly greater tonnage for the US compared to Britain and Japan. US naval analyst Dudley Knox observed that the US could have easily insisted that the capital-ship ratio apply not just to auxiliaries but also to naval bases and other aspects of sea power. “But with noteworthy generosity America offered to give up a certain first place (with no close second) in sea power and a positive ability to safeguard American interests the world over—and furthermore volunteered to do so at stupendous financial loss to her self.”

British correspondent Charles Repington noted that the Hughes plan, “however drastic, seems fair and sincere, and America is offering to scrap ships upon which she has spent $880,000,000 already.” Kato Tomosaburo understood that the Hughes plan was unassailable in its legitimacy and Japan had to accept the plan in principle. “It is simply impossible to oppose the American plan,” he said. “If we oppose it, we’ll have to pay a heavy price. World public opinion would not allow it.”

Kato Kanji later recalled that although Kato Tomosaburo “was extremely concerned because of the vast scale of the [Hughes] proposals and their influence not merely on Japan’s

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106 Kawakami, Japan’s Pacific Policy, p. 56.
107 Quoted in Gow, Military Intervention, p. 151. Primary source: Japan Chronicle, March 3, 1922.
109 Repington, After the War, p. 432.
110 Quoted in Asada, From Mahan, p. 73.
material strength but on the personnel and the morale of the future navy,” he “resolved to respond to the spirit of the proposal.” Even during difficult negotiations over the ratio with the great powers, Kato Tomosaburo wrote to Tokyo, “The American way is on the whole fair-minded.” Contrary to the expectations of the Japanese going into the conference, he confirmed, “Anglo-American oppression is something we delegates at Washington have never imagined.”

Viewing the Washington conference as an international regime that was open to Japan’s inclusion in its top ranks and one whose procedures were fair and unbiased with regard to Japan and its interests, Kato Tomosaburo and Shidehara engaged in a strategy of social mobility in order to attain and maintain status equality with the great powers. Japan needed to cooperate and appear cooperative at all costs, so that it might continue to rise up the status hierarchy of the Washington system and firmly claim its place next to Britain and the United States. Since 1905, Japanese leaders had felt increasingly isolated in the world despite their efforts to follow the rules and procedures of the global order. In 1907, Ito Hirobumi had admitted, “Japan’s position in the world is most grievous.” Despite the alliance with Britain and the victory over Russia, “there is an unmistakable trend toward Japanese isolation.” The Washington conference sought to create a new type of diplomatic system that offered Japan a golden opportunity to join the ranks of the great powers. Despite various ideological and political divisions between Japanese leaders, there was widespread agreement that Japan had to cooperate with the great powers in order to avoid diplomatic isolation.

112 Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan*, p. 87.
113 Ibid.
114 Quoted in Iriye, *Across the Pacific*, p. 114.
The Japanese government’s very decision to participate in a conference that might have singled Japan out for its activities in East Asia was based on the thought that if Japan were to decline the US invitation, “it cannot avoid the blame of obstructing a plan for guaranteeing international peace.” Even those concerned about the security implications of an unrestricted naval race viewed security as a necessary condition of maintaining Japan’s status among the great powers. Soyeshima Michimasa, for example, observed with regard to the conference:

Whether Japan can keep her honorable position in the international intercourse, ranking, as she does, on an equal footing with any of the great powers of the world; or whether she will be relegated to a second or third rate nation after an unforeseen calamity that may possibly result if she continues her naval expansion unrestrictedly, all depends upon the enthusiasm and determination in which Japan will attend the Pacific Conference.

At the conference, while the chief delegates of the Big Three negotiated the ratio question, the US government reached out to Japanese financiers through an American banker and learned that “the Japanese delegation would compromise, if necessary to avoid a rupture and the complete isolation of the Island Empire.” Meanwhile Kato Tomosaburo cabled Tokyo, “it is crystal clear that our country must bear the sole responsibility if we should clash with the United States on the question of naval armament limitation and lead the conference to failure.” The naval leadership in Tokyo agreed that the conference’s failure would hurt Japan, but mostly in terms of security. In a memo cabled to Kato Tomosaburo, they wrote, “If the conference should break up as a result of Japan’s absolute insistence, naval building competition, far keener than at

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115 Telegram marked “Very Confidential” from Tokyo to the Japanese Ambassador in Washington, July 13, 1921, quoted in Yardley, The American Black Chamber, p. 289.
117 Sprout and Sprout, Toward a New Order, p. 169. Primary source: the diary of Chandler P. Anderson, entries on November 30 and December 5, 1921.
118 Quoted in Kajima, The Diplomacy of Japan, p. 473.
present, will inevitably ensue.”

Taking this opinion into consideration, Tokyo advised Kato to “by all means maintain a conciliatory attitude and do your best to attain our proposal [on the tonnage ratio].” Finally, when it appeared that neither the US nor Britain would yield on the ratio, Tokyo reasoned that there was “practically no prospect of carrying through [our] contention” and “in the interests of the general situation and in a spirit of harmony, there is nothing to do but accept the ratio proposed by the United States” so long as the three powers could agree on a non-fortification zone. As it happened, negotiations turned heated over the inclusion by Hughes of the Amami-Oshima and Bonin islands in the zone. Tokyo pushed Kato Tomosaburo hard to have them excluded, and he threatened to resign. However, he confided to his assistant that resigning would be an easy way to save his own reputation but it would not save the nation: “Japan must not invite isolation.”

The French Counterfactual

The French case at Washington provides an important counterfactual to Japan’s social mobility strategy. France was not a rising power but a great power temporarily suffering a demotion of status. At the opening plenary session, the French delegation “seemed furious” that they were not seated at the head table with the Americans and the British but instead with the British Dominions. According to an observer, “Jusserand was white and clenched his fists. The top table was purely Anglo-Saxon from end to end.” In later sessions, Ambassador Geddes of

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119 Quoted in Asada, From Mahan, pp. 79-80.
120 Quoted in Kajima, The Diplomacy of Japan, p. 473.
123 Repington, After the War, p. 431.
124 Ibid.
Britain had to vacate his seat in order to accommodate a French presence.\textsuperscript{125} Things did not improve for France from thereon: as mentioned above, discussion of the French and Italian tonnage allowances was put off until the Big Three could agree on a ratio. When the ratio came into view, France opposed its allocation (35 percent of US/British tonnage, based on existing strength) and demanded parity with Japan (i.e. 60 percent).\textsuperscript{126} Ultimately, Hughes had to write to French Prime Minister Aristide Briand to secure his intervention for the sake of maintaining the ratios agreed upon by the Big Three.\textsuperscript{127} Although Briand agreed, he declared that France would not accept any reductions in the case of “defensive ships,” i.e. light cruisers, torpedo boats, and submarines.\textsuperscript{128} France then refused to come to terms with Britain in the subsequent negotiations over submarine tonnage, which led to their failure.\textsuperscript{129} Moreover, in exchange for accepting a lower capital-ship ratio, France was able to secure a shorter naval holiday for itself (six years instead of ten) and block an agreement on tonnage allocations for auxiliary ships.\textsuperscript{130}

Two points are important when comparing France to Japan at the conference. First, just as the French desire to cooperate was significantly dampened by the second-class treatment it received at the conference, the Japanese desire to cooperate was enhanced by the manner in which the US and Britain treated it as a first-ranking power. As Kawakami observed in the aftermath, “Japan could have made herself an enfant terrible at the Washington Conference, had the Occidental Powers shown proclivities to make sport of her foreign policy and attempted to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126} Conference on the Limitation, p. 458.
\item \textsuperscript{127} See \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{128} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 460.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Knox, \textit{The Eclipse}, pp. 83-96.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Yamato, The Washington Conference, p. 94.
\end{itemize}
pursue her relentlessly in Siberia or China.” Second, the French came away from the conference having compromised very little on their perceived security interests. Their naval strategy was defensively oriented toward Britain, hence the focus on submarines, and offensively oriented toward countering Italian sea power in the Mediterranean, hence the focus on auxiliaries. Capital ships, according to one historian, were “far down the list of French construction priorities.” Japan, on the other hand, made a major compromise on the naval ratio, which it perceived to be essential for its security. While it was able to secure an agreement on non-fortification in return, this outcome was less favorable to Tokyo than a situation in which Japan had its three demands met—the 70 percent ratio, retaining the Mutsu and Aki, and parity in aircraft carriers. In fact, Japan received a 60 percent ratio, retained only the Mutsu, and did not earn parity in aircraft carriers. The difference in outcomes between France and Japan is largely due to the fact that Japan—faced with an open and legitimate international regime—was willing to trade off material gain for status equality with the great powers, whereas France did not perceive the regime in the same way and hence did not make the same status calculations.

**SOCIAL CREATIVITY, 1922-1930**

On balance, the treaties signed at Washington were well received in Japan. The public and a number of newspapers were pleased that naval expenditure would no longer consume almost one-third of the public budget and that various outstanding issues in the Far East had been addressed, if not resolved. The conference also had its critics. The *Hochi*, a widely circulated

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131 Kawakami, Japan’s Pacific Policy, p. v.
133 Kawakami, Japan’s Pacific Policy, pp. 30-31.
newspaper, declared, “Japan has sustained such a loss through the conference as she would have suffered had she been defeated in her desperate war with Russia.”\textsuperscript{134} The Yorodzu described the conference as “the handkerchief which a magician uses to spellbind the spectators” while its real purpose was to “submerge the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.”\textsuperscript{135} Indeed the loss of the alliance—a major source of status equality for Japan relative to the great powers in the pre-Washington era—was felt keenly in various quarters. Frederick Moore, an American adviser employed by Gaimusho (Japan’s foreign ministry) and member of the Japanese delegation at the conference, observed, “The Japanese were shocked by the termination [of the alliance]. The readiness of the British to meet American wishes without serious contention altered their opinion of that Power [i.e. Britain].”\textsuperscript{136} The brief feeling of being a member of the great-power club at Washington had dissipated, and Japan once again began to feel isolated in world politics.\textsuperscript{137} With regard to the conference itself, Nish argues, “Japan chose to believe it had been subjected to a monopoly of giving” and blamed its failures on “Anglo-Saxon domination.”\textsuperscript{138}

**Changing Perceptions of the Washington System’s Openness**

In particular the unequal tonnage ratio had firmly rooted the above feelings in the minds of key figures in the navy.\textsuperscript{139} The most vocal and influential among them was Kato Kanji. At

\textsuperscript{134} Iyenaga, Toyokichi. 1922. “How Japan Views the Arms Conference.” *Current History*, 16:1, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Moore, Frederick. 1942. With Japan’s Leaders: An Intimate Record of Fourteen Years as Counsellor to the Japanese Government, Ending December 7, 1941. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{137} Nish, *Interwar Period*, pp. 30-31.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 43.
\textsuperscript{139} Sprout and Sprout, *Toward a New Order*, pp. 261-2. According to the authors, “Professional naval opinion was hostile in the extreme,” though they do not specify when exactly this hostility emerged.
Washington, while chief delegate Kato Tomosaburo negotiated the ratio with his counterparts, Kato Kanji sent a secret telegram to Tokyo that presaged the feeling that grew in the anti-treaty faction of the Japanese navy after 1921:

> The United States and Great Britain are banding together in oppressing Japan. Mutual compromise and give-and-take are something these powers simply don’t have in mind. In our view, their intention obviously is to deprive the Imperial Navy of its predominance in the Orient. They are threatening Japan by holding it responsible for wrecking the conference. To yield to such an overbearing attitude is an utter humiliation.\(^{140}\)

In a second telegram, Kato Kanji wrote, “The whole matter involves Japan’s right of self defense.”\(^{141}\) His was a view rooted primarily in status considerations. He believed that Japan was entitled in principle to equality with the great powers, “a ratio of 10:10.”\(^{142}\) A 70 percent ratio was already a major concession; a 60 percent ratio represented “inequality and fetters” that hurt Japan’s “national prestige.”\(^{143}\)

It should be noted that at no point in the 1920s did Kato Kanji actually undermine the Washington system by breaking its rules. Kato publicly praised the conference and believed in arms limitation as a legitimate goal. However, as Gow notes, “[Kato] saw the imposition of ‘inferior ratios’ as a means of permanently relegating another power to an inferior position on the basis of some transient superiority. Navies in any case were important for prestige as well as conflict and an inferior ratio effectively meant, for Kato and many others, second rank status.”\(^{144}\)

In other words, the fleet faction held arms limitation to be a legitimate goal but saw the

\(^{140}\) Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan*, p. 87.

\(^{141}\) Ibid.

\(^{142}\) Ibid., p. 86. Primary source: Memo from Kato Kanji to Navy Vice Minister Ide Kenji and Vice Chief of the Navy General Staff Abo Kiyokazu, November 24, 1921, Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) Archives.

\(^{143}\) Ibid.

\(^{144}\) Gow, Military Intervention, p. 140.
Washington system as closing off Japan’s pathway to great-power status. An inferior ratio would permanently lock Japan into a category below the one that the US and Britain occupied in the Washington system. It was a point of principle for Kato Kanji and his colleagues that even though Japan did not have the resources to construct battleships at parity with the US and Britain, it should not be denied an equal ratio.\textsuperscript{145}

At a material level, what stung the fleet faction even more was the diligence with which the civilian leadership—headed by Kato Tomosaburo as prime minister from June 1922—followed the rules of the Washington system. They abandoned the eight-eight fleet program, scrapped a number of older ships, cancelled plans for the construction of new ships, laid off 7,500 officers, and retired nine out of ten vice admirals.\textsuperscript{146} Japan was left with a six-four fleet of six battleships and four cruisers. These reductions made the Washington system’s inferior ratio even more galling to Kato Kanji and his colleagues.

**The Response: Auxiliaries, Tactics, Training**

In the eight years that followed, the fleet faction became increasingly powerful within the navy, partly because of external events that I will discuss in the next section. Faced with what they viewed as a legitimate but closed regime, they followed the rules of the Washington system but strove to build capability in areas not covered by the treaty so that when the time came for the Washington system to expand into those areas, the definition of existing strength would yield a more favorable ratio for Japan. This was, in effect, a strategy of social creativity whereby Japan sought to follow the letter but not the spirit of the international regime in order to eventually break into the elite club of two that sat atop the Washington system. Seen through this lens, the

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{146} Asada, *From Mahan*, pp. 99-100.
Japanese navy’s investment in heavy cruisers, submarines, torpedo boats, and other auxiliaries is less puzzling than a strictly materialist interpretation would suggest. Finding its route to status equality with the great powers blocked in the case of capital ships, Japan focused on building in other areas.

The navy worked not just on quantitative buildup but also qualitative improvements. The heavy cruisers Japan built were “faster, had a greater cruising radius, and were more heavily gunned than their American counterparts.” To counter US naval superiority, the Japanese Navy General Staff worked to perfect its strategy of “ka o motte shu o sei-su (using a few to conquer many),” which had proved advantageous in the asymmetrical war against Russia in 1905. In the 1920s this involved developing long-range submarines, night combat techniques designed for surprise attacks, and tactics for “outranging the enemy,” i.e. striking adversaries early and decisively at a distance from which they could not retaliate. In addition, the navy focused heavily on training, running repeated drills, including night drills that on occasion led to disastrous accidents. In a manner typical of social creativity strategies, Japanese naval leaders emphasized the spiritual and psychological qualities of their officers as a way of asserting superiority over the US navy. Kato argued that Japan must mobilize its “willpower” against the US navy’s physical might, “turning an impossibility into a possibility.” All these efforts were designed to develop capabilities that could match those of the great powers, but not along the dimensions on which the great powers themselves were superior since those were forbidden by the rules of the Washington system.

147 Ibid., p. 106.
149 Ibid., pp. 206-7.
150 Asada, From Mahan, p. 179.
MOVING TOWARD SOCIAL COMPETITION, 1924-1930

In parallel to changes in naval perceptions, broader perceptions of the Washington system underwent a drastic change a couple of years after the Washington conference, with the passing of the Immigration Act in the United States in May 1924. Whereas the inferior ratio imposed by the Washington conference had closed off the top ranks of the system, the exclusion of Japanese from immigration to the US dramatically overturned perceptions of the global order’s legitimacy. The resulting psychological scar among the Japanese public and elites permanently altered the image of the US and created growing resentment toward the entire racist enterprise that was the global order. Perceptions of US racism infused assessments of the Washington system and—combined with the psychological effects of the inferior ratio—led Japan to eventually break from it.

The Exclusion of Japanese Immigrants from the US

In 1909, as his presidency was coming to a close, Theodore Roosevelt advised the incoming administration’s Secretary of State Philander Knox that the Japanese were influenced by “two contradictory feelings.” On the one hand, they felt “a great self-confidence” resulting from their victory over Russia; but on the other hand, they felt “a great touchiness because they would like to be considered as on a full equality with, as one of the brotherhood of, Occidental nations, and have been bitterly humiliated to find that even their allies, the English, and their friends, the Americans, won’t admit them to association and citizenship, as they admit the least advanced or most decadent European peoples.”

Roosevelt had hit upon the crux of Japan’s discontent with efforts in the United States to block the Japanese from immigrating to the US. It was bad enough

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151 Quoted in Iriye, Across the Pacific, p. 120. Primary source: Papers of Theodore Roosevelt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, pp. 120-126.
that the anti-Japanese movement sought to exclude the Japanese. Worse was the fact that races
the Japanese considered inferior were not the subject of similar efforts, and that the Japanese
were in effect clubbed with the Asian countries they had sought to leave behind by joining the
great-power club. To Japanese leaders, the question was not one of material interests—as pointed
out by Foreign Minister Kato Takaaki in 1915, Japan had no desire to send its citizens where
they were not wanted and had in fact agreed not to do so under the Gentlemen’s Agreement.\textsuperscript{152}
Rather,

\textit{What we regard very unpleasant about the Californian question is the discrimination
made against our people in distinction from some other nations. We would not mind
disabilities if they were equally applicable to all nations. We are not vain enough to
consider ourselves at the very forefront of enlightenment; we know that we still have
much to learn from the West. But we thought ourselves ahead of any other Asiatic people
and as good as some of the European nations.}\textsuperscript{153}

The lumping together of the Japanese with other Asian nations, and the preferential treatment
given by Americans to “third-rate southern and eastern European nations” was gradually
affecting Japan’s perceptions of the legitimacy of US leadership in the global order.\textsuperscript{154}

Although the immigration issue had taken a backseat during the Great War and its
aftermath, it reared its head again in 1922 as the case of one Ozawa Takao, a Japanese immigrant
seeking US citizenship, reached the Supreme Court. The court ruled against Ozawa, upholding
US citizenship law at the time, which restricted naturalization rights to whites and individuals of

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{The New York Times}. 1915. “Says Japan is Moderate: Seeks her Share in China, but no
Monopoly, Baron Kato Asserts,” March 19.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
African descent.\textsuperscript{155} The Japanese were legally considered “aliens ineligible to citizenship.”\textsuperscript{156} The court’s decision gave fresh impetus to the exclusion movement in the US, which argued that Japan had violated the 1907 Gentlemen’s Agreement by continuing to send immigrants to the US. Census data showed that the number of Japanese in the US had increased from 148 in 1880 to 72,157 in 1910, and 111,010 in 1920.\textsuperscript{157} Although the Japanese government had curbed emigration since the Gentlemen’s Agreement, it continued issuing visas to so-called “picture brides”: women in Japan who were chosen for marriage, based on their photographs, by Japanese immigrants living in the US.\textsuperscript{158} After this practice was banned in 1920, Japanese migrants living in the US would make short trips to Japan to marry Japanese women—known as \textit{kankodan} brides—and bring them back to the US.\textsuperscript{159} It was not against the Gentlemen’s Agreement for Japanese women accompanying husbands to enter the United States, therefore these bride selection practices likely contributed to the increasing Japanese population in the US despite the Japanese government’s adherence to the agreement.

\textit{The Immigration Law of 1924}

During the course of over a decade, the US legislature had passed laws that increasingly restricted immigration from Asian countries, with the exception of Japan. Each bill passed by Congress since 1911 had carefully omitted to exclude “immigrants ineligible to citizenship,” choosing instead to designate geographical exclusion zones for non-European immigrants and

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.

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quotas for Europeans.\textsuperscript{160} In December 1923, for the very first time, it appeared that Congress intended to leave the controversial phrase in the bill. The Japanese press and elites were initially impassive, expecting that as per past practice, the US executive would pressure the legislature to keep Japanese sensitivities in mind.\textsuperscript{161} Nonetheless, Ambassador Hanihara Masanao in Washington wrote to Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes that such a measure would be “arbitrary and unjust discrimination reflecting upon the character of the people of a nation, which is entitled to every respect and consideration of the civilized world.”\textsuperscript{162} Hanihara reminded Hughes that Japan had scrupulously met the conditions of the Gentlemen’s Agreement, and that although to suffer such discrimination despite cooperating with the US was “mortifying,” the Japanese were “exercising utmost forbearance” and relying on “the high sense of justice and fair-play of the American Government and people” to ensure that this law did not come to pass. He added, once again, that the question was not one of material interests but of Japan’s status in the world:

To Japan the question is not one of expediency, but of principle. To her the mere fact that a few hundreds or thousands of her nationals will or will not be admitted into the domains of other countries is immaterial…The important question is whether Japan as a nation is or is not entitled to the proper respect and consideration of other nations.\textsuperscript{163}

By March, Congress appeared even more intransigent. Hughes met with Hanihara and suggested that Hanihara address a letter to him clearly stating the Japanese position and the manner in which Tokyo had scrupulously adhered to the Gentlemen’s Agreement, which Hughes

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., p. 48.
\textsuperscript{162} Hanihara to Hughes, January 15, 1924. Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1924, Vol. II, p. 335.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p. 336.
could then convey to Congress in an effort to lobby them to amend the bill. Hanihara handed this letter on April 11, concluding it by reminding Hughes of the “grave consequences” that this law would create for US-Japan relations. To the dismay of both statesmen, exclusionist members of Congress and the American press seized upon this phrase and portrayed it as a threat and an attempt by Japan to interfere in US domestic affairs. This interpretation galvanized both houses of Congress to pass the bill in a matter of four days after receiving Hanihara’s letter.

Hughes found the exclusion clause “entirely unnecessary,” especially in the context of “the attitude taken by Japan at the Conference on the Limitation of Armament held at Washington, and the spirit of friendship and mutual confidence then evoked.” On May 23, President Calvin Coolidge signed the bill into law and publicly regretted “the impossibility of severing from it the exclusion provision which, in the light of existing law, affects especially the Japanese.” From the Tokyo’s perspective, Japan had followed all the rules laid out by Washington, and was still singled out for discrimination in the 1924 law—in effect, Japan was no longer a ‘Western’ great power in Asia, since it had been lumped together with all the other Asian nations that were already excluded by prior immigration laws. In a memorandum of protest, the Japanese government wrote, “The patient, loyal, and scrupulous observance by Japan for more than sixteen years, of these self-denying regulations [i.e. the Gentlemen’s Agreement], in the interest of good relations between the two countries, now seems to have been wasted.”

Years of rule following as a social mobility strategy had ended in failure—it was impossible to

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claim status equality with the most powerful country in the world when it treated one’s citizens with racial contempt and discrimination. Hughes presciently observed that the exclusion clause had “undone the work of the Washington Conference and implanted the seeds of antagonism which are sure to bear fruit in the future.”

Exclusion’s Impact on Japanese Perceptions

The immigration law dealt a major blow to Japan’s perception of the legitimacy of the US-led global order. Sympathetic Americans such as Sidney Gulick understood that Japan wanted to be “recognized as one of the great, equal and friendly nations of the world, to be treated with consideration and respect,” and to have its nationals treated equally with nationals of “every other great nation.” Hori Mitsukame, a professor at the Tokyo Commercial University, publicly stated that the law’s effect “would be to take away Japan’s position in the world, denying her right to international existence and to the pursuit of her own happiness as a respectable member of the family of nations.” The treaty did not just deny Japan’s status equality with the great powers, it was also a major affront to national honor and pride. After the US Congress passed the act, the Osaka Mainichi declared, “In matters relating to material losses or gains, we might endure, according to circumstances. But when the honor and dignity of

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171 Quoted in Makela, “Japanese Attitudes,” p. 98. Primary source: Hori Mitsukame, Tokyo Commercial University professor, in a speech before the Pan Pacific Club, April 15, 1924; quoted in The Japan Advertiser, April 26, 1924.
our nation are called into question, we cannot remain silent." The status-oriented drivers of Japan’s external policies came into sharp focus during this period. George Rea, a journalist intimately familiar with the Far East, wrote:

> It does not require any great political prescience to sense that if Japan is affronted and rejected by the west and the truth is brought home to her people that they can never hope for full recognition of their claim to equality, a revulsion of feeling will sweep over the empire that must inevitably lead to the formulation of new policies and a new outlook upon the future.\(^{174}\)

Frederick Moore, adviser to *Gaimusho* at the time, witnessed the law have “a profound effect upon the nation” and severely hurt the sentiments of the government and the public, so much so that when Moore’s contract came to an end in 1926, the Japanese government declined to renew it, under criticism “for having an American in its diplomatic service.”\(^{175}\)

> The Japanese public reacted with considerable outrage. “Don’t look down upon us as a small nation! We are the possessors of the Yamato Spirit (*Yamato Damashii*) which has been handed down for thousands of years,” declared a letter delivered to the US consulate in Nagasaki in June 1924, signed “Blood and Iron.”\(^{176}\) The *Kokumin* newspaper wrote that the law rendered Japan “inferior even to Chinese bandits.”\(^{177}\) Various right-wing groups emerged in this moment, and other nascent groups received a shot in the arm via the sudden turn in public mood against the US.\(^{178}\) A mass movement emerged in mid-1924, peaking with protests in 38 out of Japan’s 46 prefectures on July 1, labeled “National Humiliation Day,” the date on which the law went into

\(^{175}\) Moore, With Japan’s Leaders, p. 1.  
\(^{176}\) Quoted in Makela, “Japanese Attitudes,” p. 159.  
\(^{178}\) Iriye, *After Imperialism*, p. 36.
effect in the US.\textsuperscript{179} By contrast, Japanese elites, initially outraged, soon began to discourage public protest in an effort to repair diplomatic relations with the US. Shidehara, now foreign minister, was at pains to explain to Diet members that the issue was not one of Japan’s racial inferiority. According to him, the American contention was that “the Japanese are to the Americans what oil is to water. Neither oil nor water can be said to be superior or inferior to the other, but the fact is that in no case can oil dissolve and merge in water.”\textsuperscript{180} This proved a tough line to sell. Diet member Hatoyama Ichiro asked Shidehara if he sincerely believed “that international relations, so far as Japan is concerned, are entering an era of cooperation with other countries, when Japan herself is subjected to all manner of humiliation, especially by America, which looks down upon us as an inferior nation, as demonstrated by the abolition of the Gentlemen’s Agreement.”\textsuperscript{181} Even the \textit{Gaiko Jiho}, a semi-official publication associated with Shidehara’s own ministry, severely criticized the exclusion of Japanese from America.\textsuperscript{182} Japanese leaders were ready to admit that the issue was primarily “a sentimental matter,”\textsuperscript{183} but that was precisely the point—as a survey of Japanese elites published by \textit{The Japan Times and Mail} in October 1924 showed, 62 out of 66 respondents identified racial prejudice as a factor behind the US law. The second-most mentioned cause was the poor quality of Japanese immigrants (mentioned by 43 respondents).\textsuperscript{184} The Japanese did not suffer any economic losses due to the law, nor was their security threatened by it. The matter was largely one of racial

\textsuperscript{180} Caffery to Hughes, July 8, 1924. \textit{FRUS 1924, Vol. II}, p. 409.
\textsuperscript{181} Quoted in Makela, “Japanese Attitudes,” pp. 252-3.
prejudice, which called into question the entire purpose of trying to be counted among the great powers by following their rules.

**Changing Perceptions of the Washington System**

Given that avoiding a potential US-Japan naval arms race was the primary objective of the Washington Conference, the fundamental shift in Japanese perceptions after 1924 gradually impacted the way in which key leaders viewed the Washington system. The emergence of right-wing groups that denounced the US’s “white imperialism” were a potent counterweight to the attempts of moderates such as Shidehara to smooth things over with Washington. 185 Two related strands of thinking in particular were empowered by the events of 1924. Both proceeded from the view that the Washington system was a white-sponsored and white-dominated system designed to keep Japan suppressed. One strand concluded that instead of following the whites, Japan should build solidarity and alliances with Asian nations in order to shore up Japan’s international stature. 186 The other argued that the West was able to bully Japan and exclude it because Japan was militarily weak; therefore building a strong military would ensure that Japan could at least hold its own in an unjust and unequal global order. 187 Japan’s postwar dilemma, described by Margaret MacMillan as “whether to trust the white powers, work with them in strengthening the international order, or assume that it had better look out for itself” 188 had so far resolved itself in favor of the rule-following diplomacy of Kato Tomosaburo and Shidehara Kijuro. After 1924, perceptions began to change and new and powerful voices began to speak in tongues of autarky, pan-Asianism, and militarism.

185 Iriye, *After Imperialism*, p. 36.
Japan’s changing approach to the Washington system was evident at the International Opium Conference in Geneva in November 1924. When British delegates rejected a Japanese proposal, the Japanese delegates surprised their counterparts with an unusually strong reaction, accusing the British of discrimination and slandering Japan in front of the international community. British diplomats privately noted Japan’s sensitivity at being treated as a second-class power, particularly its objection to concerns about verifying Japanese certificates of transshipment for opium raised by a “little island like Hong Kong.”189 In late 1924, a rumor spread that the US and Britain would soon organize a second arms limitation conference (which in fact was their longer-term intention since the Washington Conference was unable to successfully deal with auxiliaries). The Yamato newspaper’s reaction typified the manner in which the Washington system had started to lose its legitimacy in Japan’s eyes. “It may be wrong to say that the chief motive of America for convening the Washington Conference was to reduce Japan to a position of isolation internationally,” said the editorial, “but there is no doubt that this was one of the objectives she had in mind.”190

In 1925, the Japanese navy produced a report on the lessons of the Washington conference, which made three major observations. First, poor preparations ahead of the conference had relegated Japan to a passive role and resulted in failure. In future, Japan should establish a firm policy in advance and conduct preliminary negotiations to obtain clear recognition from the great powers of its basic positions. Second, public opinion needed to be united behind Japan’s interests in any future conference. Finally, “the utmost caution must be

taken never again to be confronted by joint Anglo-American coercion.” In fact, Japan had been well prepared going into the Washington Conference, with a naval committee dedicated to studying arms limitation from June 1919 onward. Japanese diplomats had played an active role in the conference, and according to various Western assessments had won a major concession in terms of the non-fortification of islands in the western Pacific. The experiences of 1924 had however deeply colored the navy’s perceptions of the legitimacy of the entire Washington system, and Japan’s performance and achievements of just four years prior had begun to feel hollow. In the words of senior statesman Ishii Kikujiro, who would lead the Japanese delegation at the Geneva Naval Conference in 1927, “whether correct or not, the Japanese people resent the ‘inferior ratio’ allocated to Japan at Washington and considered it a slight against them.”

The Geneva and London Conferences

By 1927, Japanese leaders were increasingly chafing against the Washington system and sought to firmly establish a 70 percent ratio for Japan in the category of auxiliaries, which were the subject of a conference at Geneva. David Carlton echoes the scholarly consensus on the Geneva Conference as “one of the most dramatically unsuccessful international gatherings of the twentieth century.” France and Italy rejected President Coolidge’s invitation, alleging that the conference was too narrowly focused on naval limitation—it was more likely, however, that France was unwilling to limit its construction of auxiliaries (as was evident at the Washington Conference) and Italy’s naval strategy sought to stay abreast of the French in every way possible.

191 Quoted in Gow, Military Intervention, p. 161.
The conference itself failed due to irreconcilable differences between the US and Britain, the former wanting to extend the Washington tonnage ratio to all categories of auxiliaries and the latter wanting to extend it only to cruisers in excess of 7500 tons with gun calibers larger than 6 inches. Japan maintained a cautious distance between these two positions, and tried to act as a “patient mediator.”\textsuperscript{194} However, had this rift not opened up, the main axis of confrontation at the conference would undoubtedly have been between the US and Japan. The navy’s instructions to the chief naval adviser of the Japanese delegation, Vice-Admiral Kobayashi Seizo were firm in their insistence on the 70 percent ratio, though the civilian delegates—Saito Makoto and Ishii Kikujiro—were prepared to be flexible.\textsuperscript{195} Major divisions emerged within the Japanese delegation at Geneva between Saito and Ishii on the one hand and naval hardliners who opposed anything less than a 70 percent ratio in auxiliaries on the other. Tokyo did not help matters by bypassing the civilian delegates and issuing instructions directly to Kobayashi. Navy Vice-Minister Osumi Mineo was instrumental in this process. He regarded the Washington Conference “a most flagrant oppression” of Japan,\textsuperscript{196} so much so that when the Japanese delegation proposed accepting 65 percent as a compromise, Osumi called the offer “most deplorable” and demanded that the delegates “must persist to the bitter end in their demand for a 70 per cent ratio.”\textsuperscript{197} If the demand was not met, Osumi reasoned, “a worst case scenario might arise, ultimately forcing us to resolve to fight to the death.”\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., p. 582.
\textsuperscript{195} Asada, “From Washington to London,” p. 163.
\textsuperscript{196} Quoted in Ibid., p. 164.
\textsuperscript{197} Quoted in Ibid., p. 167.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
Following the failure at Geneva, President Coolidge received Congressional approval to construct 15 heavy cruisers and one aircraft carrier, thereby risking renewed naval competition.\textsuperscript{199} In September 1928, the Japanese navy’s research committee on arms limitation put together a preparatory report for the next naval conference. The majority opinion viewed the Washington system, including the capital-ship ratio, as having benefited Japan. The minority view emphasized the imposition of the inferior ratio on Japan by the great powers. Both views, however, concurred that the 70 percent ratio was “absolutely necessary for the nation’s defence, nay for its very existence,” and called for it to be “adhered to without any bargaining at the next conference.”\textsuperscript{200} As the world headed into the Great Depression, in March 1929 Kato Kanji spearheaded a new naval construction plan of four capital ships (replacing older ones as allowed by the Washington treaty), five cruisers, eight destroyers, 32 submarines, and various other ships for a total of over 190,000 tons to be completed by 1936, the year the Washington naval treaty was set to expire.\textsuperscript{201} In early October 1929, the British government issued invitations to a naval limitation conference to be held in January 1930. Just as the immediate postwar recession had done less than a decade earlier, the deepening global crisis brought the Japanese to the negotiating table. Later that month, the US stock market collapsed.

Having learned from its perceived mistakes at the Washington Conference, the Japanese navy undertook a more coordinated and concerted effort to lobby the civilian leadership and the public. Navy Minister Admiral Takarabe Takeshi invited civilian and military leaders to his official residence where he and other members of the fleet faction explained the importance of

\textsuperscript{199} Craft, “An analysis,” p. 132.
\textsuperscript{200} Quoted in Gow, \textit{Military Intervention}, pp. 177-8.
\textsuperscript{201} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 184.
the 70 percent ratio. Vice-Chief of the Navy General Staff Suetsugu Nobumasa—a close ally of Kato Kanji, who now headed the general staff—launched a propaganda initiative through the press. It was not difficult to convince a country still resentful of exclusion at the hands of the Americans that Japan had to fight for its rights at the upcoming conference. Every year on July 1, a handful of protests would reiterate Japan’s National Humiliation Day (the day on which the immigration law was enacted in 1924). Gaimusho’s civilian journal and the Japanese press would periodically publish articles critical of Japanese exclusion—in August 1928, for example, the Hochi editorialized that “exclusion places us on a par with half-civilized and inferior races.” At the diplomatic level, the Japanese brought up the exclusion issue at every major meeting with the US after 1924, but remained hesitant after Hanihara’s experience to appear to be meddling in US domestic affairs. Nonetheless, from the Japanese perspective, the Washington system became harder and harder to separate from perceptions of the unjust and unfair treatment meted out to the Japanese by Washington itself.

In this climate, it was not surprising that Tokyo’s instructions to its delegates centered on “three fundamental claims” to be made at London: first, a 70 percent ratio (vis-à-vis the US) in heavy cruisers; second, a 70 percent ratio in overall tonnage for all auxiliary vessels; and third, parity in submarine tonnage with the US and Britain at 80,000 tons (Japan’s submarine strength at the time being 78,500 tons). However, it soon became clear from pre-conference preliminary negotiations that unlike its approach to the Washington Conference, the US this time did not intend to play fair. Whereas earlier the US definition of “existing strength” had been ships already built or under construction, this time its definition also included ships authorized—

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202 Takeuchi, War and Diplomacy, p. 284.
204 Hirobe, Japanese Pride, p. 12.
205 Takeuchi, War and Diplomacy, p. 288.
a critical change given that the US had delayed beginning the construction of heavy cruisers. The new definition changed the tally of cruisers from eight for Japan and 11 for the US (a ratio of 73 percent) to 12 for Japan and 26 for the US (a ratio of 46 percent). As Gow notes, “Japan found that once she had mastered the rules of the game to her advantage, the Western Powers changed the rules.” Japanese naval leaders already viewed the Washington system as closed due to the inferior ratio. Combined with American racism and self-serving procedural alteration, the system had all but lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the fleet faction.

In November 1929, Kato Kanji met with Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi and explained the American hypocrisy to him. He quoted Fleet Admiral Togo Heihachiro, who had supported Kato Tomosaburo’s insistence on the lower ratio at Washington in 1921. Based on the definition of existing strength at that time, Togo had believed Japan could not attain parity. At London, however, he knew Japan would “surpass Britain and America respectably in cruisers.” And yet Japan was willing to compromise by accepting a 70 percent ratio in cruisers. “If Great Britain and the United States do not go along with us on this we should leave the conference,” Kato quoted Togo as saying.

Kato himself added, “The reality exposes the huge contradiction in the position the US takes, reflecting its intent of demonstrating its world superiority. This should open the eyes of anyone worried about the responsibility for abolishing the new treaty. Japanese thinking had come a long way from its fear of isolation and resulting unwillingness to do anything to upset the status quo at the Washington Conference.

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208 Ibid.
The London Naval Conference, 1930

The London Conference opened on January 21, 1930, and it quickly became evident that neither the US nor Japan were willing to compromise on their respective demands of a 60 percent and 70 percent ratio for Japan respectively. The US insisted that the ratio agreed upon at Washington in 1921 be applied directly to auxiliary vessels. Japan insisted that nine years after Washington, existing strength in cruisers be used to determine their ratio—this was, after all, why Japan had focused on building cruisers through the 1920s. Washington’s response, which was to assert a new definition of existing strength, irked the Japanese. Chief naval adviser Sakonji Seizo reported that the US proposal almost totally disregarded Japan’s position and “there is no room whatsoever for accepting the ‘selfish’ American proposal.”

Kato did not attend the negotiations, but kept a close eye on them. He continued to believe that far from a 70 percent ratio, it was Japan’s sovereign right to have parity with the great powers on all types of armaments. In a letter to the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal (a senior and powerful adviser to the emperor), he warned that the more Japan gave up its sovereign right to parity, “the more flagrant the United States would become in flaunting its high-handed and coercive attitude of forcibly imposing the 60 percent ratio.” The issue was not necessarily one of national security, but rather of Japan being treated as a lesser power by the US and Britain. Kato wrote to the Japanese delegation’s chief naval adviser: “The real issue at stake is no longer our naval power per se but our national prestige and credibility.”

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Washington system was deeply colored by the US exclusion of Japanese immigrants. He wrote to Kaneko Kentaro, a member of the Privy Council, that Prime Minister Hara’s “timid” diplomacy in 1921 had made the US look down on Japan to the extent that it passed the immigration law in 1924.\textsuperscript{213} Kaneko had himself strongly protested the immigration law despite being a lifelong advocate of better US-Japan ties. Kato’s letter to him reflected the strand of Japanese thinking that had come to view military strength and assertiveness as the only way to attain equality with the West and stave off the kind of humiliation experienced by the exclusion law.

In an effort to resolve the deadlock in London, US delegate David Reed and Japanese delegate Matsudaira Tsuneo hammered out a compromise agreement behind closed doors, without the knowledge of the Japanese naval advisers in London. The agreement gave Japan a 60.2 percent ratio in cruisers but the US agreed to delay the construction of three ships so that Japan would in fact have a ratio of 70 percent until the next conference (scheduled for 1935). In addition, Japan would have parity in submarines, but at a total allowance of 52,700 tons.\textsuperscript{214} Since Japan was already in possession of eight heavy cruisers, in effect it could not construct any new ships in this category until 1935, thereby losing the opportunity to make technological advancements in design, construction, and operations. Meanwhile, the US, with its altered definition of existing strength, could construct 15 new heavy cruisers. Moreover, the lower submarine tonnage meant that Japan had to scrap one-third of its existing submarine tonnage and could not construct any new submarines until its existing ones reached replacement age. Senior

\textsuperscript{213} Quoted in \textit{Ibid.}, p. 131. Primary source: “strictly confidential” letter from Kato Kanji to Kaneko Kentaro in the papers of Kaneko Kentaro, National Diet Library.

naval leaders such as Suetsugu Nobumasa felt the allocation would severely limit Japan’s ability to carry out operations aimed at the Philippines.\(^{215}\)

Given the circumstances, the unveiling of the Reed-Matsudaira compromise in March 1930 sent shockwaves through the Japanese navy and caused a major uproar within the Japanese delegation in London, as well as among civilian and military leaders in Tokyo. “The present American compromise plan offers us crumbs and tells us to like them,” said Kato Kanji, “This is extremely high-handed.”\(^{216}\) He cabled Admiral Takarabe in London, once again using Fleet Admiral Togo’s authority and words to argue that “there is no way but to break up the conference and come home.”\(^{217}\) On March 17, Suetsugu broke all manner of protocol and released the so-called “Admiralty Statement” to the press.\(^{218}\) Most likely drafted in consultation with Kato, the statement criticized the Reed-Matsudaira compromise in a blatant attempt at rallying public opinion against its signature. The civilians at London held fast, however, and were backed at home by Prime Minister Hamaguchi and Foreign Minister Shidehara, who both—like Kato Tomosaburo at the Washington Conference—feared the repercussions of Japan being the cause of the conference’s failure. Prince Saionji Kinmochi, the last surviving *genro* (Meiji-era oligarch) after 1924, took a similar view, arguing that “Japan should lead other nations to recognize her earnest promotion of international peace by voluntarily accepting 60 per cent.”\(^{219}\) This line of reasoning, that “Japan will greatly increase her future international role if

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\(^{217}\) Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan*, p. 143.

\(^{218}\) *Takeuchi, War and Diplomacy*, p. 295.

\(^{219}\) Quoted in Harada, *Fragile Victory*, p. 85.
she takes a leading part in bringing this conference to a successful conclusion,” was very much in keeping with the social mobility strategy that Japan had followed at Washington. Saionji, however, was out of touch with his countrymen, who had increasingly moved toward social competition as the Washington system lost its openness and legitimacy in their eyes.

In the end, however, those in favor of the Reed-Matsudaira compromise prevailed, and Japan signed the London Naval Treaty in April 1930. Hamaguchi did not want Japan to “place itself in isolation” and feared what such an outcome would mean for Japan’s policies in China. He also feared the financial implications of a renewed naval arms race with the US. Kato Kanji was unmoved: “It’s as if we had been roped up and cast into prison by Britain and America.”

The next six months witnessed “the most vigorously contested [domestic] battle ever fought” not just between the navy and civilian leadership, but within the civilian leadership itself, particularly between the cabinet and the Privy Council over the ratification of the treaty (the latter being unwilling to recommend ratification). The fleet faction pushed hard against the treaty, trying all manner of tactics including insinuating that the delegation in London had usurped the emperor’s right of supreme command, a Meiji-era convention that allowed the military general staff to report directly to the emperor. Eventually, the Privy Council decided to back the cabinet and the treaty went through, leading Kato to resign as Chief of the Navy General Staff. At the societal level, there were “widespread demonstrations of militant

220 Ibid.
222 Quoted in Harada, Fragile Victory, p. 111.
223 Takeuchi, War and Diplomacy, p. 336.
nationalism” against the treaty.\textsuperscript{225} On November 14, a right-wing youth shot Hamaguchi at Tokyo Station in protest against the treaty and economic conditions in Japan.\textsuperscript{226} He succumbed to his injuries a few months later. Japanese naval journalist Ito Masanori, who lived through the entire period and had close contact with many of its protagonists, later wrote that the London Conference was “one of the remote causes of the war with the Anglo-American powers.”\textsuperscript{227}

The Aftermath

In his history of Japanese foreign policy from 1869 to 1942, Ian Nish marks 1931 as a watershed between the period of “Japan among the Powers” and the period of “Japan versus the Powers.”\textsuperscript{228} Iriye identifies the Manchurian Crisis of 1931 as inaugurating “the triumph of military thinking in Japan [which] marked the return of security considerations as the basic framework of national policy, and…also signaled the emergence of pan-Asianism as an official ideology.”\textsuperscript{229} In the absence of a status-based explanation, this move toward systemic revisionism seems irrational from a purely security perspective. After all, as a rising power, Japan could have chosen to cooperate with the great powers and strengthen its economy and defenses (i.e. engaging in what might today be called a ‘peaceful rise’) instead of marching down the path to war.\textsuperscript{230} However, a closer look at Japan’s great-power ambitions shows that security was not the only thing on the minds of Japan’s leaders. As Ishii Kikujiro observed in 1933, “Ever since Japan’s entrance into

\textsuperscript{226} Nish, \textit{Interwar Period}, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{227} Quoted in Asada, \textit{From Mahan}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{229} Iriye, \textit{Across the Pacific}, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{230} Ward, “Race, Status,” p. 616.
the family of modern nations in the middle of the nineteenth century her diplomacy has striven, and still strives, to attain two objectives—equality and security.”\textsuperscript{231}

Seen through the lens of Japan’s status aspirations, 1931 was the year that Japan decisively moved from a strategy of social creativity to one of social competition. Social creativity had entailed trying to open up an international regime that assigned Japan an unequal naval ratio. Increasingly, that regime also began to appear illegitimate due to its race-based exclusion and unequal treatment of Japan. In the midst of the domestic crisis touched off by the London Conference, Hanihara Masanao, who as ambassador in Washington had failed to stave off the US exclusion law, unexpectedly spoke up at a farewell dinner for the US Ambassador in Tokyo:

[The] resentment is felt now as it was then. Nor will it ever die out so long as the wound inflicted remains unhealed…It is not so much a question as to whether one Nation should or should not exercise its sovereign rights in regulating matters relating to its domestic affairs as it is often represented to be. Rather it is a question of whether one people should treat another people sympathetically, fairly or unfairly.\textsuperscript{232}

Hanihara’s assessment was accurate not just for the fleet faction but also for many Japanese politicians and intellectuals. Nitobe Inazo, another diplomat and public figure, wrote, “Each year that passes without amendment or abrogation only strengthens and sharpens our sense of injury, which is destined to show itself, in one form or another, in personal and public intercourse.”\textsuperscript{233}

Ishii underscored the long-term reversal that Japan had experienced as a result of exclusion: “Full appreciation of our disappointment…is possible only when it is projected against the

\textsuperscript{233} Quoted in Makela, “Japanese Attitudes,” p. 254.
background of our unremitting toil of seventy years for the realization of our aspiration for equality.”\textsuperscript{234} The US immigration law, “the severest cut of all,” had left a deep scar on the Japanese psyche.\textsuperscript{235}

Developments in the Washington system only exacerbated the feelings of exclusion and injustice that had begun to permeate Japanese perceptions of it, particularly in the navy. Vice Admiral Suetsugu came to view the “status quo” as “a stock phrase of the ‘have-powers’” such as Britain and the United States, one that Japan “must destroy.”\textsuperscript{236} Unlike at Washington where the US had acted in a fair and self-sacrificing manner, at London the US appeared self-serving and inclined to shift the goalposts with regard to Japan in order to keep the latter in second-rank status, which further served to erode the legitimacy of the Washington system from the Japanese perspective. Faced with an inferior ratio and a fundamentally unfair international regime, many Japanese leaders sought to break away, and almost did. The London Naval Treaty was not a success for leaders such as Hamaguchi and Shidehara. Rather, it magnified existing tensions and divisions among the Japanese elite. Although those who believed in social mobility as the optimal strategy for Japan still remained in important positions, they too eventually recognized that this strategy had not paid off.\textsuperscript{237} Kato Tomosaburo’s and Shidehara Kijuro’s policies had earned Japan only further insult and exclusion. As the second London conference approached, the navy switched from demanding 70 percent to an outright common upper limit for all powers, whether they had the ability or willingness to build up to that limit or not. They emphasized

\textsuperscript{234} Ishii, “The Permanent Bases”.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid.
Japan’s “equal right of armament” and “national right of survival.” The US ambassador in Tokyo observed that the conference would inevitably strain Japan’s relations with the great powers, “with loud and angry vituperations against us for keeping Japan an ‘inferior nation.’”

In the fall of 1934, a Japanese navy ministry memorandum predicted, “If by any chance the coming naval conference should recognize the traditional discriminatory ratios, our Empire will forever be ordered around by the Anglo-American powers, and it is obvious that our Empire will go to ruin.” On December 30, 1934, Japan gave notice of its withdrawal from the Washington system upon the latter’s expiration in 1936. At the Second London Naval Conference in December 1935, when Japan’s demands for parity and a common upper limit were not met, its delegates walked out. Japan had completed its transition from social mobility at the Washington Conference, to social creativity after Washington, and finally social competition in the aftermath of the London Conference. At critical points in this transition, the Washington system had changed in ways that impacted Japanese leaders’ perceptions of its openness and legitimacy, which in turn impacted their choice of status-seeking strategy. Seen through the lens of status, the roots of Japan’s more aggressive policies in the 1930s can be traced back to the manner in which the Washington system evolved in the 1920s.

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240 Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan*, p. 197.
INTRODUCTION

In October 1964, China conducted its first nuclear test, at Lop Nor in the southeastern region of Xinjiang province. The political fallout occurred over a thousand miles away, in New Delhi. “China blasted its way into the world’s nuclear club today,” proclaimed a front-page story in The Times of India, a prominent national newspaper.¹ The Indian Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, was alarmed but not surprised by the event—the Indians had known about Chinese plans for a number of years.² Memories of a humiliating military defeat at the hands of the Chinese just two years earlier remained fresh in the minds of the Indian elite. “China has been trying to build itself up as a mighty war machine,” said Shastri, “The atom bomb is the latest type of weapon which cuts across the general desire of humanity to live in peace.”³ Although many in the government shared Shastri’s aversion to nuclear weapons, calls for an Indian atomic bomb, louder since the Sino-Indian war, intensified among political parties and the public.

Despite the dramatically altered security environment and intense public pressure, however, India’s political leadership did not opt for a nuclear test in 1964. The next year, Pakistan attacked India and a war ensued; yet Delhi’s stance on nuclear weapons remained unchanged. In fact, Indian leaders took almost no practical steps toward developing a nuclear

¹ The Times of India, “Solemn Pledge Not To Use It First: Main Aim Is To Break Nuclear Monopoly,” October 17, 1964.
device for the next seven years, until Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gave “in principle” support for a nuclear test in late 1971, and official approval a year later. Following its first nuclear test in 1974, by all accounts India displayed no traces of a nuclear weapons program until 1989, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sanctioned the infrastructure necessary for a deliverable nuclear weapons capability. India conducted a second round of nuclear tests in 1998, perplexing observers who saw an economy recovering from crisis and likely to pay a high price for testing in a world no longer dominated by its Cold War ally, the Soviet Union. Some analysts explained the event as the result of a highly nationalistic government under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coming to power. But non-nationalist Indian governments—that fell in quick succession during a period of unstable coalition politics—had sought tests since 1995, well before the BJP came to power. Domestic political change was therefore also an inadequate explanation for India’s choice.

THE PUZZLE OF INDIA’S BEHAVIOR

To date, there has been no satisfactory explanation of the motives behind India’s nuclear weapons program or the timing of its nuclear tests. The best histories of India’s tryst with the atom since independence in 1947 continue to grapple with three basic puzzles. First, why did India choose to conduct a “peaceful nuclear explosion” (PNE) in 1974 and not sooner when it

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6 Peaceful Nuclear Explosions (PNE) were in vogue during the 1960s and 70s among the superpowers, who experimented with the idea of using nuclear explosions for large-scale projects such as dam building, gas stimulation for oil extraction, and harbor construction. It was abandoned by the United States in the late 1970s following evidence of adverse environmental consequences and the resulting public opposition to PNEs.
had the capability to put together an atomic bomb within a reasonably small timeframe at any
given point after the early 1960s? Second, after testing its first device in 1974, why did India not
take any action toward developing a nuclear weapons program until the late 1980s? Third, why
did India opt for weaponization in 1989 and a second round of nuclear tests in 1998 at a time
when proliferation might have entailed heavy economic and social sanctions?

The classic account of why states develop nuclear weapons describes three types of
explanations for this monumental choice—security threats, domestic politics, and norms. States
acquire nuclear weapons either when they face external threats to their national security
(especially nuclear threats), when domestic political and bureaucratic factions use nuclear
weapons to advance their own interests, or when nuclear weapons are seen worldwide as
“normative symbols of modernity and identity.” A more recent study of the determinants of
proliferation suggests that two variables matter the most: the level of economic development, and
the threat environment.

External Threat

The most common argument for India’s nuclear decision-making rests on the constraining effects
of international anarchy—specifically an overt Chinese nuclear capability after 1964 and a
brewing Pakistani capability, often aided by China—to argue that India’s nuclearization was
structurally predetermined. Indeed, Indian decision-makers frequently cited security concerns

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8 Ibid., 55.
10 Prominent arguments in this vein include Karnad, Bharat. 2002. *Nuclear Weapons and Indian
with regard to China’s and Pakistan’s nuclear weapons when justifying their own decisions to pursue nuclear tests or weapons. Moreover, Indian leaders have frequently had to withstand great domestic public and political pressure to test nuclear weapons on grounds of national security, as Prime Minister Shastri did in the wake of China’s 1964 nuclear test. In this sense, security provides both a parsimonious explanation and a ready political slogan for India’s nuclear weapons program. However, this line of reasoning cannot explain why India waited ten years after China’s first test to break nuclear ground; or why India tested in 1998 when there were no major external threats either from China or Pakistan. Most scholars agree that while security imperatives played an important role in influencing the overall direction of India’s nuclear program, they do not fare as well in explaining the timing of the critical choice to conduct a nuclear test. The figures below support this line of reasoning.

Figure 7.1 depicts a five-year moving average of the average total militarized inter-state disputes (MIDs) between India and China, and India and Pakistan in a given year between 1951 and 2010.11 The use of a five-year average is designed to capture the underlying longer-term threat environment, which is more likely than short-term fluctuations to influence any potential decisions on a nuclear weapons program—in other words, I assume that leaders do not make nuclear decisions in a knee-jerk fashion. The dotted line in the figure below for the period 1993-99 reflects my alternative coding for India-Pakistan relations during this period. The Correlates of War (COW) project codes the period as a full-scale war between India and Pakistan, which is likely in reference to the Pakistan-backed insurgency in the Kashmir valley. However, this should qualify as an intra-state and not inter-state war, and the notion of a six-year war between

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11 These incidents account for 68 percent of all MIDs engaged in by India between 1947 and 2010.
the two countries in the 1990s goes against the consensus in the international relations literature on South Asia. Therefore, the graph below depicts the trend using the original data as well as the data adjusted to reflect the lack of inter-state conflict between India and Pakistan from 1993 to 1998 (though 1999 remains coded as a war due to the Kargil conflict).

Figure 7.1: Average India-Pakistan and India-China Militarized Disputes, 1951-2010

The graph shows that despite China’s nuclear test occurring in the midst of an escalating threat environment, India did not take any steps to test a nuclear device or launch a nuclear weapons program. India made its first decision to test a nuclear weapon when the threat environment was significantly more benign, and carried out its test three years later when faced
with an even lower level of external threat. Similarly, the decision to move towards deliverable nuclear weapons, made in 1989, also occurred at a time of reduced threat. The decision to test for a second time was made when the threat level was even lower than 1989, and the subsequent test occurred in 1998, at a time when India faced one of the lowest levels of external threat in its history as an independent state. Given that the figures take into account any lagged effects of threats (within a five-year window), India’s nuclear behavior seems all the more puzzling.

Figure 7.2 shows a five-year moving average of the sum of the hostility levels of the most hostile MID with China and/or the most hostile MID with Pakistan in a given year. In other words, for any given year, I add the most hostile MID by China and the most hostile MID by Pakistan, and then compute a moving average. There are many years in which only China or only Pakistan have engaged in MIDs with India, and a handful of years in which neither has engaged in MIDs with India. Thus the scale of hostility potentially ranges from zero (no hostilities on either front) to ten (a two-front war). Assuming that states do not opt for nuclear weapons lightly in the face of short-term threats, I use moving averages to capture the longer-term threat environment. Again, due to the potentially erroneous coding of the MIDs data, I recode the hostility data from 1993-98 to reflect two alternative interpretations of this period. First, based on the alternative coding in Figure 7.1, I assume that there were no inter-state conflicts between India and Pakistan during this period. Given that there were no MIDs with China either, the MID-count and corresponding hostility levels for 1993-98 are therefore equal to zero under this coding. I code a second variant, which assumes that although there was no outright inter-state war between India and Pakistan during this time, one could argue that both sides were using

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12 Both sets of data are drawn from the Militarized Interstate Disputes (v4.01) dataset of the Correlates of War Project. Hostility data represent the hostility level of the other side toward India.
force in a ‘proxy war’ in Kashmir. Thus I code Pakistan’s hostility level as ‘use of force,’ or a four in the MIDs dataset (one level below war).

Figure 7.2: Average Total Hostility Level of Most Hostile MID by China and/or Pakistan, 1951-2010

Evidently, the level of hostility faced by India in the 1990s varies markedly depending on how the period 1993-98 is coded. Nevertheless, it is likely that an intra-state conflict in Kashmir—albeit sponsored by Pakistan—had little bearing on India’s nuclear decision-making in the 1990s. The threat was not external, and there was no sense in which India could have deterred a cross-border insurgency with the threat of nuclear retaliation. Therefore India’s 1998 test remains as
puzzling and of a similar pattern with regard to the threat environment as its 1974 test. Even if we assume that India was at war with Pakistan for six years during the 1990s, the resulting hostility level is well below the level of hostility India faced in the 1960s from both China and Pakistan. As shown in Figure 7.1 above, India’s response to increasing hostility from its neighbors in this period was not to exercise the nuclear testing option, which it did later once hostility levels had reduced by almost half. A similar pattern exists in India’s decision to acquire nuclear weapons, which occurred not at any point during a seven-year period of increasing external threat (1980-87), but two years later.

**Domestic Politics**

A second set of arguments explaining nuclear proliferation focuses on domestic politics and political economy, arguing that shifting balances of power and influence between “domestic coalitions within the scientific-military-industrial complex” explain the ebbs and flows of India’s interest in and pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities.\(^{13}\) A similar line of reasoning distinguishes between the type of domestic coalition in control of the government—coalitions focused on economic liberalization are likely to support global nonproliferation regimes and hence not flirt with the bomb, whereas more “inward-looking, nationalist, and radical-confessional” coalitions are likely to reject Western-imposed regimes and opt for nuclearization instead.\(^{14}\) Domestic political arguments are more plausible than systemic accounts, particularly given the role that the early generation of atomic scientists played in shaping and influencing the course of India’s nuclear energy and weapons programs. Moreover, Indian prime ministers such as Jawaharlal

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\(^{13}\) Sagan, “Why Do States,” 64.

Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and later Atal Bihari Vajpayee each left their distinctive imprints on India’s nuclear trajectory by either opting for or against certain aspects of atomic energy and weapons production. However, a focus on such individuals does not necessarily imply that they play distinctive causal roles in the overall story. After all, they could all be responding to varying structural factors, or shared national beliefs about nuclear weapons and India’s role in the world. In terms of the empirical details of India’s nuclear tests, domestic politics cannot explain why from 1995 onwards, successive prime ministers from different political parties and coalitions came very close to testing a nuclear weapon. Or why even earlier Rajiv Gandhi, who headed a liberalizing coalition that actually pursued India’s most ambitious global disarmament agenda to date, chose to give the go-ahead for the development of a nuclear weapons capability for India in 1989, thus taking “the momentous but secret decision that changed the course of India’s history.” Domestic politics does provide particularistic explanations for certain trends or events, such as the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP’s) role in pushing for a nuclear test in 1996 and succeeding in 1998, but it does not produce very many generalizable propositions about India’s nuclear tests and weapons program.

A country’s level of economic development appears to play an important role when considered in a cross-national perspective. Countries need to achieve a minimum level of industrialization and economic development before they are able to pursue nuclear weapons. India and China both bucked this trend. It is indeed puzzling why India spent considerable sums on nuclear technology even for civilian purposes in the 1950s and 1960s when its per

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16 See Bajpai, “The BJP and the Bomb.”
capita income was very low.\textsuperscript{18} Another line of reasoning suggests that greater integration into the world economy decreases the likelihood of a state pursuing and acquiring nuclear weapons, due to the increasing costs of upsetting economic relations that benefit important domestic constituencies.\textsuperscript{19} This is a plausible explanation for India’s first test: in 1971, when India decided to test a nuclear weapon, the share of trade in its GDP was 9.1 percent.\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, India’s openness to trade had been declining since the late 1950s. 1970 was the nadir of trade as a percentage of India’s GDP—at 8.6 percent—for the entire period from 1950 till 2010. However, increasing openness fails to explain why India chose to test again in 1998, when trade accounted for almost 24 percent of its GDP. According to one study, an increase of 20 percentage points in trade openness is associated with a 72 percent reduction in the likelihood of a country exploring the possibility of acquiring nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{21} India’s increasing integration into world markets after 1970, however, did not stem its pursuit of nuclear weapons in the late 1980s.

**Prestige**

A third set of arguments—perhaps the most weakly developed in the literature—focuses on the prestige-related motives of India’s nuclear tests and weapons program.\textsuperscript{22} Unfortunately, the literature on this motive betrays a vague and simplistic notion of how nuclear weapons produce

\textsuperscript{18} In 1971, the year the Indian prime minister gave in principle support to her atomic scientists to begin preparations for a nuclear test, India’s real per capita GDP at 2005 prices was US$ 908.
\textsuperscript{20} Calculated from the Penn World Tables.
\textsuperscript{21} Singh and Way, “Correlates,” 876.
\textsuperscript{22} For a prominent example of a prestige-related argument for nuclear acquisition and forbearance that uses India as a frequent illustrative example, see O’Neill, Barry. 2006. “Nuclear Weapons and National Prestige.” Cowles Foundation Discussion Paper No. 1560. New Haven: Cowles Foundation for Research in Economics.
prestige for a country.\textsuperscript{23} For one scholar, “prestige maximization” implies that “the indigenous development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles is perceived to carry substantial international political currency and is thus a means to achieving international prestige.”\textsuperscript{24} Another views prestige as emanating from adherence to international norms: “nuclear weapons programs serve symbolic functions reflecting leaders’ perceptions of appropriate and modern behavior.”\textsuperscript{25} In the first case, it is assumed that nuclear weapons unambiguously bestow prestige upon their owners. In the second case, it is assumed that potential nuclear powers will unambiguously follow prevailing global norms on the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Neither of these assumptions is watertight. For instance, even if we assume a lay definition of prestige as “influence or reputation derived from achievements, associations, or character,”\textsuperscript{26} in some cases adherence to nonproliferation norms can actually be prestigious if it reinforces others’ perceptions of a character trait—such as pacifism—that has previously earned a state influence in world politics. Moreover, in the case of international norms, their impact on state behavior is far from deterministic. States may choose to go against the global grain if doing so carries greater utility—in terms of security, material benefits, or prestige—than adhering to global norms. Prestige-based explanations, though intuitively plausible and empirically promising, are in this sense theoretically indeterminate. A more rigorous theory of prestige requires two things—a clear definition of prestige, and a set of testable hypotheses about the conditions under

\textsuperscript{23} In his widely cited work, \textit{India’s Nuclear Bomb} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), George Perkovich often refers to prestige as a motive (second only to domestic politics) but does not provide a definition of the concept or an account of how one might separate its effects from other influences.


\textsuperscript{26} This is the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of prestige.
which it matters for nuclear decision-making. In Chapter 2, I distinguish status from prestige and argue that the former is a more useful concept when thinking about relative standing in a hierarchy. Below, I apply this concept to show how India’s desire for great-power status has shaped its nuclear decision-making.

**DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

The history of India’s nuclear behavior raises three questions. First, why did India choose not to pursue nuclear weapons in the face of a clear security threat in the 1960s? Second, why, after its first test, did India choose not to develop a full-fledged nuclear weapons program for a decade-and-a-half? And finally, why did India opt for weaponization in 1989 and a second round of nuclear tests in 1998 at a time when proliferation might have entailed heavy economic and social sanctions? According to existing theories, rising powers will seek to fundamentally modify or break existing international rules and norms when it is in their material interest to do so.²⁷ By implication, when the cost-benefit analysis is not in favor of rule breaking, a rising power will accept existing global governance arrangements. However, the empirical record shows that rising powers frequently act to uphold international regimes rather than upend them. In the 1960s, India signed and adhered to the Partial Test Ban Treaty and actively sought to influence negotiations over the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in a direction that would uniformly ban proliferation by all states, including the established nuclear powers. Following its first nuclear test, India de facto supported the regime by unilaterally eschewing proliferation and testing. The same was true of its nuclear behavior after the 1998 test.

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In terms of observable implications of the dependent variable, rule following is likely to consist of adhering to the values and practices of the regime—a strategy of social mobility. In the case of non-proliferation, this entails not attempting to test a nuclear device or develop a nuclear weapon. Mobility may entail developing the technological trappings of nuclear science and technology—what scholars of non-proliferation term “exploration”\textsuperscript{28}—as a step toward what the great powers have engaged in. However, exploration will not evolve into “pursuit,” or investment in single-use technologies for a weapons program. Rule following will also entail not proliferating nuclear technologies to other countries that desire nuclear weapons.

*Social creativity*, an alternative strategy, is likely to consist of attempts to “reframe a negative attribute as positive or stress achievement in a different domain,”\textsuperscript{29} with the goal of either seeking to expand membership of the top ranks of the international regime, or of redirecting the regime’s goals such that they align more with one’s own goals. In the case of non-proliferation, expansion will entail the putting forward of new criteria for being counted as an equal of the great powers in the international regime. Stressing achievement in a different domain may entail investment in non-nuclear technologies that might confer status such as information technology, superconductors, space exploration, etc. A strategy of *redirecting* the international regime may involve taking the lead in shifting the terms of the international nuclear debate from proliferation to arms control among those who possess nuclear weapons, or even disarmament, in effect occupying a moral high ground that confers status. Redirecting may also involve seeking to modify the international regime to recognize the peaceful uses of nuclear

\textsuperscript{28}Sonali Singh and Christopher R. Way (2004), “The Correlates of Nuclear Proliferation: A Quantitative Test,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 48:6, 876. Exploration entails “political authorization to explore the option or…linking research to defense agencies that would oversee any potential weapons development” (867). It also includes investing in dual-use technologies.

\textsuperscript{29}Larson and Shevchenko, “Status-Seekers,” 67.
technology as an acceptable and laudable behavior. A country that engages in social creativity either through expansion or redirection of the international regime may very well engage in the “pursuit” of nuclear weapons but remain well short of challenging the international regime by testing a nuclear weapon or assembling nuclear delivery mechanisms.\textsuperscript{30}

Challenging the international regime entails attempts to outdo the great powers on the dimension that gives them their status—a strategy of \textit{social competition}. In the case of non-proliferation, it entails weapons acquisition, i.e. a first nuclear test and/or the assembly of nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{31} There are in fact two discrete steps here: the decision to test a device, and the decision to assemble weapons. As pointed out by one scholar, the decision to test a nuclear weapon is “is a decision with potentially massive consequences on every level of politics and policy, including profound effects in the areas of military strategy, diplomacy, economics, domestic institutions, and ethical or normative self-image.”\textsuperscript{32} Therefore the timing of the decision to test is analytically and empirically distinct from the decision to develop a nuclear weapons program. An additional step in rule breaking would be the assembly of delivery mechanisms for nuclear weapons, such as nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. It is worth noting that a state can move in and out of these categories by abandoning a nuclear weapons program or restarting it.

In terms of the independent variables, the perceived legitimacy of a regime involves judgments about its normative pull. Two criteria matter: whether the regime is substantively legitimate, and whether it is procedurally legitimate. Substantive legitimacy depends on the

\textsuperscript{30} Pursuit is defined as “additional further steps aimed at acquiring nuclear weapons, such as a political decision by cabinet-level officials, movement toward weaponization, or development of single-use, dedicated technology.” See Singh and Way, “The Correlates,” p. 866.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

degree to which a rising power is in agreement with the goals of the regime. In the case of non-proliferation, a rising power may view the overarching goal of reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the world as desirable for reasons independent of the regime. In this case, the preferences of the rising power align with the regime’s rules. Legitimacy also stems from a regime’s procedures. A rising power that disagrees with the substantive goals of a regime may still follow its rules or try to change them within the framework of the regime if it views the procedures of the regime as fair. Fairness involves not just transparent decision-making but equality of opportunity—in the latter sense, a rising power will form judgments of the regime’s procedural fairness by evaluating its treatment of other states that it considers to be its relevant ‘out group’ or comparators. Most often this group will contain the great powers, but at times it may also contain other rising powers or states that for historical or cultural reasons are viewed as comparators. If a regime is seen as giving de facto or de jure preferential treatment to such states, a rising power is likely to view it as relatively illegitimate.

The openness of a regime is a matter of institutional design. It entails a rising power’s judgment of how easily new powers can enter the ranks of the great powers that dominate the regime. In the case of non-proliferation, the regime became more closed after the signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and its coming into force in 1970. In essence, the treaty froze the category of nuclear weapons states and barred new entrants into this club for the next twenty-five years. In 1995, the NPT was extended indefinitely. It is worth noting here the difference between de facto and de jure openness. Although a regime’s rules may erect institutional barriers to entering its upper ranks, there may be actions available to a rising power that bring it into de facto status parity with the great powers in the regime. Critically, to do so is
likely to entail breaking the rules of the regime or at least trying to shape them in ways that bolster the rising power’s claims to parity.

The table below summarizes the observable implications of the dependent and independent variable discussed in this section.

Table 7.1: Observable Implications of the Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Observable Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DV: Approach to Rules</td>
<td>Follow (Exploration)</td>
<td>- No nuclear test or weapons program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- No proliferation to third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Investment in nuclear research and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expand (Pursuit)</td>
<td>- Single-use technology, start of weapons program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Investment in non-nuclear technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redirect (Pursuit)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Single-use technology, start of weapons program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Emphasis on arms control and disarmament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Emphasis on peaceful uses of nuclear technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge (Acquisition)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- First nuclear test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Assembly of weapons and delivery mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Proliferation to third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV: Regime Legitimacy</td>
<td>High/Low</td>
<td>- Substantive: Rising power agrees/disagrees with non-proliferation goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Procedural: Equal/unequal treatment of rising power and comparators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV: Regime Openness</td>
<td>High/Low</td>
<td>- Regime’s institutional design allows/disallows new powers to enter the upper ranks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CAUSAL MECHANISM

In contrast to explanations that emphasize security, domestic politics, and prestige, I argue that key shifts in the global regime governing the testing and development of nuclear weapons, coupled with India’s own perception of the openness and legitimacy of this regime, determined changes in India’s nuclear behavior. The underlying intuition is that assuming a country seeks status through its foreign policies, nuclear weapons and multilateral diplomacy are both realistic
and equally possible choices. Whether a state chooses multilateralism or not depends on its perceptions of regime legitimacy and openness.

The overall timeline of India’s nuclear journey—illustrated in the table below—is as follows. In the initial period following independence, India followed the rules of the international nuclear regime; it sought to develop nuclear technology (not weapons) in the manner that the great powers had done and were doing at the time. China’s nuclear test in 1964 changed the external security and domestic political calculations, but it did not fundamentally transform the status hierarchy from India’s perspective. What did transform it, however, was the emerging form of the NPT in the late 1960s, which appeared to relegate India to a lower status relative to China and the great powers, and to temporarily close off the option of India achieving status parity with them (the NPT was initially valid for 25 years). India’s response was to challenge the regime—the NPT went into effect in March 1970; just over a year later, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gave “in principle” support for the development of a nuclear explosive device.33

33 Perkovich, India’s Nuclear Bomb, 172.
Table 7.2: Key Events in India’s Nuclear History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>India gains independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Atomic Energy Commission established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>First research reactor (Apsara) functional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Second research reactor (CIRUS) functional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Third research reactor (Zerlina) functional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Sino-Indian War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Nehru’s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Plutonium reprocessing plant functional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>China’s first nuclear test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>India-Pakistan War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>L. B. Shastri and H. K. Bhabha die in separate incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>India’s first nuclear ballistic missile test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>China’s first thermonuclear test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>NPT opened for signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>NPT goes into force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>East Pakistan crisis and Bangladesh War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Indira Gandhi gives tacit approval for test preparations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>India’s first nuclear test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Decision to build deliverable nuclear weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>CTBT negotiations, NPT permanent extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>India’s second nuclear test (five devices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>India-US civilian nuclear cooperation agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the test in 1974, India adopted a strategy of social creativity by consistently critiquing the international regime for being unequal and seeking to change the terms of the global debate on nuclear weapons by emphasizing disarmament. India did nothing to develop atomic weapons, while constantly decrying the global nonproliferation regime as a form of “nuclear apartheid” that separated the nuclear haves from the have-nots. The eventual decision to weaponize India’s nuclear capability came in 1989, arguably in response to the failure of a

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34 This was a term coined by Indian negotiator V.C. Trivedi in 1967 with regard to the treaty, and has been used by Indian officials ever since. See *Ibid.*, 138, and Singh, Jaswant. 1998. “Against Nuclear Apartheid.” *Foreign Affairs*, 77:5.
major attempt at social creativity in the form of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s disarmament proposals at the UN.\textsuperscript{35}

Subsequently, the global regime of nuclear control began shifting again through the negotiations for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, which came as a major surprise to India. Shortly after the latter event, India decided to challenge the international regime once more—Prime Minister Narasimha Rao authorized preparations for nuclear tests, which did not come to fruition due to the fear of American sanctions.\textsuperscript{36} After some domestic political instability that saw three governments led by different parties fall in quick succession (each of whom also sought nuclear tests), the Vajpayee government came to power in 1998 and immediately ordered the tests, which took place a couple of months later.\textsuperscript{37} Following this round of tests (composed of five detonations), India successfully established itself as a de facto nuclear weapons state, irrespective of the legal definitions in the NPT, and after initial contretemps with the United States and other powers, India’s record as a responsible nuclear power was gradually recognized.

In 2008, the United States concluded an agreement on civil nuclear cooperation with India that effectively recognized (and compelled the world to recognize) India’s status as a de facto responsible nuclear weapons power and brought India back into various global arrangements for the supply of nuclear materials and technology from which Delhi had been excluded since the first test of 1974. Following the US-India agreement, India has neither tested nuclear weapons nor signed either the NPT or CTBT (the latter being less relevant since the US Congress failed to ratify it in 1999). India maintains that it will not sign the NPT as a non-

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{Notes}


\textsuperscript{36} Perkovich, India’s Nuclear Bomb, 353.

\textsuperscript{37} Bajpai, “BJP and the Bomb,” 41-42.
nuclear weapons state (de jure), and the NPT is near impossible to amend in order to include India as a nuclear weapons state. Nonetheless, India has consistently upheld global norms regarding the use and spread of nuclear weapons since 1998, thus once again gradually adopting a strategy of social mobility (which it last did before 1971) given that it perceives the international regime to be open to including India in its top ranks—a process currently underway at the Nuclear Suppliers Group and other global arrangements that regulate the supply of nuclear fuel and technology—and unbiased due its recognition of India’s responsible behavior with regard to nuclear non-proliferation. The table below summarizes the values of the dependent and independent variables in India’s case over time.

Table 7.3: Dependent and Independent Variables Over Time

|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1947 – 1971     | High
Big science as the path to great-power status  | High
Regime initially unbiased                      | Follow
Nuclear ambiguity                              |
| 1971 – 1974     | Low
Pathway to nuclear status blocked               | Low
Second-tier status relative to China and great powers | Challenge
Prepare for first nuclear test                |
| 1974 – 1995     | High
De facto nuclear capable state                  | Low
Regime biased, “nuclear apartheid”              | Redirect
No weapons program, advocate disarmament        |
| 1995 – 1998     | Low
Official path to nuclear status permanently blocked | Low
Responsible nuclear behavior not recognized    | Challenge
Prepare for second nuclear test                |

Exogenous change: Superpowers decide on NPT in late 1960s
Endogenous change: 1974 Nuclear test
Exogenous change: NPT permanently extended in 1995

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The empirical analysis in this chapter and the next focuses primarily on India’s decision to not pursue a nuclear test in the 1960s and the subsequent decision in 1971 to test a nuclear device. However, as the table above shows, the theory is applicable to India’s second test as well, on which I will provide an overview toward the end of the next chapter.

**SOCIAL MOBILITY, 1947-1961**

India possessed the capability to begin a program that would culminate in a weapons test prior to 1974. In 1958, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru claimed that India could produce an atomic bomb in “three or four years,” which was probably an exaggeration.\(^{39}\) Nonetheless, by 1965 a US special national intelligence estimate stated, “[India] probably already has sufficient plutonium for a first device, and could explode it about a year after a decision to develop one.”\(^{40}\) Other US intelligence estimates ranged from four to five years in 1963, to one to three years in 1965.\(^ {41} \) At the outer limit, therefore, India could have possessed an atomic bomb by 1968. Moreover, given that Indian nuclear scientists were no less capable or globally networked than their Chinese counterparts, had Delhi launched an attempt soon after independence it could have probably got there even sooner. However, India’s position on nuclear weapons in the Nehru

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\(^{39}\) Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, 35.


years (1947-1964) was a nuanced one—while Nehru actively sought nuclear power and technology for civilian uses, he conspicuously abjured nuclear weapons while letting it be known that India could manufacture a bomb if it was pressed to, but it chose not to. In an often-cited speech from 1946, Nehru said:

As long as the world is constituted as it is, every country will have to devise and use the latest scientific devices for its protection. I have no doubt that India will develop her scientific researches and I hope Indian scientists will use the atomic force for constructive purposes. But if India is threatened she will inevitably try to defend herself by all means at her disposal.\(^{42}\)

This stance was at the core of India’s social mobility strategy during the period from independence until the late 1960s. As long as the option to go nuclear remained open, i.e. as long the international regime for the regulation and control of nuclear weapons remained open to India’s ascent, India was in favor of a rule-following position that emulated the achievements of the great powers in nuclear technology but self-consciously renounced nuclear weapons.\(^{43}\) Indian leaders also held the emerging global regime for the control of nuclear weapons to be substantively legitimate, and in fact advocated complete disarmament in a very serious fashion. India readily signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty negotiated by the superpowers in 1963, which banned all but underground testing. In the words of one scholar, “Nehru’s nuclear diplomacy


\(^{43}\) Although the NPT did not come into existence until much later, there was a global regime already emerging with the aim of controlling the proliferation of nuclear weapons and promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear technology, starting with Nehru’s own 1953 exhortation in the UN General Assembly for a comprehensive nuclear testing ban; US President Eisenhower’s ‘Atoms for Peace’ initiative, also introduced through the UN; the first UN conference on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in 1955; and the launch of the American ‘Plowshare’ initiative, which sought to develop atomic energy for peaceful purposes within the US. See Abraham, Itty. “Contra-Proliferation: Interpreting the Meanings of India’s Nuclear Tests in 1974 and 1998,” in Sagan (ed.), *Inside Nuclear South Asia*, 112.
reflected a sense that India possessed a certain moral authority in the international system, particularly in the wake of its nonviolent independence struggle, and it aimed at nothing less than slowing the nuclear arms race between the superpowers.”44

As argued in Chapter 2, rising powers value status parity, or symbolic equality, with the great powers. The policies that emerge from such considerations may not always align with policies that emerge from considerations of security or economic gain, and in fact the pursuit of status—within certain parameters—might trump these other considerations. The key insight that flows from this in the context of nuclear policy is that under certain conditions the pursuit of nuclear weapons might enhance a country’s status while at other times the avoidance or renunciation of nuclear weapons might achieve the same outcome. “The idea of showing you can do something by not doing it,” argued Barry O’Neill, is an important source of prestige, or in this case status equality with the great powers.45

The desire for status parity with the great powers played an important role in India’s foreign policy and, by extension, its nuclear policy in the years immediately following independence in 1947. India’s first generation of leaders had organized a hugely successful movement of noncooperation against British imperial occupation, winning in some sense a public relations battle by occupying the moral higher ground. They soon realized that status could be earned by injecting moral considerations into the standards by which states are judged globally. While it was true that India did not possess the resources to be a competitor for influence—in the standard sense—in the postwar order, this fact by no means preordained a

44 Kennedy, “India’s Nuclear Odyssey,” 126.
policy of nonalignment as some writers have argued. It was entirely possible for India to have sought alliance with either superpower in an effort to bolster its security and prosperity. However, India chose nonalignment precisely because it bestowed a certain status of being above the fray of Cold War politics. In the words of one analyst, “In the years following independence there was a pervasive sense among many Indians that their nation, though weak in relation to the Great Powers, could still achieve international stature through mediatory efforts and moral suasion.”

In the realm of nuclear policy, the strategy of nuclear ambiguity—neither expressing nor foreclosing the capacity to build nuclear weapons—served a similar end. It allowed India to maintain a unique position in the international system as a scientifically advanced and potentially powerful but essentially pacifist country. As a rising power whose non-aligned foreign policy had already won it a considerable degree of international recognition, India valued its position in the international status hierarchy sufficiently to be willing to trade off some amount of short-term security for it. Once we understand India’s nuclear policy in these terms, certain counter-intuitive behaviors and outcomes of the 1960s such as India’s public renunciation of nuclear weapons, its strong support for global disarmament and non-proliferation efforts (prior to the NPT), the search for security guarantees, and the failure to obtain said guarantees start to make sense.

**Investing in Status through Big Science**

In order to understand the role of status in India’s nuclear behavior in the 1960s, one has to begin in the late 1940s (at least) with the way in which India’s desire for status parity with the great

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powers drove its efforts in big science, especially atomic energy, which was the jewel in the crown. Historians of nuclear science and research in India have dealt extensively with how Indian leaders such as Nehru and Bhabha saw in this field the “modernist imperative” of a postcolonial nation and sought constantly to catch up with the great powers. As early as 1945, Bhabha stated in a speech at the Bombay branch of the Indian Council of World Affairs that “given proper education and facilities for work, the Indian mind was perfectly capable of keeping pace with the other scientifically advanced countries of the West.” Nehru highlighted this imperative when introducing the Atomic Energy Bill in the Constituent Assembly of India in 1948: “If we do not set about it now, taking advantage of the processes that go towards the making of atomic energy…we will be left behind and we shall possibly only just have the chance to follow in the trail of others. That is not good enough for any country, least of all for a country with the vast potential and strength that India possesses.”

Nehru was particularly clear that in order to be an equal of the great powers, India would need to cooperate with them on equal terms and not terms of dependence. He believed that India could develop the human capital necessary to cooperate on equal terms with advanced countries despite a lack of resources in the wider economy. While inaugurating a rare earths factory in Alwaye in 1952, he said, “[W]e want to do this work ourselves - not to be helpless and dependent upon others, but to cooperate with others in this task. While our financial resources are nowhere near to other countries, we hope certainly to have scientific talent of the first order.

so that we may go ahead with this by ourselves or in cooperation with others.”

He believed that barring the great powers, India in the early 1950s was ahead of the vast majority of the world in the realm of atomic energy. A decade later, Nehru was confident even of outdoing the superpowers in this field. He reminded fellow lawmakers of the need to stay ahead of the technological curve: “We cannot wait for America or Russia or some other country to achieve [technological advancements in nuclear power] and then try to imitate the benefits of that. We have to build up in order to keep in the fore all the time. The moment we give up that effort and wait to take advantage of some further improvement made by a foreign country, we have lost the foothold.”

True to Nehru’s word, India invested heavily in big science and reaped the status rewards. In 1957, India launched the *Apsara*, a swimming pool reactor that Bhabha and his team had designed using British blueprints and constructed using uranium fuel rods imported from the United Kingdom. At the inauguration, Nehru said

> We are told, and I am prepared to believe it on Dr. Bhabha’s word, that this is the first atomic reactor in Asia, except possibly the Soviet areas. In this sense, this represents a certain historic moment in India and in Asia...We are not reluctant in the slightest degree to take advice and help from other countries...But it is to be remembered that this Swimming Pool reactor in front of you is the work, almost entirely, of our young Indian scientists and builders.

By the early 1960s, India had developed research and practical expertise in a number of advanced fields such as atomic energy, oil and gas extraction, geological science, mining, water

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55 Abraham, “Contra-Proliferation,” 110.
and power production, and agricultural research.\(^{56}\) In March 1964, barely two months before Nehru’s death and a little over six months before China’s first nuclear test, India completed Project Phoenix, its first plutonium separation plant at Trombay. The press release issued by India’s Department of Atomic Energy for this event emphasized, “The plant was designed and built entirely by the staff of the Atomic Energy Establishment…[it] is one of the most sophisticated and advanced type of chemical plants, using techniques at the frontiers of chemical technology, and has several unusual features.”\(^{57}\) It went on to add that only four other countries in the world had operating plutonium plants—the US, the USSR, Britain, and France—and that the completion of Project Phoenix had placed India “among the first half of a dozen countries in the world in the utilisation of atomic energy.”\(^{58}\)

**India and the International Nuclear Regime**

As a self-perceived leading player in the field of atomic energy and nuclear science, India took a strong interest in the international regime set up by the great powers to govern the development and spread of nuclear technology and weapons. During the 1960s, the international nuclear regime consisted of an evolving set of principles, norms, and rules centered on disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control. Being essentially social environments, the international institutions in which these issues were discussed and negotiated offered middle powers such as India a venue in which to attain status. Historians who study India’s nuclear program and


\(^{57}\) Department of State. “Inauguration of Indian Plutonium Separation Plant.” Telegram from American Consul in Bombay, Ref. A-249, 29 April 1964. The National Security Archive, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB187/IN03.pdf, p. 2. In fact, like the Apsara reactor, this plant too was built with significant foreign assistance (see Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, 64).

political scientists who study nuclear proliferation have largely tended to ignore the role that this broader international regime for the control of nuclear testing and proliferation—the international nuclear regime, for short—played in shaping India’s nuclear choices during this period.  

Delhi’s strong support for the international nuclear regime was an important aspect of India’s strategy of social mobility in the 1960s. In April 1964, P.N. Haksar, India’s ambassador to Vienna, wrote a note presumably intended for his colleagues at the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi, requesting that a junior officer from the Department of Atomic Energy be seconded to the office of India’s permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency, a position held ex officio by Haksar himself. He wrote: “As a permanent member of the Board of Governors of the I.A.E.A., our country occupies a special position. We also occupy a special, even a leading, position among the developing countries…” Haksar continued but later crossed out this part: “…by reason of the fact that…we are the most advanced in the field of the development of nuclear energy. Indeed, my impression is that we are quite a leading country, even when compared to some of the West European countries.” He went on to argue that given India’s position, it should be in a position to take “detailed interest in the day to day functioning of the Agency [the IAEA]. Our participation should be well informed. We owe this not only to ourselves but to the large number of developing countries who look towards us for guidance and support.” Haksar’s predecessor Arthur S. Lall had been largely absent from his Vienna posting and as a result India had been represented at the IAEA by the chargé d’affaires and, according to

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59 One exception is Kumar, A. Vinod. 2014. *India and the Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime: The Perennial Outlier*. Delhi: Cambridge University Press, though this work focuses more on recent and contemporary dynamics.
Haksar, “our reputation as effective members of the governing body slumped during this period.”

Arthur Lall was absent from Vienna because he was involved in the negotiations of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament in Geneva, another venue in which India sought to earn considerable status as an active and constructive member. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, as long as India was able to maintain status parity with the great powers within this institution, Delhi maintained a posture of nuclear ambiguity despite external threats and domestic pressure to develop nuclear weapons after 1962. It was only when the NPT started taking concrete shape that India’s own thinking on nuclear ambiguity as a source of international status began to change.

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60 Haksar, P. N. Untitled draft note (dated 1 April 1964). P. N. Haksar Papers (I&II), Subject Files, S. No. 27, “Papers relating to P. N. Haksar’s tenure as Ambassador of India at Vienna and Austria.” Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), pp. 19-21. The final version of this draft was not available.
Chapter 8

India and Nuclear Non-Proliferation:

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 1970

SOCIAL MOBILITY, 1961-71

Existing explanations for the lack of a serious effort by India to develop a nuclear arsenal or even assemble a nuclear device in the 1960s focus entirely on internal constraints. Four explanations are typically offered. First, given its pressing developmental needs, India could not afford to develop a nuclear arsenal. This line of reasoning—argued by many intellectuals and government officials in the 1960s itself—draws largely from the public statements of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, who consistently argued that India “cannot afford to spend millions and millions over nuclear arms when there is poverty and unemployment all around us.”¹ Second, India simply did not have the technological capability to produce nuclear weapons during this period. Specifically, India did not possess plutonium in sufficient quantities to build a nuclear device until 1969,² nor were Indian scientists proficient enough to perfect crucial aspects of bomb design until the early 1970s.³ Third, domestic politics and institutional discontinuities slowed down the nuclear program in the 1960s. Nuclear decision-making was largely driven by Jawaharlal Nehru and his chief atomic scientist and technocrat, Homi J. Bhabha, in the initial years following independence. Nehru’s death in 1964, followed by the unexpected deaths of


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Shastri and Bhabha within a fortnight of each other in 1966 and the ensuing political and institutional instability dampened progress toward a nuclear weapons capability.\textsuperscript{4} Finally, the worldviews of successive Indian prime ministers—Nehru, Shastri, and Indira Gandhi—are cited as evidence of the ingrained “normative aversion” of India’s political elite with regard to nuclear weaponry.\textsuperscript{5} In constant tension with the security and prestige motives for nuclear weapons acquisition, this factor frequently applied the brakes on the more enthusiastic drive of India’s scientific bureaucracy for the bomb.\textsuperscript{6}

Arguments regarding cost and capability are difficult to evaluate given the thin empirical record. Estimates of the cost of a nuclear warhead diverged greatly in the 1960s, depending on who was making the estimate and for which context.\textsuperscript{7} More generally, it was acknowledged globally that some countries (India among them), if they wanted nuclear weapons strongly enough, could muster the resources to build them despite the heavy cost—in other words, cost was not strictly prohibitive.\textsuperscript{8} As for technological capability, the jury is divided: although India’s Canadian reactor CIRUS began producing Plutonium in October 1963 and its reprocessing plant at Trombay came online in June 1964—suggesting that India would have had sufficient

\textsuperscript{4} Abraham, \textit{The Making}, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{5} Perkovich, India’s Nuclear Bomb, 3.
\textsuperscript{6} On the role of scientists in pushing for the 1974 test, for example, see Chengappa, \textit{Weapons of Peace}, 44-58.
\textsuperscript{7} Bhabha himself cited American experts to argue that a 10 kiloton explosion would cost US $350,000 (Perkovich, \textit{India’s Nuclear Bomb}, 67), a figure that included neither expenditure on associated industrial infrastructure in the Indian case nor the additional cost of procuring and fabricating the technology indigenously.
plutonium for a nuclear explosion by mid-1965\(^9\)—significant questions remain about the efficiency of these facilities at the time.\(^{10}\)

Institutional and domestic politics arguments assume an underlying institutional and political desire for nuclear weapons that was halted due to leadership changes. While this was certainly true of the scientific bureaucracy, top decision-makers such as Nehru, Shastri, and even Indira Gandhi made a clear decision that India would not build nuclear weapons. Why they did so becomes important, and this is where the fourth strain of argument—on normative aversion—becomes relevant. Again, however, the evidence is weak. Indian leaders were not averse to using force in international affairs: Nehru had done so against in Kashmir in 1947, in Goa in 1961, and in the conflict with China in 1962; Shastri, even less an adherent of realpolitik than Nehru, did not hesitate to decisively repel an attack by Pakistan in 1965. More importantly, as I will discuss below, at no point did Indian leaders absolutely renounce nuclear weapons. In all their public speeches and statements, Indian prime ministers were cautious to always leave the door open to potential acquisition of the bomb at a future date if circumstances called for it.

**Was Going Nuclear Inevitable?**

These four existing strands of reasoning have in common an underlying assumption that the final outcome in the early 1970s was in some sense inevitable or overdetermined due to reasons of external security and domestic pressure for the bomb. Factors such as cost, technology, institutional breaks, and ideology only served to act as the viscous medium in which Indian decision-makers had to operate in their inexorable march toward nuclear capability. Recent scholarship has labeled this period as one of “proliferation drift” for Delhi, in which “security

\(^{10}\) Nuclear Weapons Archive, [http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/India/IndiaWDevelop.html](http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/India/IndiaWDevelop.html).
motivations mattered substantially” and a host of regional and international threats coupled with bullying by the United States gradually drove India to test a nuclear device.\textsuperscript{11} There is no doubt that security considerations—which also drove domestic politics on the nuclear question—played an important role in shaping India’s nuclear pathway. Absent the ongoing rivalry with Pakistan and the military threat from China, it is unlikely that India would have pursued nuclear weapons in the first place. However, while it is a necessary condition for explaining India’s nuclear behavior, security is insufficient for explaining the motivation and timing of India’s nuclear decision-making.

India’s decision to go nuclear was not preordained by security concerns, for two reasons. First, security was not and has never been the only goal of India’s foreign policy. If security was the primary driver of India’s so-called proliferation drift in the 1960s, then Delhi should have pursued further steps toward developing nuclear weapons after the first test in 1974. In fact, almost nothing was done on this front until an abortive attempt in the early 1980s (whose motivations are unclear) and eventually a full decision to weaponize in 1989. Second, despite a major security threat, we know that top policymakers in Delhi did very little through the 1960s except to sanction theoretical work that might someday result in a nuclear test.\textsuperscript{12} It is worth noting that although by 1965 US intelligence estimates had placed the timeframe in which India


\textsuperscript{12} On 27 November 1964, Shastri informed the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian parliament) that he had sanctioned research toward a Peaceful Nuclear Explosives (PNE) program, which was modeled on the US Plowshare initiative. See Ramana, M. V. 2003. “La Trahison des Clercs: Scientists and India’s Nuclear Bomb.” In M. V. Ramana and C. Rammanohar Reddy (eds.), \textit{Prisoners of the Nuclear Dream}. New Delhi: Orient Longman, p. 225.
could produce the bomb at anywhere between one to five years,\textsuperscript{13} it still took Indian scientists three years to fabricate a device after receiving political approval in 1971, suggesting an extremely low level of preparedness.

**Nuclear Ambiguity as Optimal Strategy**

Given the circumstances of the 1960s, India’s optimal strategy was to neither pursue nor absolutely renounce nuclear weapons. This strategy is the precursor to what later came to be labeled India’s strategy of nuclear ambiguity, that is, neither expressing nor foreclosing the capacity to build nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{14} It was a two-pronged strategy. First, India consistently pushed for general and complete disarmament in the international system through various conferences and international institutions such as the disarmament conferences at Geneva and the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The 1955 Bandung Conference of African and Asian states, which India had a major role in planning, focused squarely on the issue of “universal disarmament coupled with effective international control,” particularly in light of the environmental effects of nuclear testing.\textsuperscript{15} In various domestic and international forums through the 1950s and early 1960s, Nehru consistently championed the cause of universal disarmament and called on the great powers to accelerate their efforts toward this end.\textsuperscript{16}

Second, Indian leaders consistently kept the nuclear option open, insisting that while they could build nuclear weapons, they chose not to in the interest of international peace and


\textsuperscript{16} See Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches, pp. 309, 318, 362-3, 394.
disarmament. India’s ambiguous approach to nuclear weapons mirrored the essentially dual
nature of atomic power, which Nehru viewed as “Janus-like,” facing two ways: “the way of vast
destruction and annihilation and the way of great speed in construction and progress.” As early
as 1948, during the debates of the Constituent Assembly of India, he purported to maintain this
ambiguity: “I think we must develop [atomic energy] for the purpose of using it for peaceful
purposes. It is in that hope that we should develop this. Of course, if we are compelled as a
nation to use it for other purposes, possibly no pious sentiments of any of us will stop the nation
from using it that way.” Twelve years later, he maintained the same position while discussing
the annual report of India’s Department of Atomic Energy in parliament: “It is true that in the
ultimate analysis a country which has atomic power fully developed can use it for good or evil
purposes. And no declaration which I can make today will necessarily bind people in future, but I
do hope that we shall create an atmosphere in this country which will bind every Government in
future not to use this power for evil purposes.” In the following four years, this strategy would
be challenged by a comprehensive defeat at the hands of the Chinese military and Beijing’s first
nuclear test. Yet, Indian leaders stuck to their ambiguous guns.

Reactions to the Chinese Threat

Following Nehru’s death in 1964, China’s nuclear test should have created the security impetus
necessary for India to begin developing a nuclear weapon; but India did not pursue this path. In
fact, India had known early in the 1960s that China was working hard to develop a nuclear

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17 Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches, 436.
18 Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative Debates), vol. 5, 3323, cited in Perkovich, India’s
Nuclear Bomb, 20.
19 Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches, 436.
weapons capability, and yet Nehru had chosen to take no action on the nuclear front.\textsuperscript{20} Nehru’s successor Shastri faced great pressure from opposition parties and members of his own party to launch a nuclear weapons program following the Chinese test, yet even he chose not to do so. India retained its rule taking strategy that emphasized technological proficiency at par with the West but without any desire to produce a bomb. In fact, by this time Indian leaders believed that this strategy had brought them considerable dividends in terms of global influence and status. During a heated debate at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress party’s central decision-making body a month after China’s nuclear test, Shastri emphasized India’s ability to “give the lead in the maintenance of world peace,” especially to newly independent African and Asian countries, a lead that would undoubtedly be jeopardized by nuclear tests.\textsuperscript{21} His foreign minister, Swaran Singh, argued that at a time when “there was such increasing response to the policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence [championed by India],” it would be foolhardy if “India herself expressed doubts about the validity of its principles” by testing.\textsuperscript{22} V.K. Krishna Menon, who had been defense minister under Nehru during India’s humiliating defeat at the hands of China in 1962, argued more pragmatically that non-alignment had “enabled India’s voice to be heard in international councils” while allowing India to continue arming itself conventionally and being on good terms with both superpowers.\textsuperscript{23} To conduct a test now would be to throw all of these achievements away.

In May 1966, after China had conducted its third nuclear test and Parliament was once again up in arms about the lack of an equivalent Indian response, Swaran Singh reiterated that

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\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Times of India}. 1964. “Nuclear bomb manufacture will be heavy burden: Shastri.” November 9, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
India’s “policy (of making a bomb) is kept under constant review.” He added, “In the matter of peaceful development of atomic energy we are pushing ahead and giving it top priority. As the House is aware, the world recognizes that we’re one of the countries which are capable of being an atomic power within a reasonably short time.”\textsuperscript{24} Once again, India’s leaders stressed the technical ability to produce a weapon and the desire not to do so. By maintaining this stance, India continued to emulate the peaceful technological achievements of the great powers without undermining a regime that it found legitimate and had so far allowed Delhi to keep its options open. So strong was India’s rule taking instinct that it sought security guarantees from the superpowers instead of developing its own nuclear weapons capability. The guarantees, however, seemed not to be forthcoming partly because the superpowers were leery of a potential nuclear showdown with China and partly because India’s own pursuit of the guarantee conflicted with its non-aligned foreign policy and was hence half-hearted. One observer of this process noted, “It is not so much that India, with her immense problems, wishes to embark on a nuclear weapons program as that she wishes anxiously, and one might add legitimately, to protect her option to do so.”\textsuperscript{25}

An examination of Indian reactions and governmental policy in response to the Chinese threat through the 1960s shows that nuclear ambiguity held fast even through this tumultuous period. The primary national concern after 1964 was how to prevent Beijing from engaging in “nuclear blackmail” in future territorial disputes with India.\textsuperscript{26} The Indian government was faced with three alternatives: do nothing, seek security guarantees from the superpowers, or build an


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 501.

independent nuclear deterrent. As mentioned above, Shastri immediately declared that India would not pursue an independent deterrent, primarily for reasons of cost. The argument he and others made was that building and testing one device alone would not amount to a deterrent; rather, in order to credibly deter China, India would need to develop a full-fledged nuclear arsenal with long-range delivery mechanisms to reach Chinese cities. Indira Gandhi later echoed this argument in a parliamentary debate in 1968, by which time China had conducted no less than seven nuclear tests: “The choice before us involves not only the question of making a few atom bombs but of engaging in an arms race with sophisticated nuclear warheads and an effective missile delivery system. I do not think that such a course would strengthen national security. On the other hand, it may well endanger our internal security by imposing a very heavy economic burden which would be in addition to the present expenditure on defence.”

Those who argued against the bomb also offered two other arguments. First, the nuclear threat from China was neither imminent nor credible. Three months after the Chinese test, in reply to a question at a press conference on how his government proposed to meet the challenge of the Chinese bomb, Shastri replied, “The atom bomb is not going to fall on India tomorrow and, therefore, we need not consider this matter.” He went on to emphasize that the Chinese threat, if it materialized, would not be nuclear: “There is a greater danger of their using the conventional army and conventional weapons in attacking India. In fact, it is much more important than the use of atom bomb by China.” Fifteen months later, in an interview on

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27 Ibid., 22.
30 Shastri, Selected Speeches, 25-6.
Canadian television, he argued, “it will take some time for China to develop the deterrent
capacity, and to my mind the explosion just at present is with a view to creating a political
impression.”

The second argument of those against the bomb was that India could rely on security
guarantees from the great powers in the event of the threat of a nuclear attack by China. Three
days after China’s first test, US President Lyndon B. Johnson announced: “nations that do not
seek national nuclear weapons can be sure that if they need our strong support against some
threat of nuclear blackmail, then they will have it.” Keeping this in mind, H. M. Patel—then
recently retired from India’s national security bureaucracy—argued that India should arrive at
some sort of “arrangement with the West” the guarantee its security. Senior Indian diplomat R.
K. Nehru (Jawaharlal Nehru’s cousin) argued that an informal guarantee was “good enough,”
because anything more would mean “a deviation from our basic policy of non-alignment.”
This tension between non-alignment and the desire for a security guarantee eventually led to India’s
efforts on this front going nowhere, though many among the Indian elite doubted the
willingness and ability of either superpower to intervene on India’s behalf in the face of a
Chinese threat in the first place.

31 Ibid., 41.
33 Patel, “Arrangement with the West.”
Vohra, H. R. 1966. “U.S. intrigued at Indian desire: A-guarantees.” The Times of India, 4 June,
p. 5.
Those in favor of an independent Indian deterrent argued primarily against the alleged cost constraint. Subramanian Swamy, a professor of economics at Harvard University at the time, argued that the opportunity cost of not building a nuclear deterrent was unacceptably high given the Chinese threat.37 “To me it is inevitable that India produce nuclear weapons, and generally strengthen her defence,” he argued, “The logic of cost is quite pedestrian, for it is neither costly nor is it logic.”38 A more moderate stance was taken by those who argued that given the nature of the Chinese threat and given China’s capabilities, India should continue investing in its conventional capabilities as it had been doing following the 1962 war while also keeping the nuclear option open. P. S. Gyani, a former Lieutenant General, argued that “in the Himalayas, we have to fight on a man-to-man basis” but advocated continued improvements in India’s ability to manufacture nuclear weapons and delivery systems (which at the time was virtually non-existent).39 Shastri himself was reluctant to authorize anything more than theoretical work, and that too for peaceful purposes. In November 1964, he authorized research on “peaceful nuclear explosions” (PNEs) of the type that the US government’s Plowshare program had been advocating for large-scale construction and engineering projects. At a Congress Party conference in January 1965, in a vein similar to Nehru’s declarations of ambiguity, he stated, “I cannot say anything about the future, but our present policy is not to manufacture the atom bomb, but to develop nuclear energy for constructive purposes.”40 Later, when was further questioned about this statement, he clarified, “When I say for the present, this

present is a very long period…but I cannot say anything as to what might happen in the distant future.”

*The Benefits of Nuclear Ambiguity*

Despite the diverse range of views and a strong pro-bomb lobby, India’s political elite essentially adopted a strategy of nuclear ambiguity through the 1960s. A contemporary analyst summarized India’s policy as one of remaining non-aligned, continuing a conventional military buildup, organizing world opinion against China, and publicly refusing to develop nuclear weapons because to do so would be costly, would undermine disarmament, and would increase the overall risk of war in the international system. The two-pronged strategy of promoting disarmament while keeping the nuclear option open was internally reinforcing. Each arm of the strategy supported the other: so long as international disarmament efforts did not bear fruit, India could retain the future option to build the bomb; and so long as the nuclear option was open, India could legitimately pursue disarmament as part of its foreign policy agenda and strive for its success.

It should be clear, though, that nuclear ambiguity was not optimal from a security perspective. If the China threat was real—and from the perspective of the time, it was, even to those who advocated against the bomb—maintaining the option to build nuclear weapons was a very far cry from actually possessing sufficient nuclear firepower to deter the Chinese threat. Shastri’s initial argument that China was still a long way off from possessing a credible deterrent simply deferred the problem. Indeed, China successfully tested a nuclear ballistic missile much

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41 Shastri, Selected Speeches, 24.
sooner than the Indians had expected. Therefore if nuclear ambiguity didn’t serve to enhance India’s security, it must have had an alternative purpose. I argue that that purpose was status, or symbolic equality with the great powers.

**The Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament**

After years of failed United Nations resolutions, bilateral negotiations, and brief multilateral negotiations (in the form of the short-lived Ten Nation Committee on Disarmament), the superpowers came to an agreement via a common declaration on 21 December 1961 to set up the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament (ENCD), which would include five members of the Western bloc (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Italy), five members of the Eastern bloc (the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria), and eight nonaligned nations (Brazil, Burma, Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Sweden, and the United Arab Republic). France, from the outset, rejected the ENCD and refused to participate in its official proceedings on grounds that nuclear disarmament was a matter for the nuclear powers alone and that test bans were ineffectual means of promoting disarmament. The ENCD therefore had seventeen de facto participants, though France did participate unofficially in consultations with the Western bloc at the ENCD.

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43 Writing in 1965, R. K. Nehru (“Control and disarm,” 39-40) stated, “the explosion of a few bombs does not make a country a nuclear power. The country must build an arsenal of nuclear weapons and an effective delivery system. It took the UK, with its highly developed industrial base, 13 years to attain its present position of what has been described as 'comparatively modest nuclear strength.’” By this reasoning, he expected, “There does not seem to be much prospect…of China becoming a major nuclear power in the foreseeable future.”

The United Nations General Assembly initially charged the ENCD with arriving at a plan for general and complete disarmament. The ENCD first met on 14 March 1962 and spent the first two years of its existence on this question. Failing to make much headway, committee members decided to focus instead on “partial” disarmament, or goals that were more achievable than general and complete disarmament. These included a ban on nuclear testing, the designation of nuclear-free geographical zones, and nuclear non-proliferation. An early result of these efforts was the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), which banned all forms of testing that were relatively easy to detect, that is, in the air, under water, and in space. The harder question of underground testing was put off and remained unresolved.

As for general disarmament, fundamental differences between the positions and proposals of the United States and the Soviet Union precluded agreement. Key issues covered under this rubric at the ENCD included nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, delivery systems for nuclear weapons, verification and control of disarmament measures, disarmament of conventional forces, an international military force under UN auspices. On nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles, both sides proposed disarmament in stages, except that the United States proposed gradual percentage reductions in each stage whereas the Soviet Union proposed large-scale disarmament in the first stage itself, along with the removal of US forces from Europe and Asia. Each side played to its strength—the United States proposed gradual percentage cuts because in the early 1960s its nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles far outnumbered those of the Soviet Union. In the event, given the basic conflict of interests, the superpowers were unable to agree on a plan for general disarmament.

What did emerge as an area of great power agreement was the need to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries. In 1960, the National Planning Association in the United
States had argued that countering nuclear proliferation was “an opportunity to find at least one common concern which might move the nuclear powers of both the East and of the West to achieve some limited agreements for joint action.”\textsuperscript{45} In July 1965, the superpowers each introduced a draft non-proliferation treaty. Negotiations over the following three years led to concessions on both sides and eventually agreement on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or the NPT, which was opened for signature in the United Nations General Assembly on 1 July 1968 and—subject to ratification by the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, and forty other countries—came into force on 5 March 1970. Although the NPT was initially considered a weak treaty with no enforcement mechanisms and boycotted by two nuclear powers, France and China, it has in retrospect been described as “the only important agreement that emerged from the Eighteen-Nation Committee.”\textsuperscript{46} Shortly after the NPT was opened for signature, the ENCD held its last and 430\textsuperscript{th} meeting on 26 August 1969. The committee was subsequently expanded into the Conference on the Committee on Disarmament, which eventually became the Conference on Disarmament as it exists today.

The ENCD was the first multilateral institution in which nonaligned states contributed to discussions on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation alongside the great powers and major powers of both blocs. It was therefore an important venue for a country such as India, which had already earned considerable recognition as being both nonaligned and scientifically advanced relative to other countries of the Third World.

\textsuperscript{45} National Planning Association, “The Nth country,” xi.
India in the ENCD before 1965

The ENCD’s proceedings opened in March 1962 with high-level delegates present from each country. V. K. Krishna Menon, then defence minister, led the Indian delegation in the first six meetings (and would return to Geneva from time to time as required by protocol). Early on in the proceedings, on 20 March 1962, he strongly advocated issues that one would not expect from a country that many thought was flirting with nuclear weapons. He advocated general disarmament, reminding the committee that this was largely the responsibility of the nuclear powers: “it would be helpful if the sides concerned would take into account the concern of those nations, representing the majority of the peoples of the world, which really cannot put a brake on disarmament—we cannot throw away atomic bombs because we have not got them—all that we can do is to commit ourselves not to make atomic weapons, to the extent we have any capacity to make them.”

Remarkably, he also pushed for non-proliferation: “We have ourselves advocated for a long time that the spread of these weapons to other countries not only increases the area of danger but also places them…in less responsible hands.” And finally, he called for a comprehensive test ban and a moratorium on testing as long as the ENCD was in deliberations: “we are in favour of a treaty as sacrosanct as it can be made; we are in favour of any type of arrangements that can be made. But, pending those treaties, we are even more concerned to see to it that even the prospect of such a treaty is not jeopardised by explosions that may take place.”

Menon’s positions on all three issues were unconditional and in stark contrast to positions that India would begin taking in the late 1960s onward.

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47 ENCD (Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament). Fifth Meeting. University of Michigan Digital Library <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/endc/>, p. 32.
48 Ibid., 35.
49 Ibid., 37.
Of course, it is possible to dismiss his speech as insincere, talk that is essentially cheap for a middle power such as India so long as the great powers are deadlocked on these critical issues. However, one only has to look at the example of France to see the counterfactual case of a country that deliberately avoided the ENCD because of fears that the superpowers would curb its nascent nuclear weapons program. As noted by one scholar, “Participation in disarmament talks largely beyond its control threatened to ensnare France in a bargaining game whose rules were set by other states, principally the superpowers.” India did not suffer from the same fears because at the time, it derived significant status benefits from being an active and constructive member of the ENCD. Menon declared in the committee, “We do not take the view that we have come here as onlookers, merely to bear witness to what has been said and what has not been said, because war and its consequences make no exemptions based on race or creed or geography, or anything of that kind.”

Arthur S. Lall, who led the Indian delegation at the ENCD for the first two years, held similar views of India’s role in the committee. Shortly after stepping down from his role, he wrote an article in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, in which he asked, “In the context of disarmament negotiations one is entitled to ask why the non-aligned nations are there at all.” The answer, according to him, was that “The non-aligned have…come into a position of quite considerable parliamentary power in world councils to which the major power blocs are sensitive. The political philosophy of non-alignment in international affairs, though no older than about fifteen years, has already won the adherence of some forty-five member states of the

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51 ENCD, Fifth Meeting, 42.
United Nations.” He offered a number of reasons as to why the nonaligned nations—one can safely infer that he was thinking primarily of India in this context—had gained such influence. These included the increasingly active and successful disarmament-related diplomacy conducted by the nonaligned countries in the United Nations since the mid-1950s; their role in major international peace conferences in Laos, Congo, and the Middle East; the considerable negative security externalities of nuclear weapons for non-nuclear states; “The sterility of the direct confrontation type of negotiations between the two sides”; the fact that some non-nuclear powers such as Sweden and India would soon be able to manufacture nuclear weapons; and the inadvisability of any agreement on general and complete disarmament that might exclude “approximately one-third of the world which chooses to remain outside the power alliances.”

Lall viewed the role of India and other nonaligned countries as indispensible to the ENCD’s mission. He argued that by 1961, “it was virtually impossible for the two sides to agree to sit down in negotiations without the presence of nonaligned representatives.” In a monograph he subsequently produced as a visiting professor of international relations at Cornell University, he noted, “For the first seven years or so of United Nations history, the non-aligned countries were a small insignificant minority…But things suddenly changed. The success of the Indian resolution on Korea altered the status of the nonaligned at the United Nations…In April 1954 Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru took a step which arose out of this new realization and made the world take note that the nonaligned were no longer going to remain on the side lines. He asked the United Nations to put on its agenda the question of the cessation of nuclear weapon

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53 Ibid., 18-19.
54 Ibid., 18.
tests...Thus, it was a nonaligned initiative which brought to the United Nations the issue of nuclear tests.”

In April 1962, when American and Soviet negotiators had reached an impasse on the control and verification of nuclear tests largely due to the United States’ insistence and the Soviet Union’s flat refusal to allow inspections in all environments, the eight nonaligned nations put forward a compromise proposal that would permit inspections only in the case of underground tests. The Soviets accepted this compromise in May and the Americans accepted it in August, introducing two separate treaties, one on underground tests and one on all other environments—the latter became the PTBT. Reflecting on this episode, Lall argued, “The weight of the Eight Nation memorandum...increased the standing of the nonaligned at the Geneva Conference as partners in negotiation. The nonaligned, of course, entirely concede the primacy of interest of the nuclear powers in the matter of arms control and disarmament, but they do not at all accept President de Gaulle’s view that negotiations should involve nuclear powers alone.” Of course, not every effort by India and the nonaligned nations was successful—a similar attempt to break a deadlock on the number of inspections in early 1963 was “stillborn.”

India in the ENCD after 1965

From 1965 onward, India’s approach to the ENCD underwent a gradual transformation, largely due to the evolution of non-proliferation as an issue. Indian leaders had advocated the non-dissemination of nuclear weapons and technology to non-nuclear states from an early stage in the ENCD, as a step toward disarmament. In July 1962, Menon said to the committee, “We feel that

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55 Lall, Negotiating Disarmament, 2.
56 Ibid., 23.
57 Ibid., 25.
a simple, but effective, agreement [on non-dissemination] on this matter could be achieved forthwith if the Governments of the three nuclear Powers here and the Government of France were to declare unilaterally but simultaneously that here and now they will not pass on to any other country or group of countries nuclear weapons or the control of such weapons or the means and knowledge to manufacture them.”

Vishnu Trivedi, Lall’s successor in the ENCD, argued in March 1964 for the nuclear powers to build on the momentum of the PTBT and introduce a similar treaty for nuclear non-proliferation. He stated what he believed to be the basis of an acceptable agreement: “The four nuclear Powers should commit themselves not to transfer nuclear weapons or weapon technology, and the non-nuclear nations should pledge not to manufacture, possess or receive these weapons.”

Crucially, however, Trivedi argued that nonproliferation was necessary to increase the likelihood of disarmament at a future stage of negotiations—in other words, nonproliferation and disarmament were inextricable from the Indian perspective.

In May 1965, Indian representative B. N. Chakravarty made a speech in the Disarmament Commission in which he outlined a five-point proposal for non-proliferation, which included the non-transfer of nuclear weapons and technology by nuclear powers; the non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear powers; a United Nations security guarantee for non-nuclear powers threatened by nuclear or potential nuclear powers; tangible progress toward disarmament (including a comprehensive test ban treaty, a freeze on production of weapons and delivery vehicles, and a reduction in existing stocks); and non-acquisition and non-manufacture of nuclear

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58 *Times of India*. 1962. “No supply of a-arms to others: Menon asks big powers to act.” 25 July, p. 1. The proceedings of this meeting are missing from the online ENCD archive.

59 ENCD, 174th Meeting, 17.
weapons by non-nuclear powers.\textsuperscript{60} Naturally, this was a tall order for the ENCD and the superpowers. In August 1965, shortly after the superpowers had introduced their respective initial drafts of the NPT in which there were no obligations on the nuclear powers to halt the further production of nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles or to reduce existing stocks, Trivedi decried "the unrealistic and irrational proposition that a non-proliferation treaty should impose obligations only on non-nuclear countries, while the nuclear Powers continue to hold on to their privileged status or club membership by retaining and even increasing their deadly stockpiles."\textsuperscript{61} Trivedi coined the terms "horizontal" and "vertical" proliferation,\textsuperscript{62} as well as "nuclear apartheid,"\textsuperscript{63} as a means of criticizing the nuclear powers for engaging in double standards and excluding India from the nuclear club through the NPT. India had publicly renounced nuclear weapons and supported disarmament and non-proliferation in order to maintain status parity with the great powers in the ENCD—the NPT threatened to subvert India's nuclear ambiguity by compelling it to give up the nuclear option while also relegating it to second-tier status relative to the great powers.

Although much has been made about the security threat posed to India by China's nuclear weapons, by 1966 India was far more concerned about the emerging non-proliferation regime. NPT negotiations had revealed that the existing nuclear powers were unwilling to accept any limits on their nuclear stockpiles while seeking to stop non-nuclear states from acquiring any sensitive nuclear technologies. This potential outcome threatened to leave India out of the great-power club for good. India rallied by pushing hard for disarmament by the great powers in the

\textsuperscript{61} ENCD, 223\textsuperscript{rd} Meeting, 13.
\textsuperscript{62} Burns, \textit{A Seat}, 216.
\textsuperscript{63} ENCD, 298\textsuperscript{th} Meeting, 10. See also Perkovich, \textit{India's Nuclear Bomb}, 138.
ENCD. In November 1966, Lord Chalfont, the British foreign minister, visited India to meet with Indira Gandhi and her top officials to solicit their support for the great power positions on the NPT. The prime minister did not discuss these matters with her guest, leaving matters in the hands of her foreign secretary, C. S. Jha. During their meeting, Chalfont argued that India’s stance on disarmament should not get in the way of a “simple non-proliferation treaty” that did not require inspection and control. He also argued that the nuclear powers should not be expected to relinquish their weapons in the face of “the developing Chinese nuclear threat.” Jha explained that India had been in favor of disarmament well before the Chinese nuclear threat had emerged. He was also sanguine in the hope that “with the passage of time, China might adopt a more cooperative attitude to various disarmament proposals particularly after it assumes its place in the United Nations,” which Jha himself had lobbied for as Permanent Representative to the UN in 1959. He went on to say that from India’s point of view, “it was an unacceptable thesis that China’s growing nuclear capability is a sufficient justification for the refusal on the part of the nuclear Powers to agree to disarmament measures. It could in fact be argued that a genuine move in the direction of nuclear disarmament on the part of the nuclear Powers might have a favorable impact on China.” Jha also highlighted the growing feeling in India that “disarmament negotiations were being directed towards the preservation of the monopoly of smaller Powers,” a direct barb at the British representative. In essence, Jha and his government valued the potential

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65 Ibid., 46.
denial of India’s status parity with the great powers (via the NPT) more than the potential nuclear threat from China.

Nonetheless, Indira Gandhi desultorily explored security guarantees from the nuclear powers as a way of hedging against the Chinese threat while also pushing for a more balanced NPT. In April 1967, L.K. Jha, principal secretary to the prime minister, visited Moscow, Paris, Washington, and London to discuss the matter of security guarantees for non-nuclear powers in the NPT. In London, along with P.N. Haksar (who was then acting high commissioner), he met with the British prime minister and a handful of his senior ministers and officials, including Lord Chalfont. Aside from stating previously held positions on the proposed security guarantee, the two Indian officials discussed the NPT with Lord Chalfont. In his secret report of this discussion, L.K. Jha noted telling his interlocutor that “[India] could not sign a treaty which would hamper our potential for developing nuclear technology to the fullest extent. This was one field in which India was not under-developed and we proposed not to take a back seat in the advance of nuclear technology.”

Once again, Indian leaders viewed their country’s status in world politics arising from scientific achievements in the field of nuclear technology, yet they were nowhere close to contemplating weaponization—nuclear ambiguity remained Delhi’s preferred strategy for attaining status in the eyes of the world.

The NPT Becomes Reality

The NPT denied India its objective and consequently set off the process by which Indian decision-makers arrived at their decision to break with the international nuclear regime. In

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October 1968, when it was already too late, Indira Gandhi addressed the United Nations General Assembly. On the NPT, she said, “The problems of insecurity cannot be solved by imposing arbitrary restrictions on those who do not possess nuclear weapons, without any corresponding steps to deal with the basic problem of limiting stockpiles in the hands of a few powers. How can the urge to acquire nuclear status be controlled so long as this imbalance persists?” Although India had used its position in the ENCD and United Nations General Assembly to get key provisions introduced into the NPT that provided U.N.-backed security guarantees for non-nuclear powers facing nuclear threats and permitted the pursuit of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes (under international supervision), Delhi’s main objective—to get the nuclear powers to concretely commit to halting production and reducing stocks of nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles—went unmet.

Over time, the international nuclear regime began to lose legitimacy for India as the NPT took shape. When the NPT came into force in March 1970, the regime also became a closed one from India’s perspective. India, unable to join a treaty that essentially froze the number of legal nuclear weapons states in the world, was relegated to the second tier of world powers. The rule following strategy of abjuring nuclear weapons had decidedly not paid off. Consequently, India refused to sign the NPT, and began to consider ways in which to redress the status imbalance the latter had created.

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67 Gandhi (Indira), *Selected Speeches*, 359-60.
SOCIAL COMPETITION, 1971-74

When the NPT came into force in March 1970, it stated that only countries that possessed nuclear weapons on 1 January 1967 were officially recognized as nuclear powers. There was no clearer demotion of India’s status in the international system. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom were official nuclear weapons states. France and China, albeit non-signatories to the NPT, were de facto nuclear powers. India was neither. The carefully crafted strategy of nuclear ambiguity, designed to maximize India’s international status, had resulted in disaster. In March 1968, the journalist G. S. Bhargava wrote, “The situation would have been different if two years ago we had gone ahead and launched a peaceful explosion. This would have left us capable of taking the next step [of not signing the NPT] without being immediately committed to making the bomb.” In other words, India would now have to demonstrate its nuclear capability.

It was in these circumstances that Indira Gandhi gave in-principle approval for India’s first nuclear test in the fall of 1971, and formal approval a year later. The fact that it took almost three years to produce a nuclear explosion suggests that India had essentially not taken any significant steps toward a weapons capability since US intelligence agencies had estimated a one to three year time horizon for weaponization in 1965. Moreover, as George Perkovich has argued, the 1971 decision to conduct a peaceful nuclear explosion had less to do with the East Pakistan crisis and Bangladesh War of 1971 than with “the Atomic Energy Commission’s determination to prove its mettle and Indira Gandhi’s sense that India would gain confidence in itself as a nation and in her as a leader.” He adds: “More than any other international

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consideration, the desire for major power status affected India’s eagerness to demonstrate its nuclear capability,”⁷¹ a desire that was in no small measure heightened by the coming into force of the NPT.

Given that the China threat was already a decade old and the security-related events of 1971 did not fundamentally alter Indian thinking on the strategic utility of nuclear weapons, the nuclear test in 1974 has prominently been explained as a domestic politics driven outcome.⁷² A key argument in this regard is that Indira Gandhi held a tenuous grip on power in 1973 and early 1974. Domestic support for her government was at an all-time low and the economy was in recession. Following the test, her approval ratings shot up and 90 percent of the population said they were “personally proud” of India’s achievement.⁷³ It is, of course, impossible for her to have known in advance that her decision would be popular among the public. One might ascribe to domestic politics the fact that legislators in Parliament had been clamoring for a test since Shastri’s days as prime minister. The main problem with this explanation is that the major challenges to her rule came not from Parliament, where her party held a two-thirds majority, but from social movements, labor unions, and regional party leaders. Moreover, if electoral politics were a compulsion, she could have waited till the country was closer to its next general election, which was two years away (but in the event did not materialize because Gandhi imposed emergency rule in India from 1975 till 1977—another sign that the challenge came from civil society and not Parliament).

Thus in the absence of compelling security and domestic politics reasons for testing, status concerns take on renewed importance as an explanation for the 1974 test. One scholar has

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 168. Emphasis in original.
⁷³ Ibid., 67-68.
called this test “at best, a scientific experiment,” which was officially termed a “demonstration,” presumably of Indian achievements in nuclear science.\textsuperscript{74} Faced with an international regime that had punished India for rule following and denied it status in the global hierarchy, and one that had closed off any prospect of India being recognized as a nuclear power in the near future, India decided to become a rule breaker.

Three months after the 1974 test, Indian negotiator Vishnu Trivedi presented a paper at a meeting in Divonne, France, organized by the Arms Control Association and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In it, he summarized the Indian predicament poignantly:

\begin{quote}
[India] adopted the Atomic Energy Act in April 1948 and set up its Atomic Energy Commission in August 1948, one year after independence. Indian engineers and scientists designed, built and commissioned the first research reactor in Asia in 1956, built India’s own fuel element fabrication plant in 1959 and her first plutonium separation plant in 1964. There was thus nothing to prevent India from exploding a nuclear explosive device before January 1, 1967, the date separating the era of nuclear-weapon powers from the nonnuclear-weapon powers under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

Encapsulated in this statement was everything an observer needed to know about India’s desire for status based on nuclear ambiguity in the pre-NPT world, and the sharp jolt that Delhi had received in terms of status demotion that led to its “peaceful nuclear explosion.” The 1974 test truly was the “demonstration” that India’s leaders had longed for the world to see.\textsuperscript{76} Having restored the status imbalance with the great powers that the NPT had created, India then settled back into a posture of nuclear ambiguity for the next 24 years.

\textsuperscript{74} Abraham, “Contra-Proliferation,” 118-119.
\textsuperscript{76} Abraham, “Contra-Proliferation,” 118-119.
SOCIAL CREATIVITY, 1974-95

India’s 1974 test served to correct the status inconsistency caused by the NPT coming into force. Although India considered the regime to be unfair and discriminatory, it was now a state with demonstrable nuclear capabilities, which once again created a pathway for India to claim symbolic equality with the great powers in the top ranks of the international nuclear regime. The international regime was therefore open and only partially legitimate. Disarmament remained a substantively legitimate goal in the eyes of Indian leaders, but the international regime for attaining it appeared deeply unfair and biased. The result was a strategy of social creativity, specifically focused on redirecting the international regime by de facto observing its rules while advocating for their modification, to go beyond non-proliferation, to disarmament.

A world without nuclear weapons had always been a major foreign policy goal for India. Like the policy of non-alignment, India’s stance on disarmament provided Delhi with status benefits among states in the Third World, which at this time was a vital constituency for rising powers such as China and India. India’s advocacy helped maintain its status as a champion of the downtrodden that acted as a strong voice for the weaker states vis-à-vis the great powers. Championing disarmament therefore allowed India to reframe its negative status (as a rule breaker) within the international regime in positive terms, by calling on the regime to achieve even higher goals than it currently did. India therefore did not take any steps toward a nuclear weapons program after 1974 because it viewed the international regime as open but in need of procedural legitimacy. In essence, India employed a strategy of social creativity by amplifying its unfairness-based critique of the NPT and reinvigorating calls for disarmament. Unfortunately for Delhi, the regime reacted to punish India for its rule violation by restricting the supply of
nuclear materials and technology—the Nuclear Suppliers Group was established as a direct
response to the Indian nuclear test.

The NPT still stung Indian policymakers, not because it constrained their non-existent
nuclear program, but because it was a constant reminder of India’s inferior status relative to the
great powers and its rising power neighbor, China. It is therefore not surprising that following its
test, India adopted the position of conscientious objector to the regime, rather than continuing
down a rule-breaking path. Vishnu Trivedi’s commentary on the NPT, mentioned above, was
reiterated in a 1976 secret policy planning paper titled “India’s Diplomatic Objectives” by A.K.
Damodaran, then Joint Secretary of Policy Planning in the Ministry of External Affairs.
Analyzing India’s diplomatic priorities in concentric geographic circles, he wrote, “After the
neighbours and near-neighbours…our major interest would be the Superpowers with whom we
have to co-exist in this planet [sic] under conditions of some equal relationship.”

Having established this premise of equal status—the only grounds on which to claim parity with the
great powers, given the large gap in capabilities—he put forward a view that summed up India’s
strategy of social creativity with regard to global governance in this period. “On the whole we
are a status quo power,” he wrote, “but we have by no means a vested interest in the United
Nations structure as it is today. While we would certainly not risk a confrontation to change it, it
should not be forgotten that we ourselves are one of the deprived countries in the 1945 U.N.
Charter.” He argued that India should continue negotiating with the international institutions
created and dominated by the superpowers in order to derive the maximum benefit of


78 Ibid, 29.
cooperation they had to offer. In the United Nations, he argued, “we have to play a role commensurate with our importance. We also have to be persistence in seeking influence and authority in these forums by continuous diplomacy.”\(^7^9\) In the realm of nuclear weapons and disarmament in particular, he added:

> Our peaceful nuclear explosion is an affirmation of the right of the poorer countries to develop their own technological expertise. It is also connected with our feeling that the resources of the world should be exploited under some reasonable international order and not merely by the present, small group of countries possessing the technical capacity to do so.\(^8^0\)

In keeping with Indian thinking since 1947, Damodaran viewed the nuclear test of 1974 as an expression of India’s right to claim status parity with the great powers, and consequently the NPT as a regime that denied India’s great-power ambitions while according that status to others. However, this fact was not grounds for breaking with the global order, rather he advocated negotiating with it and seeking to change it in ways that would strengthen India’s claim to fair and equal treatment. Having earlier said that India was a status quo power, he concluded his paper by qualifying this statement in a way that depicts the dual nature of social creativity, which is to modify the existing hierarchy without overturning it:

> [T]here is no escaping the fact that, on several key issues…we are not a status quo power, particularly vis-a-vis the Superpowers. We are, in many senses, a have-not power and cannot totally accept the policies dictated by the interests of the have-powers who are naturally interested in preserving their political and economic power and influence.\(^8^1\)

\(^7^9\) Ibid.
\(^8^0\) Ibid, 32.
\(^8^1\) Ibid, 34-35.
At a fundamental level, India’s decision-makers considered the foundations of the global order to be worth investing in; however, they wished to do so as equals with the great powers, and nuclear non-proliferation was a vital test of the good faith of the great powers and their treatment of India. What this meant in behavioral terms was that “Only by behaving like an important and strong power can India become one,”82 but the definition of importance and strength would be on India’s terms. Delhi would continue following the norms of the global non-proliferation regime while decrying the inequality that it had created between nuclear haves and have-nots. The very term ‘nuclear apartheid’ contained the essence of India’s complaint: a situation where artificial exclusivity replaced equality of opportunity as the ordering principle.

SOCIAL COMPETITION, 1995-98

The next break in India’s relationship with the global nonproliferation regime came in May 1998, when Delhi tested five nuclear devices in the same area where it had conducted its first nuclear test 24 years earlier. Until 1998, India had maintained a strategy of social creativity by trying to redirect the international regime, supporting multilateral disarmament initiatives (which usually went nowhere) and denouncing the NPT as unfair and discriminatory. In June 1988, Rajiv Gandhi took a major initiative by submitting to the UN General Assembly an “Action Plan for Ushering in a Nuclear-weapon free and Non-Violent World Order,” which called for the elimination of nuclear weapons in three stages by 2010. The plan prioritized global and universal disarmament, a move clearly designed to achieve status parity for India.83 It has been argued India’s plan in fact prioritized disarmament for the de jure nuclear powers, “in keeping with India’s interests.” However, this assessment is problematic for two reasons. First, the plan itself

82 Ibid, 33.
83 Kennedy, “India’s Nuclear Odyssey,” 145.
clearly stated its objective as disarmament for “all other countries” in addition to the nuclear weapons states. Second, it is unclear what material interests were at stake at a time when there were no major threats from either Pakistan or China. In the latter case, a military buildup from both sides on the border had been peacefully resolved the year before, with renewed resolve to seriously pursue dialogue on resolving differences. Rajiv Gandhi himself made a historic visit to Beijing in December 1988, where he conceded for the first time that Tibet was an integral part of China and that the border issue should be bracketed in order to allow the overall bilateral relationship to progress. Given these circumstances, it is unclear what India’s material interests were at this time that required it to prioritize disarmament for the declared nuclear powers. The only viable explanation remains that of status parity.

The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union did, however, dramatically alter India’s strategic landscape. No longer able to rely on the 1971 Indo-Soviet mutual defense pact and faced with an increasingly rampant insurgency in the Kashmir valley backed by Pakistan, some have argued that India’s next nuclear test in 1998 was driven by security concerns. However, security-driven arguments for the 1998 test are weakened when one considers that although India was more vulnerable to US pressure after the demise of the Soviet Union, \textit{a priori} the one way to worsen India’s prospects in a unipolar world dominated by the US was to conduct a second round of nuclear tests. Moreover, a second round of tests would undoubtedly set off an arms race or at least retaliation from Pakistan, if not China. As it turned out, Pakistan responded with nuclear tests of its own just two weeks later. China on the other hand was distant and cool in its response, partly because by then the nuclear disparity between India and China was so great—according to one estimate, by 1995 China had conducted over

\footnote{See Ganguly, “India’s Pathway.”}
four dozen nuclear tests. Finally, India’s relations with China, Pakistan, and the United States were not in jeopardy in the mid-1990s. Therefore it is unlikely the decision to test was motivated primarily by security concerns, Vajpayee and Defense Minister George Fernandes’ public claims about China being the “potential threat number one” notwithstanding.

The domestic politics argument for testing has been made rather convincingly. The main factor in these explanations is the rise of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power, whose vision of a “macho national security state” or particular sense of national pride (which is distinct from the Congress party’s sense of national pride) led to the decision to test. Individual-level explanations have also relied on Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s “oppositional-nationalist” identity as one that created the sufficient conditions for the 1998 test. And finally, Vajpayee’s political vulnerability within his ruling coalition of parties, and within his own party, is held to have precipitated in his mind the need to test as soon as he came to power in 1998 in order to keep his coalition detractors and hardliners within his own party at bay. Most of these arguments are contradicted by the fact that successive governments since the Narasimha Rao government of 1992-96 had seriously considered, taken preparatory steps, and come very close to testing nuclear weapons, only to be held back by some combination of fear for the impact of sanctions on the fragile post-1991 crisis economy and American pressure. While Vajpayee or the BJP may certainly have had the nationalist credentials and drive to stand

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89 Hymans, The Psychology, pp. 171-203.
up to the US, it was also the case that by 1998 the Indian economy had enjoyed four years of
growth at approximately 6.5 percent per year on average.\textsuperscript{91} Along this dimension, Vajpayee was
less constrained than his predecessors. More importantly, two major events in the global nuclear
weapons control regime played a greater role in motivating India’s second test. The first was the
negotiation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which began in 1993 and all but
singled out India and Pakistan as potential problem states whose signature was required—along
with 44 other states that were less problematic—for the treaty to come into effect. Worse yet, the
treaty itself embodied an inequality similar to the NPT in the 1960s. While it was a
‘comprehensive’ test ban, in that in addition to all the types of tests banned by the 1963 Partial
Test Ban Treaty it also banned underground tests, it did not ban a new generation of tests such as
sub-critical tests or computer simulated tests that did not require a nuclear explosion but could
still generate useful technical data for those with the capability to conduct them, i.e. the great
powers.

Once again, India was relegated to a lower status compared to the great powers, at a time
when China could lay greater claim to membership of the club due to its impressive head start
over India in economic growth and military development. The second major event took place in
May 1995, when the NPT—which originally had been valid for 25 years—was reviewed and
permanently extended by all parties to it. This was a development that “stunned” India’s foreign
policy establishment,\textsuperscript{92} which had not expected other countries to go along with the American
desire for a permanent extension. After 24 years of trying to shift the international regime’s
priorities as a means of garnering status within it, India decided once again to challenge it. For

\textsuperscript{91} World Bank, World Development Indicators (WDI), retrieved March 23, 2014.
\textsuperscript{92} Mistry, Dinshaw. 1998. “Domestic-International Linkages: India and the Comprehensive Test-
the first time since the late 1960s, changes in the global nuclear weapons regime had rendered it both closed and illegitimate in India’s eyes. The response was a strategy of social competition in order to outdo the nuclear weapons states on the dimension of power they valued most—nuclear weapons.

Sometime between May and December 1995, Prime Minister Rao authorized preparations for nuclear tests, which due to political instability and repeated elections did not come about until the BJP-led coalition’s election in March 1998. Following the test, just as it had done in 1974, India began cooperating with the regime again while criticizing it for being biased. Delhi announced a voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing and proposed various measures to reduce the threat of nuclear war in South Asia, including a ‘no first use’ policy. Moreover, the BJP-led government signaled that it was ready to sign the CTBT and also offered to join multilateral counter-proliferation efforts such as the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Container Security Initiative. An India that was once again satisfied with its status parity with the great powers was more willing to engage with the global nonproliferation and testing regimes that were now de facto open to India’s rise since they had been unable to contain it. In the event, the CTBT lost much steam after the US Congress failed to ratify it in 1999.

MOVING TOWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY, 1998 ONWARD

The international nuclear weapons regimes further opened up to accommodate India in 2005, when the George W. Bush government signaled its intention of signing a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with Delhi, which would amount to an endorsement of India’s nuclear status and behavior as a ‘responsible nuclear power’ since 1974. India’s relationship with the global nonproliferation regime has been far less antagonistic since this agreement was concluded
in 2008, because India now views the regime as both legitimate and open to its rise. The danger remains, of course, of any institutional moves in future to close off potential avenues of status accumulation for India within the regime, in which case India might revert to a strategy of social creativity, or—worse yet for the regime—social competition.

CONCLUSION

In the two decades following independence, Indian leaders believed that non-proliferation was a desirable goal, that international norms and rules surrounding nuclear weapons applied equally to all states, and that the nascent regime for the control of nuclear weapons left a pathway open to India’s rise as a potential nuclear weapons state. Hence, they chose a strategy of exploring nuclear technology while abjuring nuclear weapons. Subsequently, when the regime shifted in ways that made it closed and procedurally illegitimate in India’s eyes, Indian leaders decided to break non-proliferation rules and conduct a nuclear test to demonstrate India’s capability and status equality with the great powers. The test had the effect of de facto opening up the regime again, since India was able to claim parity in nuclear sophistication with the great powers (though many have argued that the test was a failure).

The regime responded by isolating India and creating a great-power monopoly over international arrangements for the supply of nuclear materials and technology. Between 1974 and 1995, India viewed the international regime as open but deeply unfair and biased. Consequently it sought to change the regime in ways that would accommodate its position on nuclear weapons. It emphasized disarmament and its own responsible nuclear behavior while being technically in contravention of the regime itself. The decision to pursue nuclear weapons came in 1989, following the failure of a major attempt by India to shape global rules and
discourse on disarmament to make them equally applicable to all states. However, at this point India did not deem it necessary to test a weapon to assert its status as a responsible nuclear power.

The decision to test came in 1995 amidst negotiations toward a potential CTBT that would allow the great powers to continue computer-based and sub-critical testing, and an NPT that was indefinitely extended, thus permanently locking India out of the top ranks of the non-proliferation regime. India reverted to a rule breaking strategy in order to reassert its status in a regime that it once again viewed as illegitimate and closed. Unexpectedly, India’s second round of tests did not evoke the type of reaction that its first tests had evoked. The great powers were far more accommodating this time around. Sensing greater fairness in the manner in which the great powers viewed its nuclear program, India began to consider the regime legitimate and worth cooperating with on a limited basis. It offered to participate in various initiatives short of the NPT itself.

Finally, with the conclusion of a nuclear agreement in 2008 that recognized India’s status as a responsible nuclear power and created exceptions for it within arrangements for the supply of nuclear technology and materials, India once again viewed the regime as both procedurally fair and open, and adopted a strategy it had last used in the 1960s, which was to support the regime and uphold its rules.

**Implications for Theories of Nuclear Proliferation**

India’s nuclear behavior is best understood by viewing multilateral nuclear diplomacy and nuclear testing as two options on a spectrum of choices a state may make to enhance its *status*
Within a particular international regime.\textsuperscript{93} Thus traditional arguments that emphasize a drive for nuclear weapons based on perceived security threats, the narrow interests of scientists or atomic-energy bureaucrats, or an obsession with modernity need to be embedded within a broader narrative of status-seeking in the case of rising powers. The quest for great-power status gives rise to specific behaviors based on state perceptions of whether a regime is legitimate or not, and the ease with which a rising state can join the ranks of the great powers that dominate the regime. In other words, the desire to test a nuclear device or to acquire nuclear weapons does not occur in a vacuum for purely technological or (domestic or international) structural reasons, which are necessary but insufficient to explain the evolution of a nuclear program.

At least since the end of the Second World War, states have operated in an international system that resembles a social environment thick with rules, norms, and institutions. It is this social environment—in a more neutral sense than traditional conceptions of ‘international society’—that provides the scaffolding for a rising power’s status ascendance and influences its decision whether to emulate social norms by not testing a nuclear weapon, to challenge social norms by testing it, or to modify social norms by changing institutional design and focus. The decision to test therefore becomes one of a number of choices that a rising power may make based on the social environment in which it finds itself. There is no sense of inevitability in this decision, as the rolling back of many nuclear programs around the world has shown. Given the right international regime characteristics, a rising power may very well decide that its status needs are best served by rule following rather than rule breaking.

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\textsuperscript{93} In a similar vein, Lisa Martin (1992), “Interests, Power, and Multilateralism,” \textit{International Organization}, 46:4, 767, argues that multilateralism is one among many tools that states will choose depending on what maximizes their interests.
Chapter 9

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

Social hierarchies are ubiquitous in the daily lives of individuals, organizations, nations, states, and even the international system. The status-based dynamics observed in the preceding chapters have parallels in various domains—firms, political parties, race- or caste-based social orders, and even academia—where a senior leadership group sets the rules of the game for those lower down the pecking order. A junior professor a few years away from applying for entry to the elite club of tenured faculty assesses the legitimacy and openness of the institution (university) in which she operates. If she thinks that having a particular set of qualifications (research output, teaching evaluations, departmental service, etc.) gives her a good chance of getting tenure, and that the promotion process is fair, she will seek to attain those qualifications and apply for tenure, i.e. she will engage in social mobility. If she thinks she has qualifications that her university does not value (teaching vs. research, for example), and that the promotion process is unfair, she may launch a protest against the university or apply to competing institutions, i.e. she will engage in social competition. In between are scenarios in which only one of the two conditions—openness or legitimacy—is satisfied, leading her to perhaps advocate for different tenure criteria or a fairer promotion process as part of a strategy of social creativity. All of the above scenarios apply to any actor seeking entry into the top ranks of a social hierarchy, and in this sense rising powers in international security regimes are no different. This is however an uncommon way of thinking about international politics, particularly in the context of power transition. Therefore it is
important to understand the major themes that emerge from the case analyses of the preceding chapters.

**STATUS POLITICS IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY REGIMES**

The first and obvious finding of the empirical analysis is that contrary to the vast majority of the power transition literature, international security regimes emerge as major sites of contestation between rising powers and great powers during power transition. While most existing research has focused on war, which is one possible *outcome* of power transition, few scholars have looked closely at the *process* of power transition. There is an entire realm of interaction that exists between rising and great powers that can provide significant clues as to why some rising powers end up adopting revisionist foreign policies while others do not. International security regimes are the locus of these interactions, and the main mechanism driving the latter is the desire for great-power status.

Great powers often design the rules and norms of international security regimes in order to entrench their own privileged position in the global order and to constrain the rise of new powers. Britain attempted to use the Declaration of Paris to constrain the US’s rise by abolishing the practice of privateering. The US sought to use the Washington Conference to constrain Japan’s naval expansion in the Far East and weaken the Anglo-Japanese relationship. The US and Soviet Union could not agree on much regarding global nuclear governance in the 1960s, but they could agree on the need to restrict new countries, including India, from joining the nuclear club. Vitally, these attempts at restraining rising powers are not always doomed to failure. They can work if the great powers are attentive (even inadvertently) to the perceptions of rising powers with regard to the design and functioning of international security regimes. As the
example of Japan at the Washington Conference showed, a rising power that is treated in an unrestricted and unbiased manner will follow the rules of an international security regime even at the cost of short-term insecurity or material losses. On the other hand, a poorly designed international regime that deprives a rising power of institutional upward mobility and creates inequalities between it and other major powers is likely to provoke active resistance and challenges from the rising power, as was the case with India’s response to the international regime for the control of nuclear weapons that emerged in the late 1960s and persists to this day.

Even this latter type of bad institutional equilibrium is not irreversible—in the mid-2000s, when the US finally recognized India as a responsible nuclear power and began lifting various multilateral restrictions on India’s nuclear commerce, India became content to cooperate with the international regime and uphold its basic tenets. These types of outcomes suggest that institutions are not fixed and rigid entities but rather fluid social hierarchies that can in fact be altered by their most powerful members. An appropriate counterfactual in this regard would be the case of Japan and the Washington system. It is entirely conceivable that the US and Britain could have elicited greater cooperation from the Japanese navy through the 1920s had they modified the international naval arms control regime to permit Japan an equal capital-ship ratio. Although Japan did not have the resources to build at the same level as the great powers, its naval leaders greatly valued the symbolic equality of a 10:10:10 ratio.

Understanding this drive for symbolic equality is vital in all the cases. A rule or norm that imposes little or no costs on a rising power, or that even produces significant economic benefit by way of reduced spending on armaments, will still be resisted so long as a rising power perceives the rule to be denying it the right to possess a particular instrument or strategic option that might give it symbolic equality with the great powers. This is the case even if the rising
power has no intention of actually utilizing the instrument or option in question. Thus the US valued privateering not only for its putative strategic value but for what it symbolized—it was the only naval instrument that would allow the US some semblance of being an important maritime player.\(^1\) Japan valued its right to construct capital ships up to the same tonnage limits as the great powers, even though actually following through would bankrupt its economy. India went to great diplomatic lengths in the 1950s and 1960s to preserve its nuclear option without ever seriously intending to exercise it, because it was the only way to maintain the most visible trappings of great power while lacking the economic or military foundations. It is telling that after challenging an international security regime and asserting their respective rights, neither the US nor India went further down the path of actually utilizing the respective instruments they had sought to preserve—the US did not use privateers again after 1856, and India did not attempt to develop nuclear weapons for 15 years after its first test, and that too only in response to reports of Pakistan’s acquisition of nuclear weapons. Had Japan’s challenge to the Washington system not gotten caught up in broader geopolitical currents in the 1930s, it is likely that Japan too would not have resumed building capital ships at the scale that it did from the mid-1930s onward.

Regarding the choice of status-seeking strategies among rising powers, the evidence shows that contrary to the predictions of some social psychologists, the sequence does not always run from social mobility to social creativity and then social competition. The US and Japan did follow this sequence, beginning with rule following behavior, then switching to some form of creativity (regime expansion in both cases), followed by a direct challenge to the international regime. It is possible, however, for a rising power to switch from mobility to

\(^1\) Even though the practice of the blockade and the sheer strength of the British Royal Navy would have rendered privateers superfluous in any major conflict.
competition if the perceived openness and legitimacy of an international regime change simultaneously. This was the case with the advent of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), which dramatically altered India’s perceptions of the international regime along both dimensions and resulted in the decision to demonstrate India’s nuclear prowess through a peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE). What all the cases have in common is that the rising power in each case opened with a social mobility strategy. At each switching point thereafter, there were external changes in the international regime or the global order more broadly, effected in all cases by the great powers, which altered one or both dimensions along which the rising powers evaluated their status equality with the great powers.

International regimes are thus vital sources of information for rising powers about how the great powers perceive them. The institutional design and functioning of a regime reflect the intentions and values of the great powers. If a rising power perceives the regime as potentially granting its claim to symbolic equality with the great powers, it will act in ways to capitalize on the opportunity (through social mobility). If it perceives the regime as potentially denying its claim, it will act in ways to modify the regime or challenge it outright in order to reassert its claim to great-power status. Understanding the status-related attributes of international regimes is vital for comprehending the security externalities they produce. As this dissertation has demonstrated, existing literatures on the laws of war, arms control, and nuclear non-proliferation leave important puzzles unaddressed due to their narrow focus on the material aspects of external constraints and domestic politics. A focus on the status concerns of rising powers illuminates the real material fallout of seemingly innocuous institutional variables. For example, the fact that a successful arms control agreement such as the Washington Conference or the NPT might in fact
lead to further arms buildups or nuclear acquisition is only a paradox if one does not take into account the security externalities of status ambitions.

**GENERALIZING THE FINDINGS**

This dissertation tested a theory of status-seeking using in-depth longitudinal case studies, each one focusing on a single rising power in relation to a single international security regime. There are a number of other ways in which to approach this empirical task. It is possible to test the theory using a cross-sectional approach, comparing the approaches of a number of rising powers in a single time period with regard to a single international security regime. As mentioned in Chapter 2, a study of the respective approaches of China, India, and Japan to the international nuclear regime in the 1960s and 1970s—a period when all three countries were rising powers—would help generalize the findings of the current study, though such an effort would encounter challenges of comparability across a set of very diverse cases.

Another approach might be to consider the status-seeking strategies of a single rising power across a number of different international security regimes, such as the cases of India and the international nuclear regime as well as the prohibition regimes for biological weapons, chemical weapons, and landmines. Given that all these regimes are designed with the intention of preventing the spread and use of certain types of weapons, they fall broadly within the same issue-area. Moreover, studying the approach of a single country helps to address a number of unobservable sources of bias that might arise from cross-country studies. In the Indian case, for example, one could argue that because the prohibition regimes for biological and chemical weapons and landmines did not create a tier of great powers to which India did not have access,
India was more willing to cooperate in these cases than in the case of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Finally, it might be possible to generalize the findings of this study to issue-areas other than international security, particularly in the contemporary era. For example, a status-based framework helps make sense of why after years of un成功的ly trying to secure permanent membership on the UN Security Council, rising powers such as India and Brazil have not resorted to a strategy of social competition. The answer lies mostly in the perceived procedural fairness of the UNSC as well as its partial openness. The institution of rotating non-permanent membership with no limit on numbers of terms allows countries such as India and Brazil to periodically join the ranks of the permanent five (P-5) members and also to consider the decisions of the UNSC to be legitimately arrived at, even if their substance might frequently be disagreeable. Thus it is only when the UNSC becomes illegitimate in the eyes of India and Brazil that they are likely to challenge the international regime, which in this case would most likely involve exit.

More contemporary applications of the theory suggest themselves in the international regimes for trade, development, and climate change. For example, the establishment of the WTO’s dispute settlement mechanism has undoubtedly made the international trade regime more acceptable to a number of rising powers, including China, which was a latecomer to the regime. Moreover, the fact that a growing economy brings greater leverage and importance in international trade negotiations suggests that the international trade regime is relatively open compared to say the UN Security Council. Thus faced with a relatively open and increasingly
legitimate international regime, rising powers are likely to exercise social mobility in world trade and largely follow the rules and norms of the WTO and associated multilateral trade bodies.\footnote{The WTO may lose some legitimacy from the imposition of non-tariff barriers and other uncompetitive practices by the great powers. However, there is nothing strictly in the institutional design of the WTO that prevents rising powers from pursuing similar policies, therefore it can still be considered a mostly legitimate international regime.}

In contrast to international trade, the regime for international development is relatively closed due to the existence of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which is tied to the developed-country club of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Moreover, the US and its allies control appointments to senior leadership positions at international development agencies such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. By and large, the international regime has appeared legitimate to rising powers such as India and China, in that they do not question the importance of foreign aid and development assistance, and the regime itself has not operated in an unequal manner, having benefited both countries in their development trajectories. Therefore my theory would predict that the rising powers would engage in social creativity by trying to expand the international regime so as to include themselves in its top ranks. Indeed that is precisely what India’s and China’s ambitious foreign aid programs aim to achieve by providing the kind of untied infrastructure-focused aid that the DAC countries no longer provide, thus raising their global profile as donor countries by being more attractive to potential aid recipients and borrowers than the DAC countries.

Finally, in the area of climate change, the international regime has been open in that any rising power can join its top ranks by contributing to the regime’s goals. However, the regime until recently was not viewed as legitimate by China and India, who perceived the West’s attempt to elicit greater cooperation from large developing countries as an unfair shirking of the West’s own responsibility for causing the industrial pollution that led to the climate crisis of the
late 20th century. Faced with an open and illegitimate international regime, China and India engaged in strategies of social creativity, specifically seeking to redirect the international regime in a manner that would recognize their right to produce emissions as developing countries. The resulting principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities was a classic example of changing the valence of an attribute from negative (emissions) to positive (development). In recent years, however, both countries have increasingly accepted the legitimacy of shared burdens and are gradually increasing their respective levels of cooperation with the international climate change regime in order to appear as problem solvers alongside the great powers, especially the US. In this manner, my theory of status-seeking can be applied to international regimes, rising powers, and time periods other than the ones considered in this dissertation.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND POLICY**

The findings of this dissertation have implications for theories of power transition, international organization, and status in world politics. First and foremost, the theory suggest that there are conditions under which a power transition can proceed on peaceful terms if the great powers are attentive to the status aspirations of rising powers. The history of the Westphalian state system offers only one example of a peaceful transition, which took place between Britain and the United States. Standard explanations for this transition have focused on ad hoc factors such as cultural affinity between the two powers. However, without specifying how cultural affinity matters, it is difficult to fully engage with it as a cause of peaceful transition. Arguably, it mattered because it enabled Britain to accept the American desire for great-power status, and to

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accede to that desire by providing institutional pathways in the global order for the US to attain symbolic equality with Britain.\(^4\)

Thus war is only one possible outcome of a power transition. There is much that goes on in the process of transition that can lead to alternative outcomes if the status aspirations of rising powers are taken seriously. International regimes offer the ideal environment in which to take these aspirations seriously, because rules and norms provide visible and measurable yardsticks by which rising powers (and other observers) can measure the level of esteem in which the great powers hold them. The most important observation from an international organizations perspective therefore is that institutional design and social purpose are vitally important during power transitions. As William Thompson has observed, “small s” status concerns (i.e. affronts, irritations, etc.) are heightened in times of “big S” status changes (i.e. power transitions).\(^5\) The objectives of an international regime, the degree to which it provides pathways for mobility, and the extent of its procedural fairness are vital to the status ambitions of rising powers. Simply put, form matters as much as substance for rising powers in international regimes.

As far as the literature on status is concerned, this dissertation contributes a theory of the conditions under which states will pick one identity management strategy over another, and what the behavioral implications of these strategic choices are in the context of international security regimes. In testing the theory against the case evidence, I have been careful to address materialist explanations and show that rising powers are willing to incur significant risks and costs in material terms when opportunities to attain great-power status arise, or when threats to the attainment of great-power status arise. The dissertation also diverges from the standard approach

\(^4\) Of course, once the US had surpassed Britain materially and decided to take on a global role during the First World War, these dynamics were no longer relevant as the transition had already taken place.

\(^5\) Thompson, “Status Conflict,” p. 222.
to status in world politics, which is to study its impacts on the propensity for conflict between states. In doing so, it shows that status-seeking is not a purely emotional or irrational exercise that leads to extremely risky behavior such as conflict initiation (though, as Jonathan Renshon argues, even conflict initiation is a rational method of accruing status).\footnote{Renshon, “Status Deficits,” p. 10.} Rather, states can rationally pursue status as an objective and act strategically in order to attain it. Status-seeking can involve emotional reactions and it does have significant security externalities, but it is no more an emotional pursuit than the pursuit of security or economic well being.

The policy implications of all of the above can be summarized in three broad points. First, if great powers such as the US seek to “manage” the rise of new powers, they must not only pay attention to the latter’s material interests but also to their status ambitions.

Understanding the worldviews of rising powers is therefore a critical exercise for the sake of international security. Mapping perceptions of the institutional architecture of international regimes among rising powers, and how they might vary from one country to the next, is an important exercise that can produce valuable insights on how to negotiate with and come to agreements with these important states in the international system.

Second, institutional innovations that enable social mobility for rising powers are likely to produce more peaceful outcomes in international security regimes and therefore lower the risk of conflict during power transitions. Inviting China to be a “responsible” stakeholder while the US controls the levers of leadership in various international regimes is likely to produce few results unless China is invited to genuinely become an equal partner in the leadership of international regimes. US diplomacy to this date has been unable to transform the rhetoric of global partnership with China into genuine institutional innovation. The top jobs in international
institutions, for example, would be a good place to start the reform process. Otherwise, the US can expect more institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB) of the BRICS countries to emerge over the coming decades.

Finally, at the micro-level, the procedural aspects of negotiations with rising powers can have a major impact on their outcomes. This is not simply a point about respect or honor—though matters of protocol can have important localized effects—but rather one about legitimacy. At the very least, decision-making in key global forums should appear transparent, consensual, and fair when a rising power compares its treatment with the treatment received by the great powers or any other salient comparators. In some cases, this might require great powers to actually make deeper concessions than the rising powers, or to favor the rising powers over other classes of countries (as the US has done by creating smaller groupings of high-powered countries within larger multilateral institutions in the areas of trade and climate change). In other cases, it might simply require a diplomatic style that appears to be paying close attention to the concerns of rising powers and explicitly factoring these concerns into the decision-making process (as multilateral groupings such as the Nuclear Security Summit have done). Even if some rules impose unequal obligations to the disadvantage of a rising power, it might still accept them so long as they are arrived at openly with clearly stated reasons and justifications. The great powers must therefore carefully cultivate the Weberian rational-legal authority of international regimes if the global order is to accommodate the rise of new powers.

**CONCLUSION**

A number of scholars have studied how the rise of new great powers impacts global order. However, why these countries might choose to become more “responsible” actors instead of
simply free-riding on existing institutions, or conversely why they might undermine the very order that has facilitated their rise, remains systematically under-studied. Existing literatures on power transition and international organization do not comprehensively explain these types of behaviors. A rapidly growing literature on the pursuit of status in international politics can help shed light on these questions, but so far it has not demonstrated how or when status matters relative to other goals that states pursue in the international system, such as security and economic gain.

In this dissertation, I have developed a theory of status-seeking to explain why rising powers sometimes uphold the rules and norms of international regimes when it is not in their material interest to do so; and conversely, why they sometimes break from them at great cost. Drawing on social identity theory, I have showed that rising powers follow a range of strategies to attain great-power status, and that these strategies translate into different rule-oriented behaviors in international regimes. A rising power’s choice of strategy depends on the extent to which it perceives the international regime to be open to its rise and procedurally legitimate. I have tested this theory in the domain of international security regimes, specifically those designed to restrain certain weapons and modes of warfare. Through longitudinal case studies of the United States and the maritime laws of war in the mid-19th century, Japan and naval arms control in the interwar period, and India and nuclear non-proliferation in the latter half of the 20th century, I have showed that rising powers draw important inferences about their own status from the design and functioning of international regimes, and are willing to accept significant risks to enhance their status within these regimes.

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