The Balance of Power and Asia-Pacific Security in the 21st Century: The Views of the First Generation of the English School

By Liselotte Odgaard

Email: lodgaard@ps.au.dk

Abstract

This paper takes the first generation of the English school as a starting point for investigating power balancing between the United States and China in contemporary Asia–Pacific security to answer the question if coexistence characterizes regional order. According to Manning, Wight, Butterfield, Bull and Northedge, stable power balancing depends on the political framework rather than the polarity aspect. For the political framework to sustain stability, common agreement on mechanisms that advance coexistence by designating common principles for conflict resolution is essential between powers with conflicting security interests. In the Asia-Pacific, fundamental disagreement on the mechanisms necessary to maintain stability characterizes Sino-US relations and prevents the emergence of an order based on stable power balancing embedded in a political framework of coexistence.

Introduction

From the beginnings in the Cold War era, the English school has occupied an uneasy position in the landscape of international relations because the school considers it fundamental to have a common moral foundation for the efforts of states to enhance their relative positions in the international realm and, as such, it occupies common ground with realist analyses of international anarchy as well as constructivist analyses of identity politics.[1] The principal first generation scholars, defined as those who contributed to English school arguments on the balance of power and considered strategic issues fundamental to the maintenance of international order, are C.A.W. Manning, Martin Wight, Herbert Butterfield, Hedley Bull and F.S. Northedge.[2]

Their theoretical arguments on power balancing and strategic issues are used to address the question if post-Cold War Sino–US relations in the Asia–Pacific are characterized by balancing underpinned by coexistence, making for a stable order, or whether they rather bear the marks of an unstable order that cannot accommodate grievances, leading to attempts to overturn the existing political settlement. The argument rests on the insight of the first generation of English school scholars that stable power balancing depends on the political framework rather than the polarity aspect. For the political framework to sustain stability, common agreement on mechanisms that advance coexistence by designating common principles of conflict resolution is essential between powers with conflicting security interests.

The theoretical arguments are illustrated by examples dating from the Congress of Vienna of 1815 to the end of the Cold War in 1989 because during this period the balance of power between states manifested itself as a fundamental dynamic in international relations. The seeds of what came to fruition in 1815, however, had been planted more than two centuries earlier. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia indirectly introduced the concepts of absolute sovereignty and non-intervention by allowing the political authorities of delimited territory to determine domestic policies on religion. In the event of popular dissatisfaction, their option was to vote with their feet, i.e. to leave their home country. The decision to invest incumbents with religious authority heralded the gradual dissolution of horizontal boundaries of group authority such as that between

---

[1] The overlap between the English school and these neighbouring ideas is most clearly revealed in Wight's exposition of what he calls realism, rationalism and revolutionism. Rationalism equals the English school, and revolutionism approximates constructivism.

[2] According to some of his colleagues, F.S. Northedge considered himself to be a realist scholar. However, significant parts of Northedge's work contribute to the English school debate on balancing and coexistence. His employment at the London School of Economics and Political Science and his affiliation with many first generation English school scholars are likely explanations of these contributions.

the Catholic Church and dynastic rulers, instead instituting vertical geographical boundaries as fundamental. On this occasion, the states system was formalized. Hence, international order became an order between states whose characteristics depended on their choice of allies and adversaries, thereby encompassing power balancing between states based on the management and use of military force. The 1713 Peace at Utrecht transformed the principles of absolute sovereignty and non-interference into explicit rules of state conduct, hence formalizing the principle of power balancing as part of the European system. Thereby, security was not merely a possible outcome of state interaction; instead, security was obtained through the institutionalization of an equilibrium of power as a fundamental principle underpinning the foreign policies of states. Common security management was thereby introduced as a part of the European order. However, the international order introduced in 1713 was based on tradition, recognizing only the authority of dynasties and not that of republics.

It was not until the 1815 Congress of Vienna that international order became purely based on power in the sense that whoever was strongest, dynasty or republic, would have the greatest say in European security affairs. The 1815 Congress was an attempt to remove the issue of legitimate rule from the international agenda by recognizing republics as legitimate international entities with a right to managerial responsibilities provided they had sufficient capabilities to sustain their position. Ironically, only by 1815 did it become possible to employ different understandings of legitimacy in the game of power balancing between states because there was no longer a prior definition of entitlement to political authority. Instead, the task of defining legitimate political authority was left in the hands of the most powerful states in the system. In other words, in 1815 a system of power balancing underpinned by coexistence encompassing principles on the use of force, security management and legitimacy came into being.

The remainder of the paper outlines the main characteristics of the first generation of English school scholars and investigates the understanding of balances of power and coexistence among the first generation of English school scholars with the purpose of devising a framework for the study of balancing and coexistence in Asia–Pacific security. The main argument is that stable power balancing is not merely achieved through an equilibrium of power; it also depends on agreement between the major powers on a system of coexistence that allows for conflict resolution on the basis of common principles on the use of force, the legitimacy of governments, and the institutions managing international order. Such agreement is not found in Sino-US relations. Their relations are characterized by power balancing not embedded in a framework of coexistence. Sino-US relations constitute a major impediment to the establishment of permanent conflict resolution mechanisms and complicate efforts at establishing structures of policy coordination and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.

The first generation of the English School: concepts and dynamics

The central concepts of the English school are international order, institutions and states. Its concept of international order defines the way the English school sees the layout of the international realm, and its concept of institutions defines the way the school sees the dynamics that engender activity and change in the international realm. The English school considers the states to be the central actors in the international realm. In this section, I provide an outline of these core concepts.

The concept of international order describes how state security is ideally facilitated through regulatory mechanisms in the international realm. Basing its enquiries on order, the English school covers the spectrum from hostility over coexistence to integration in its efforts to understand international relations. Order may be understood as 'a pattern that leads to a particular result, an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals or values'.[3] This definition implies that order is an intermediate goal pursued to achieve other, primary goals. Order is hence a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Ultimately, order is a means to preserve the states system and the states themselves, to maintain peace as the normal condition and to maintain coexistence. Efforts to maintain coexistence involve limiting violence, stabilizing possessions through rules of property and keeping promises. Moreover, Bull sees order as a pattern, implying that recurring mechanisms or ways of behaving must prevail if order is to exist. Since no political authorities exist above and beyond the states, they are the only territorial actors who may participate fully and regularly in international relations. Consequently, they are the principal actors in the patterns of order. Institutions make up these patterns of order.

Bull defines institutions as 'a set of habits and practices shaped towards the realization of common goals'.[4] Institutions in the English school sense are not merely concrete organizations or formal structures such as the United Nations although these are part of the patterns of order made up by the institutions. Rather, institutions form a kind of superstructure consciously used by the states to further peace and stability.[5] The balance of power is the most fundamental of these institutions.

---

[3] Hedley Bull (1977/1995), *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, London: MacMillan, pp. 3-4.

[4] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 71.

[5] Adam Watson (1992), *The Evolution of International Society: A comparative historical analysis*, London: Routledge, p. 311.

The balance of power

The balance of power ideally ensures that power is distributed in such a way that no single state or entity is able to dominate the remaining states or entities. Objective characteristics such as relative military power and economic resources determine the distribution of capabilities and hence play a central role in establishing which states occupy the positions of major powers. Major powers prioritize the maintenance of the balance of power above all other security issues, including that of ensuring peace, because it is a precondition of the preservation of the states system. Bull discusses the consequences of the number of poles in the system – the main focus of neo-realism – but his main point is that power balances are not the direct outcome of polarity, but are contrived, i.e. based on the conscious actions of states. He furthermore claims that states are motivated by the conscious goal of a stable balance.[6] Butterfield on his part points to the danger of focusing solely on relative economic and military capabilities for stability since conflict between the major powers usually arises from complex situations in which the limits of legitimate state conduct are not immediately obvious.[7] Wight attributes the maintenance of the balance of power to conscious policies, emphasizing that stability is not obtained by merely taking into account the distribution of power; adherence to common principles of order such as the requirements for legitimate political authority is equally important.[8] Manning describes the relative stature of the powers as not just another name for relative influence; influence is a function not of a country's stature only, but of its connections. This complex idea of power implies that the strongest power may not necessarily command the most influence; a weaker power with big friends may end up more influential.[9] Power balancing is therefore not just determined by relative capabilities, but also by diplomatic skills. Northedge describes the balance of power as an act of political will rather than a mechanical law of the international system. He uses the example of the inter-war years in early twentieth century Europe, identifying the rise of idealism caused by the memories of the catastrophic effects of the First World War and the unwillingness of the European powers to enforce the 1919 peace settlement, as central explanations for the disintegration of the balance of power that was to constrain German territorial ambitions.[10] Although aware of the different consequences for order of simple and complex balances of power, the English school argues that the political framework rather than polarity determines the stability of power balancing.

---

[6] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 97-107.

[7] Herbert Butterfield, (1972), 'Morality and an International Order', in Brian Porter (ed.) *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919–1969*, London: Oxford University Press: 336–57, pp. 356-357.

[8] Martin Wight (1966), 'Western Values in International Relations', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds) *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, London: George Allen & Unwin: 89–131, pp. 104.

[9] C.A.W. Manning (1975), *The Nature of International Society*, London: MacMillan, pp. 190-191.

[10] F. S. Northedge (1976), *The International Political System*, London: Faber & Faber, pp. 92-94.

For the political framework to sustain international order, commonly agreed rules of coexistence are required. Coexistence means that states may pursue their national interests as long as they do not jeopardize international stability.[11] A regional order of coexistence requires that the great powers leave each other alone except in case of collisions of interests. Under these circumstances, they will cooperate in order to avoid or control conflicts which may otherwise result in mutual use of force. Bull argues that major powers may play a role in the promotion of international order by pursuing policies that work for them. Such policies aim at preserving the general balance of power, seeking to avoid or control crises as well as seeking to limit or contain wars amongst one another. However, major powers also exploit their pre-eminence by unilateral exploitation of their local preponderance through mutual respect for one another's spheres of influence and by joint action to promote common policies through the international system as a whole. Exploitation of the special position of major powers presupposes the management of mutual relations with one another to avoid conflict and wars between them. Even so, in practice, major powers frequently behave in such a way as to promote disorder, for example by seeking to upset the general balance rather than to preserve it, to foment crises rather than to control them, and to win wars rather than to limit them. Bull investigates the extent to which the United States and the Soviet Union contributed to international order during the Cold War. He concludes that they carried out the six roles mentioned above and as such contributed to an international order that enjoyed a great deal of support among other states.[12] Butterfield notes that the management of international order through conference diplomacy is likely to be the arena for power politics, and 'the major powers hold a predominance in them which bears some proportion to their might.' The promotion of international order therefore depends on the coincidence between the national interests of the dominant powers and the common interest in coexistence. Butterfield gives the example of British policies during the inter-war years and during the Second World War in the twentieth century. He notes that the virtues of British moderation of and consideration for the demands and interests of others were born out of the fact that the policy which would have been dictated by self-interest happened to be identical with the one demanded by altruism. Real-political considerations encouraged Britain to opt for conference diplomacy rather than a trial of strength with a rival, hence promoting coexistence rather than conflict by taking into account the interests of others.[13] Wight points out that most states seek their preservation by pursuing the balance of

---

[11] Liselotte Odgaard (2002), *Maritime Security between China and Southeast Asia: Conflict and cooperation in the making of regional order*, Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 51; Liselotte Odgaard (2002), 'Perception, Pragmatism, and Political Will: Maritime Disputes and Balances of Power in the Asia-Pacific', *Asian Perspective* (26:4): 113–43; Liselotte Odgaard (2003), 'The South China Sea: ASEAN's Security Concerns about China', *Security Dialogue* (34:1): 11–24.

[12] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 194-222.

[13] Herbert Butterfield (1951), *History and Human Relations*, London: Collins, pp. 32-33.

power as illustrated by Britain's doctrine of intervention against the Holy Alliance in nineteenth century Europe. Castlereagh is aware of the interests of the community of nations as a whole, and his attention to the common interests of states is tied in with balance of power considerations as against a guarantee of regimes. The repeated interference of the great powers in the affairs of Sweden, Poland, Geneva and Holland was, in the last resort, justified by reference to the balance of power; in other words, international order was upheld through a great power agreement that the use of force was legitimate insofar as it served to preserve stability.[14] Manning argues that the states must agree on the rules and goals of the international system, even if their individual goals differ, for coexistence to prevail.[15] Northedge mentions that during the early phases of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union successfully avoided war with each other as well as with the lesser powers Britain, France, West Germany, Italy and Japan, in part because both disapproved of resorting to armed force in almost any form. At the end of the day, the prevention of violent conflict between major powers is not so much a question of equilibrium in the international balance of forces as of a common agreement between the major powers on the constraints on the use of force.[16] Coexistence is hence designed to stabilize the balance of power through limited cooperation on the avoidance of conflicts between the major powers that may upset the *status quo*. Coexistence is not a foregone conclusion. It depends on the willingness and ability of the major powers to establish a set of common rules to be implemented in their management of international order. A common vision of the bases of international order and its purpose are the principal requirement for power balancing to be based on coexistence.

Rules of coexistence

Rules of coexistence do not exhaust the totality of international legal instruments which, of course, go far beyond those necessary to preserve international stability. Neither rules regulating cooperation among states above and beyond mere coexistence, such as trade rules, nor the constitutive rules of international society, are pertinent to stable power balancing. Rules of coexistence merely define the minimum conditions for maintaining a stable balance. According to Bull, they are the rules of war, of jurisdiction and of agreements (*pacta sunt servanda*).[17] Northedge similarly discusses the normative rules of law, of propriety or morality, and of right and wrong or ethics. He argues that such rules are necessary for coexistence simply because states cannot escape their neighbours; after a war, some kind of *de facto* peace settlement has to be put in place because, in contrast to men, states cannot keep to themselves. Goodwill with other states and,

---

[14] Wight, 'Western Values in International Relations', p. 117.

[15] Manning, *The Nature of International Society*, p. 108.

[16] Northedge, *The International Political System,* pp. 283-285.

[17] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 65-68.

consequently, the status as a worthy business partner is the basis for a state's successful interaction with other states. Reputation is an asset that states cannot afford to take lightly.[18] Wight describes the preconditions of stable power balancing by which is meant the maintenance of the *status quo*. The *status quo* does not preclude peaceful change or even violent conflict. However, change is subject to control. In addition, the maintenance of the balance of power requires flexibility of alliances in the sense that every member of the states-system should be prepared to cooperate with any other member of the states-system, as circumstances demanded. The balance of power conferred a right of intervention in the domestic affairs of a state that threatened the balance of power.[19] Wight directly ties coexistence in with power balancing, hence stating as the principal rules the right to use force in the event of a revolutionary power threatening to overthrow the existing international order, the principle of rule-governed change, and general acceptance of the principle of stable power balancing overruling alliance obligations. Manning is less specific about the precise nature of the rules. He does, however, argue that the international realm is a quasi-*Gemeinschaft*. The aspirations of states to coexist are not founded on contractual obligations but on the fact that the organization of the international realm into states makes the existence of social relations between them unavoidable. As a consequence, states will attempt to justify their foreign policy decisions by reference to common rules of state conduct, claiming that their actions do not represent a breach of the international political framework. The prevalence of international anarchy implies that claims of rule-bound behaviour may be contested by other states, which allows for a relatively wide margin of interpretation as to the nature of legitimate conduct. The fact that states routinely look to the collectivity of states for approval, however, indicates that they invariably attach importance to the acceptance of the diplomatic community of their foreign policy decisions.[20] Butterfield in practice describes the nineteenth century balance of power system as one of coexistence by saying that the rules and precepts of the system might not have prescribed the ordinary objectives of foreign policy, but at least they established limitations. This system drew a line which a state could not cross safely whether in promoting its own interests or in pursuing its ideals. He also notes that the qualities of moderation and self-restraint characterizing the nineteenth century balance of power system cannot be taken for granted; the First World War and the inter-war years in the early twentieth century demonstrated that if a states system is destroyed through the breach of its rules, the rules cannot be reinvented.[21] Hence, the principal virtues of a states system based on coexistence appear to be flexibility rather than rigidity, moderation rather than extremism, and persuasion rather than imposition.

---

[18] Northedge, *The International Political System,* pp. 112-113, 150-151.

[19] Martin Wight (1973), 'The Balance of Power and International Order', in Alan James (ed.) *The Bases of International Order: Essays in Honour of C.A.W. Manning*, London: Oxford University Press: 85–115, pp. 100-109.

[20] Manning, *The Nature of International Society*, pp. 160-161, 176-177.

[21] Butterfield, 'Morality and an International Order', p. 341.

Bull argued that the rules of war, of jurisdiction and of agreements (*pacta sunt servanda)* constitute the rules of coexistence defining the minimum conditions for maintaining a stable balance.[22] The rules of war serve to limit violence, which is a common goal of all social life and as such a goal of the international system as well. The rules of jurisdiction promote the goal of stability of possession which is reflected in the compact of mutual recognition of sovereignty at the international level. The rules of agreements serve to fulfil the goal of the keeping of promises, without which cooperation at the national or international level cannot take place. This list of rules and goals is not exhaustive, according to Bull. He also includes the preservation of the system, the goal of maintaining the independence or external sovereignty of individual states, and the goal of peace as the default condition in international relations.[23] It is, however, difficult to envisage the preservation of international anarchy, the survival of individual states and the maintenance of peace without common agreement to limit the use of force, to respect political authorities governing a designated territory and its people, and to respect agreements, such as treaties. Without limitations on the use of force, peace is unlikely to be the normal condition in a system of states in which the states enjoy a monopoly on violence. Equally, if jurisdiction does not carry any weight as a protective measure, international anarchy is most likely replaced by another type of international order, such as a hierarchy with one political authority that lays down the law for all other entities. Finally, if the sanctity of agreements is not recognized, it becomes meaningless to negotiate treaties, such as peace settlements that restore post-war working relations between states and guarantee the security of entities that survived the war.

The rules of life, property and truth are essential. States, as peoples, do not adhere to the rules all the time, but that is a condition of life at the national as well as at the international level. The rules pertaining to a particular order will often be nested in actual state behaviour rather than in written agreements since decades or even centuries may pass before legal rules are accepted by all states. In the meantime, rules may be recognized *de facto* through state conduct. The major powers are those responsible for upholding international order by maintaining stable power balancing. The central question is therefore whether they have worked out an explicit or tacit practice on the basis of the rules of coexistence which is conducive to the preservation of stable power balancing such as that established between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Occasionally, these powers may have broken the rules originally established by mutual agreement, but the breaches happened at random; Washington and Moscow did, however, not consistently fail to adhere to their own rules, and they only broke down when the Soviet Union disintegrated, leaving the United States as the only major power.

---

[22] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 16-18.
[23] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 16-18.

During the Cold War, violent conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union was constrained by the strategic relationship of mutual nuclear deterrence, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states belonging to the opposing alliance as well as the UN Security Council. Mutual nuclear deterrence was established on the basis of the realization that even a vast superiority in numbers of weapons could not prevent the catastrophic results of a few nuclear weapons hitting the territory of the major powers. President Eisenhower recognized this in a speech to the United Nations as early as in 1953. The way to prevent a war between the two major nuclear powers of the Cold War was to acquire actual operational weapons together with such a credible appearance of determination to use them that even the advisors to the President would not doubt his resolve.[24] Mutual US–Soviet nuclear deterrence was supplemented with the gradual development of an arms control system, in part emerging from nuclear conversations begun in the 1950s on the consequences of atomic testing in the atmosphere. These developed into an agreement on the 1963 Test Ban Treaty, the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and other treaties which paved the way for strategic arms limitation talks.[25] Although their immediate value in preventing war between the major powers might have been limited, the talks demonstrated the awareness in Washington and Moscow that a nuclear war would be devastating for both parties and that both powers, however hostile their relations might be, were able to embed mutual nuclear deterrence in a diplomatic dialogue that engendered mutual agreement on constraints on the use of nuclear weapons, however limited these constraints were.

The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states belonging to the opposing alliance was sometimes breached, usually through proxy conflicts such as the Second Indochina War. However, in Europe, which bordered the Soviet Union where the Cold War was coldest, and in Latin America in the immediate vicinity of the United States, the major powers refrained from interfering in the opposing alliances, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact, even in the event of alleged severe human rights violations such as those committed with the assistance of the Soviet Union in Hungary in 1956 and with the assistance of the United States in Chile in 1973. The principle of non-interference was respected at the core of their spheres of influence because it allowed them the stability required to manage their main allies, in the case of Washington by means of democratization and in the case of Moscow by means of totalitarianism.[26]

---

[24] John Lewis Gaddis (1997), *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 229-234.

[25] J.P.D. Dunbabin (1994), *International Relations Since 1945: A History in Two Volumes: The Cold War: The Great Powers and their Allies*, Harlow, England: Longman, pp. 150-188.

[26] Gaddis, *We Now Know*, pp. 189-207.

The UN Security Council was the principal forum for great power management of international peace and security. The permanent members, the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China,[27] had, and still have, veto powers ensuring the possibilities of either assent or abstention on important questions. By preventing action against a permanent member, the veto saved the organization from wrecking itself in operations against its most powerful members. Enforcement actions could be undertaken only with cooperation from all permanent member states.[28] The five permanent members were also those states recognized as nuclear powers, which made the veto even more significant. In practice, the UN Security Council largely proved incapacitated in the management of global security, with 13 peacekeeping and military observer operations and the adoption of economic sanctions against South Africa as significant exceptions.[29] This incapacity left the management task to the United States and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Washington and Moscow mutually accepted that insofar as joint decisions on the management of international peace and security was taken, it happened on the basis of unanimity in the Council. The guidelines for state behaviour listed in the UN Charter, which defined the rules of the game in international politics during the Cold War, were therefore undisputed as the reference point for the legitimacy of state conduct. The basic principle of the UN Charter acting as a benchmark for the United States and the Soviet Union as well as all other states was that of absolute sovereignty, which was committed to Article two, paragraph four stating that all states shall refrain from the threat or use of force in their international relations.[30]

The US–Soviet agreement on constraints on the use of force as well as common definitions of legitimacy and institutions are examples of rules of coexistence allowing the major powers to maintain stable power balancing despite prevailing ideological differences. The example serves to demonstrate that it is not enmity *per se* that prevents major powers from establishing common rules of state conduct; instead, it is, as Manning has pointed out, their agreement that the goal of stability is essential to both parties which determines their ability to establish a lasting political framework that preserves the *status quo*. Also, this framework of common rules of state conduct must be considered amenable to the furthering of their national interests and the goal of stability.[31] The English school has not been very specific about the substance of the rules of

---

[27] The People's Republic of China became a member of the UN Security Council in 1971, replacing the Nationalist representative from Taiwan.

[28] Thomas G. Weiss, David P. Forsythe and Roger A. Coate (1999/2004), *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Boulder: Westview Press, pp. 11-12.

[29] Weiss, Forsythe and Coate, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, pp. 29-46.

[30] The United Nations (1945), *Charter of the United Nations*, 26 June 1945. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

[31] Manning, *The Nature of International Society*, p. 108.

coexistence and the dynamics that give rise to them. Below, I attempt to rectify this omission by elaborating on the rules of coexistence and how they further stable power balancing.

The rules of war support coexistence by defining constraints on the use of force. These rules do not prevent wars; indeed, occasional, limited warfare that affects the distribution of power among the major powers may contribute to stable power balancing. However, wars between the major powers are avoided principally by averting or controlling crises and wars between lesser powers that, ultimately, may involve the major powers. This general aim may encompass a lot of additional efforts such as the settlement of political disputes and the control of competition in armaments.[32] One example is the arms control agreements based on mutual nuclear deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.[33] During the nineteenth century European concert, wars were started only in the event of consent from all major powers.[34] Hence, the constraints on the use of force vary according to military-technological developments, the views of the major powers on the acceptability of violent conflict, and similar unit and interaction level characteristics. During the inter-war years, disagreement prevailed as to whether the restrictive rules of the League of Nations on the use of force were universally applicable, as indicated by the decision of the United States to forego membership of the organization. The central questions are therefore not the contents of the specific rules, but the existence of agreement on the constraints on using force as well as the system devising the basic principles concerning the use of force. For example, the system defines whether collective security or a self-help system should apply, and the constraints define the limits on using force in defending the collective or national interests of states.

The question of constraints on the use of force is not only central to the prevention of war between the major powers but also to the formation of alliance patterns within a specific international order. Major power agreement on constraints on using force does not prevent states from defecting from one alliance to another, but it raises the potential costs for lesser powers of disregarding the common rules on the use of force. For example, *de facto* nuclear non-aligned powers such as Israel and India that refrained from signing the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) also stopped short of publicly claiming nuclear status to minimize the political costs of acquiring a nuclear capability. Both powers traded in formal alliances for the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), at least, partly due to the gravity of threats from neighbouring states. After the Cold War, India, by contrast, decided to go public with its nuclear capability in 1998, formally announcing its intention to develop what it called a minimum credible deterrent. The decision allows India to

---

[32] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 192, 206-207.
[33] Dunbabin, *The Cold War*, pp. 150-188.
[34] Wight, 'Western Values in International Relations', pp. 116-118.

discuss its nuclear capability with external interlocutors such as the United States, implying that the Cold War order in the Asia–Pacific has disintegrated with the implosion of the Soviet Union.[35] This situation has left India with opportunities to carve out a new position for itself, such as opting for acceptance that India belongs to the club of nuclear powers and considering the advantages and drawbacks of a strategic partnership with the United States, its Cold War adversary.

Acceptance of the constraints on using force from the allies of the major powers in general and their core allies in particular is crucial because the major powers depend on their assistance and backing. No state is so powerful that it can enforce its own interests without taking the views and demands of its allies and partners into account.[36] Even the most powerful state needs to convince its partners that its policy is responsible and feasible in order to avoid the eclipse of common interests due to intra-alliance divergences.[37] The states whose combined activities are to bring about a desired outcome must be provided with a plausible justification of the constraints on using force.[38] The standing of a major power therefore depends on its ability to persuade its allies that power is used in a just and sensible manner because consensus on the constraints on using force is central to alliance solidarity. For example, the Eisenhower administration's pursuance of multipolarity with Europe as an integrated third pillar in the global balance of power was subsumed under a proposal to adopt the doctrine of flexible response in 1962. As part of the plan to establish a multilateral European force, the European allies were supposed to pay the lion's share for a middle-range ballistic missile force that remained under US control. Europe was not enthusiastic about the proposal that left them without control of the nuclear forces, and since the control issue was more important to Washington, the multilateral force proposal was dropped in 1965.[39] US insistence on retaining control over the decision to launch nuclear missiles, however, came at the cost of the participation of France, who decided to leave NATO's strategic command structure in 1966 to preserve an independent nuclear capability.

The importance of intra-alliance consensus is derived from the ability of a major power to command an identifiable group of loyal supporters, which will enable it to create a stable sphere of influence for itself. On

---

[35] Ashley J. Tellis (2003) 'Toward a 'Force-in-Being': The Logic, Structure, and Utility of India's Emerging Nuclear Posture', in Sumit Ganguly (ed.) *India as an Emerging Power*, London: Frank Cass: 61–108.

[36] Grotius quoted in Martin Wight (1978), *Power Politics*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, p. 123.

[37] Wight, *Power Politics*, p. 130.

[38] Manning, *The Nature of International Society*, pp. 29-32.

[39] Steve Weber (1993), 'Shaping the Postwar Balance of Power: Multilateralism in NATO', in John Gerard Ruggie (ed.) *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, New York: Columbia University Press: 233–92, pp. 262-267.

the other hand, if there is disagreement on the use of force, cooperation is potentially jeopardized, and alliance patterns may become volatile. Volatility is not to be confused with flexibility, which implies the reshuffling of existing alliance patterns to maintain an approximate equilibrium of forces. Instead, volatility implies that existing mechanisms for resolving intra-alliance conflicts including the reshuffling of alliance patterns cannot be relied upon and the major powers cannot take it for granted that support for their decisions on the use of force is forthcoming from their partners and allies. This unstable environment is therefore characterized by a high level of uncertainty concerning the combined forces commanded by opposing major powers, which diminishes the transparency of military security issues and increases the risk of violent conflict.

France's departure from its military role in NATO in 1966 is an example of the inherent flexibility in systems where common constraints on the use of force are accepted by allies as well as adversaries. The result of France's departure was the reshuffling of alliance patterns because it happened under conditions of stable power balancing between the United States and the Soviet Union. Washington and its other allies worried about the precedent France's withdrawal might set, but the United States made an effort to accommodate France. First, Washington refrained from opposing the French nuclear deterrent, second, the United States supported European currency realignments when the franc weakened in 1968 and President de Gaulle refused to devalue, and third, Washington accepted negotiating cooperation between the United States and France, all of which gradually engendered detailed plans to exchange military information at a more limited level than that between the United States and its other European allies, predominantly using presidential and military channels. Hence, Washington moved quickly to exercise damage limitation to preserve unity in transatlantic relations. Considering the continued threat from the Soviet Union against France, Paris accepted US overtures for continued military cooperation, and after a period of upheaval, US–French relations returned to approximate normality from the mid-1970s, as indicated by the French decision to keep troops in Djibouti after its independence in 1977.[40] However, US–French alliance relations were never fully repaired, and France has remained the potentially deceitful ally to this day. Hungary's attempt at leaving the Warzaw Pact in 1956 was more disconcerting to the Soviet alliance system because it was only prevented by the use of force. The US–Soviet tacit agreement to refrain from interference in each other's spheres of influence, however, withstood the pressure and left Hungary, no longer considered a loyal ally, at the periphery in terms of influence in the Soviet alliance system. It was no coincidence that Hungary was the first state to open the so-called iron curtain on 23 August 1989, allowing people to leave for Austria, an action that proved central to the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November that year. During the Cold War, the overall pattern was that of a stable power balance between the United States and the Soviet Union, and

---

[40] Dunbabin, *The Cold War*, pp. 398-399.

Washington and Moscow agreed on mutual constraints on the use of force. Consequently, they were able to manage intra-alliance conflicts while maintaining coexistence between the West and the East bloc.

By contrast, during periods of instability with no coexistence between the major powers, allies are able to defect to the opponent if their interests and demands are ignored by their major power sponsor. This happened in late nineteenth century Europe with Bismarck's rise to power in Prussia in 1862 because he did not accept the Concert system that Austria's Metternich and Britain's Castlereagh had been instrumental in creating. Bismarck rejected the idea of self-restraint that had encouraged Austria, Britain, Prussia, Russia and France to coordinate their foreign policies before making decisions on the use of force against other sovereign entities. Bismarck reasoned that unification of the German principalities was the only route to security. On this basis, Prussia broke its confederate bond with Austria, the secondary German principalities were estranged from their alliance with Austria, and Austria and Prussia undertook a war that separated Schleswig–Holstein from Denmark. In 1866, Austria declared war on Prussia. The war left Vienna completely isolated from Germany and allowed Prussia to establish hegemony in Northern Germany. By means of military power, Bismarck imposed a change in the alliance system that disregarded the principle of the Concert of Europe of maintaining a special equilibrium within Germany in order to create a structure among the German states which was strong enough to resist attacks from both the East and West bloc, but not powerful enough to disquiet Germany's neighbours and which was sufficiently unified to be mobilized for defence purposes, but not too centralized to become an offensive threat. Bismarck's policy of German unification concluded in 1871 after France's defeat in the Franco–Prussian war had heralded the dissolution of the Concert of Europe with the First World War upsetting the European equilibrium of power by the creation of a state through the use of force.[41] During the second half of the nineteenth century, the European order of coexistence was dissolved by Bismarck's rejection of the very same principles that ensured its maintenance, hence giving rise to violent conflicts. This allowed Prussia to poach on existing alliances on the basis of Prussia's demands for regional order in Europe, thus engendering insecurity throughout the system due to swiftly changing allegiances.

The rules of jurisdiction support coexistence by defining the principles of legitimate political authority. International legitimacy depends on the collectivity of states' assessment of the entities who claim sovereign rights over a territory and its population.[42] The default criterion for this assessment is effective control

---

[41] Henry A. Kissinger (1968), 'The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck', *Daedalus* (97:3): 888–924.

[42] Martin Wight (1977), *Systems of States*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, p. 153.

defined as the presence of an effective and stable regime within a geographically delimited area.[43] This definition represents a narrow interpretation of state obligations, namely to accept political authorities with a proven record of control over territory and peoples – irrespective of their ideological, religious or ethnic features. The reasoning behind this narrow definition of legitimacy is that if foreign policy is dominated by moral considerations, international stability will be jeopardized,[44] the implication being that stability comes before human rights considerations.

The principle of effective control, a fundamental principle in the UN Charter, came to dominate the Cold War period. The principle was, however, vaguely defined, which left it to the states to interpret what the term 'people' means and how they are to be effectively controlled.[45] One explanation of the unclear definition of the principle of effective control during the Cold War is the violent chaos engendered by the attempts at implementing national self-determination in Eastern and Central Europe, in the Balkans and in Asia Minor. Effective control was introduced with a view to avoid conflicts engendered by competing territorial claims. The major powers of the Cold War were not willing to take responsibility for prospective conflicts emerging in the countries that were about to be decolonized. Since it had proven impossible to delimit borders according to ethnic affinities, the political authorities able to control the peoples located within a delimited territory were left with responsibilities for nation-building on the basis of the ethnic groups that were present within their territories.[46] Another reason for the preference for the principle of effective control during the Cold War was the ideological conflict between the West and East bloc, which was not compatible with cooperation on questions involving interference in the political authority of existing states. During the Cold War, effective control hence involved the freezing of existing territorial borders unless a state ceased to exist.[47]

[43] Det Sikkerheds- og Nedrustningspolitiske Udvalg (1994) *Magt og normer i international politik: Statsdannelser, grænser og humanitær intervention* [Power and norms in international politics: State formation, borders and humanitarian intervention], Copenhagen: Det Sikkerheds- og Nedrustningspolitiske Udvalg, p. 25.

[44] Butterfield, 'Morality and an International Order', p. 341.

[45] Alain Pellet (1992), 'The Opinions of the Badinter Arbitration Committee: A Second Breath for the Self-Determination of Peoples', *European Journal of International Law* (3:1): 178–85, p. 179.

[46] J. Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin (1994), 'The state and the nation: changing norms and the rules of sovereignty in international relations', *International Organization* (48:1): 107–30, pp. 122-123.

[47] Martti Koskenniemi (1994), 'National Self-determination Today: Problems of Legal Theory and Practice', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* (43): 241–69, p. 257.

The main problem with the principle of effective control is that states are not obliged to take into account the views of the population. Consequently, fundamental rights rest with states. A state can therefore decide to manage its political authority in a way that does not enjoy legitimacy among its people. Insufficient domestic legitimacy may produce conflict within the international system since dissatisfied domestic groups may challenge existing political authorities and thereby also existing international borders. Mechanisms to resolve such conflicts do not exist at the international level because the international system and its practices are built around states. If one state interferes in another state in support of a subset of the population without approval, the result is international condemnation. For example, India's invasion in Pakistan in 1971, which led to the establishment of Bangladesh, was condemned and attracted no outside support despite a widespread desire in the East Pakistani population to secede from Pakistan.

By contrast, a broad interpretation of state legitimacy may include the internal management of political authority by the units qualifying as states on the argument that the *raison d'être* of states is ultimately to provide security for individuals.[48] In the event of severe human rights violations such as genocide, individual security rather than stability may be prioritized by states. Individuals and not only states have rights and duties within this definition of legitimacy implying that states do not have a right to discriminate against peoples within their territory on the basis of ethnic, religious, ideological or other forms of loyalty that transcends state borders. Minorities have rights of political participation equivalent to those enjoyed by the majority of the population. According to a broad interpretation of legitimacy, states are not only responsible for the preservation of the states system, but also for the protection of the basic rights of individuals.

The broad interpretation of legitimacy was applied in Europe during the interwar years of the twentieth century. The interpretation was adopted by the great powers with the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. After 1918, the dominant political form was the nation-state rather than the multinational empire. This empirical fact was taken to its ultimate conclusion since the practice adopted in Europe was to return territory previously annexed by other states on the basis of ethnicity. For example, Alsace–Lorraine, who had been annexed by Prussia in 1871, was returned to France by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, and the northern part of Schleswig–Holstein, who had been annexed by Prussia in 1864, was returned to Denmark as a result of a plebiscite in the province. The principle of national self-determination also found expression in the League of Nations designed to facilitate cooperation between the major powers on the preservation of international peace and

---

[48] R.J. Vincent (1986), *Human Rights and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 151. The broad interpretation of legitimacy belongs to the second generation of English school scholars, sometimes called the solidarist strain of English School thought. If phrased according to Bull's theory of international relations, it involves rules regulating cooperation among states above and beyond what is necessary for mere coexistence, such as trade rules.

stability. The organization subscribed to the idea that public opinion was the voice of reason prevailing over governments, which was reflected in the decision to give minor powers permanent preponderance in the Council of the League of Nations.[49]

The main problem with the broad interpretation of legitimacy is that, in its respect for justice, it inadequately fails to confront the problem of power. Had, for example, the people of Alsace–Lorraine been asked about their preferences in a referendum, they might have opted to remain a part of Germany since one consequence of the Prussian occupation was substantial French emigration from and German immigration to the province.[50] The definition of ethnicity used to define jurisdiction over Alsace–Lorraine was hence based on recent history, whereas the definition used to define jurisdiction over Schleswig–Holstein was founded on popular opinion. In reality, of course, France used its power, in its capacity as one of the principal drafters of the Versailles Treaty on account of its victory in the First World War, to interpret the principle of legitimacy to its own advantage. On another note, the frequency of civil wars involving genocide leaves a state with responsibilities for intervening in numerous conflicts provided a broad interpretation of legitimacy obliges a state to protect fundamental individual rights. In practice, a number of other factors are therefore taken into account in the decision-making on so-called humanitarian interventions, such as the possibilities of international approval and status as a result of the intervention, the likelihood of success, the implications for the balance of power of the intervention, etc.

Irrespective of the substance of the interpretation of legitimacy, agreement on the limits of political authority is fundamental to prevent domestic politics from creating havoc at the international level since it defines the boundaries of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. Blurred boundaries concerning the principles of non-interference lower the perceived level of protection of existing regimes since they can no longer predict which entities may fall victim to outside intervention. The result may be unstable balancing dynamics and the increased likelihood of preventive warfare against likely aggressors.

For example, the broad interpretation of legitimacy adopted after the First World War, which resulted in the dissolution of the dynastic multinational Ottoman and Austro–Hungarian empires, concealed vastly different views on how the principle was to be implemented, as indicated by the divergent interpretations adopted by France and Denmark. Different notions of how to implement national self-determination meant that

---

[49] E.H. Carr (1939/1946), The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations, London: MacMillan, pp. 28-36.

[50] James Mayall (1990), *Nationalism and international society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 53.

significant pockets of minorities ended up outside the borders of their ethnic homeland. Most conspicuously, the victors of the First World War ignored the vote of the Austrian population, who favoured joining Germany. In practice, French foreign policy decisions were made on the basis of the principle of effective control encouraging France to demand security guarantees against a restored Germany, which might challenge the legitimacy of the French government. By contrast, the United States tied in the notion of national self-determination with the idea of democratic peace, arguing that if political authority ultimately rested with the German people, they would remain peaceful and not seek to conquer territories inhabited by German minorities. Democracy rather than national self-determination was hence at the crux of the US understanding of legitimacy. Germany, however, interpreted the idea of national self-determination literally, compelling the Weimar Republic to resist enforcement and work for the revision or overthrow of the Versailles Treaty. Predictably, the United States did not issue security guarantees to France, who was left to fend for itself, while Washington concentrated on the economic recovery of Germany. Germany used its gradual restoration to plan for the reunification of what it defined as the German motherland, plans that were realized with the Second World War.[51] The boundaries of the principle of non-interference were blurred since France did not endorse the US idea of democratic peace and hence focused on rearming against a future German threat. Germany similarly did not endorse the US principle and expected France to oppose its prosperity to prevent German hegemony in Europe. The insecurity prevailing between France and Germany and US negligence to address this problem partly explain why Germany decided to pre-empt the possibility of French opposition towards German influence with the subjugation and occupation of France. Hence, stable power balancing founded on coexistence never came into being after the First World War.

For the rules of agreement to support coexistence, consensus is necessary on the institutions used for policy coordination on security issues to ensure stability and peace between the major powers. The English school does not normally consider organizations as fundamental institutions. However, the first generation of these scholars emphasizes the importance of major power management and the ability of these powers to use conference diplomacy as a tool for solving disagreements within common frameworks of decision-making on security issues. The existence of common institutions, whether these are informal like the *ad hoc* conferences used during the nineteenth century European Concert or formal like the series of arms control negotiations that took place between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, is necessary to carry out security management. Great power management is not conceivable without some form of physical platform that bring together state leaders. The institutions discussed in this paper define the limits of acceptable state conduct and provide a framework of joint decision-making within which contending

---

[51] Donald Kagan (1995), *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace*, New York: Anchor Books, pp. 281-436.

states may adjust their differences on the rights and responsibilities of states. Common decision-making is needed because balances of power are political in the sense that politicians deliberately maintain them.[52] Since states are the ultimate political authorities in the international realm, the decision to remain within rule-bound limits is not a question of law but of politics.[53] States involved in the maintenance of a stable balancing pattern tend to apply the *raison de système* which says that the common good must not be sacrificed for the benefit of national interests.[54] Major power disagreements are consequently resolved with respect for existing rules of coexistence, which means that a state might have to postpone the pursuance of, for example, goals of territorial expansion insofar as such an act is likely to upset the power equilibrium. If states fail to maintain a stable balance, it is not because order in the form of power balancing embedded in common rules of coexistence has become less important to them. Rather, it reflects that these rules are founded on a weak institutional framework that does not facilitate that states sacrifice the pursuance of national interests if these threaten the common interests of states.

Ideally, institutions for policy coordination between the great powers provide a coherent set of guidelines for the rights and responsibilities of states in preserving international order that sustains coexistence. For example, the nineteenth century European concert aimed to preserve peace by concerted diplomatic action which was reinforced by periodic conferences dealing with problems of mutual concern. Such concerns typically arose in case of disagreement on whether specific foreign policy actions were in line with the existing political framework of coexistence. One incident that caused disagreement was the Greek insurrection in the Ottoman Empire causing Russia to demand an exclusive right of intervention to protect the Greeks against Turkish oppression on the grounds of an obligation to protect co-religionists. A Russian intervention threatened the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and hence, in Austria's opinion, the dynastic principle and the principle of non-intervention in other states in the event that force was used, which would upset stable power balancing. A Russo–Turkish war would threaten Austria's safety and the existing order that depended on constraining Russian territorial ambitions in Europe and on preventing nationalism from upsetting the European balance. Humanitarian considerations for the Greeks were thus, in Austria's opinion, subordinate to maintaining the existing European order. To determine the sense of the allies and to preserve alliance unity, *ad hoc* ministerial conferences were held in Vienna which resulted in an agreement to separate the Greek question of human rights atrocities from the Turkish issue of breaches of Russo–Turkish treaty obligations, thwarting the Russian territorial ambitions. The agreement was confirmed by the European

[52] Wight, *Power Politics*, p. 180.

[53] C.A.W. Manning (1972), 'The Legal Framework in a World of Change', in Brian Porter (ed.) *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919–1969*, London: Oxford University Press: 301–55.

[54] Martin Wight (1991), *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, p. 31.

Congress gathering all European powers in Verona to ensure consent from the minor powers.[55] The conference diplomacy of the early days of the European Concert did not merely serve the purpose of confirming prior agreement; it was central to demonstrate unity across Europe on a legitimizing principle on which to continue social oppression of nationalist forces such as those forming among Greeks. Nationalism was the major long-term threat against the survival of the multinational empire Austria who formed one of the indispensable pillars in the European balance.

By contrast, disagreement between the great powers on the appropriate institution for policy coordination on security issues results in competing definitions of the limits on state conduct. The resulting existence of multiple guidelines diminishes the possibility of upholding international agreements and security guarantees since, in the event of dissatisfaction with one political framework, states may opt for alternatives presented by other powers. The outcome may be an unstable balance of power with fragile strategic partnerships and fluctuating patterns of cooperation. The twentieth century interwar years were beset with this problem since the United States never ratified the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which established the League of Nations meant to preserve European stability. The US critics that proved sufficiently influential to prevent the Senate's approval did not approve of Washington's commitment to safeguard European peace and stability, instead advocating a return to isolationism. Britain also abstained from such a commitment, favouring a policy of appeasement on the grounds that Britain had no interest in involving itself in continental power scrambles and favoured a revision of the treaty in favour of Germany, who was seen to have been unfairly treated in the process of meeting the national interests of the victors in the First World War. The US and British resistance towards the Treaty left the League of Nations with no powers to enforce the Covenant's provisions of collective security, and, in reality, France was left to protect itself. The British version of the Treaty, which made Britain's promise to protect France contingent upon US approval, was rejected on 19 November 1919. The German Weimar republic, who had been excluded from the League Assembly and did not form part of the League Council which was the decision making body in the event of a threat of war, resisted enforcement and worked for the revision or overthrow of the Versailles Treaty. Not surprisingly, Germany looked with approval upon subsequent US and British efforts to prevent France from rigorously enforcing the Versailles Treaty and revise the treaty's provisions with the purpose of conciliating Germany. The efforts resulted in Germany's permanent membership of the League Council leaving Germany free to violate the Versailles Treaty. The goal of appeasement was, however, not reached as evidenced by the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. The decade leading up to the war was marked by fluctuating patterns of cooperation as

---

[55] Henry A. Kissinger (1957), *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–1822*, London: Phoenix Press, pp. 286-311.

evidenced by, for example, Germany's decision to collaborate with the Soviet Union despite British opposition.[56]

The ability of major powers to manage their relations according to an agreed set of principles determines whether cooperation and conflict are patterned or random. In a stable order, conflicts over local or peripheral issues are likely to be resolved within the boundaries of existing security arrangements that preserve coexistence. According to Bull, states often pursue vastly different and conflicting objectives in the international realm, but in so far as their foreign policy is consistent with the common rules of behaviour, the *status quo* is not challenged.[57] For example, the Second Indochina War, also known as the Vietnam War, did not upset stable power balancing because the communist takeover in South Vietnam only set an example for its immediate neighbours, Laos and Cambodia.[58] Likewise, the war did not upset the structure of coexistence sustaining stability through mutual nuclear deterrence and arms control, non-interference in the affairs of core states in the opposing alliance, and the authority of the UN Security Council; the United States had its alliance stronghold in Southeast Asia in the Philippines, and Southeast Asia was at the periphery of the Soviet sphere of influence.

By contrast, conflict resolution in an unstable order is usually imposed due to the abandonment of the existing framework of obligations. In the words of Manning, some of the great powers agreeing on the political framework of the 1919 Versailles Treaty had reservations about the very nature of the game; that is to say, their views on the legitimate use of force, on regime legitimacy and on the institutions useful for policy coordination differed fundamentally from those of US President Woodrow Wilson.[59] These differences sowed the seeds of subsequent wrangles that engendered the Second World War. In the interwar years, the vast differences between the French, US, British and German views on the preconditions for sustaining coexistence implied that they acted according to conflicting rules of the game. For example, German complaints about the conditions of the peace settlement after the First World War were taken into account because the United States and Britain were supportive and sufficiently strong to impose their will despite French protests.

---

[56] Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace*, pp. 281-436.

[57] Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 64.

[58] Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 190.

[59] Manning, *The Nature of International Society*, p. 162.

Stability is hence not necessarily associated with the absence of conflict and a high frequency of cooperation. This discussion of coexistence has attempted to demonstrate that periods of transition in patterns of power balancing are accompanied by instability due to disagreements on the just use of force, legitimate political authority and institutional settings. This was the situation during the second half of the nineteenth century with the rise of Bismarck to power in Prussia, and the interwar years between the First and Second World Wars were similarly marked by such fundamental disagreements. Such disagreements typically arise in areas where the spheres of influence of the great powers overlap and as a result of the failure of states to adjust the existing order to changes in the identities of the leading powers. Hence, Prussia's understanding of the instruments necessary for the protection of national security could not be accommodated within the nineteenth century European Concert system. German, French and British interests were not considered to be adequately protected by the League of Nations system. This situation led to conflicting implementations of the provisions of the security arrangements in Europe.

Periods of instability do not necessarily engender war, at least not immediately. The twentieth century interwar period in Europe lasted for 20 years, and Prussia and Germany gradually imposed revisions to nineteenth century security arrangements over a period of approximately 50 years. However, unstable power balancing not underpinned by a political framework of coexistence creates a dysfunctional international environment that allows states to pursue hegemonic aspirations at the expense of the common interests of states. The risk of violent conflict, blurred boundaries of non-interference and competing institutions of policy coordination promotes an inherent sense of insecurity in the international realm which prompts the states to spend undue resources on keeping the peace because the nature and rules of the game have been called off; instead, the states play their own games without adequate information on the games played by the other states. This unstable situation calls for relatively high expenditure on national defence and on diplomacy enabling individual states to counter aggression, to withstand crises that may turn into violent conflict, and to constantly adjust to swiftly changing patterns of strategic cooperation. Such an international environment calls for compromise on revised mechanisms for sustaining peace and stability to adjust the existing order to changes in the identity of the leading powers. However, major powers contesting the foundations of order are not necessarily able to forge such compromises because they fear the loss of due influence. For this reason, this type of environment is more prone to war between the major powers. For example, the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century were characterized by repeated instances of wars and interventions engendering swiftly changing alliance patterns, such as for instance Germany's unexpected decision to lapse the Reinsurance Treaty with Russia in 1890, siding instead with Britain. In addition, the conference diplomacy bringing together the European powers to manage security issues did not devise a system that would permit the peaceful resolution of disputes. The 1878 congress of Berlin demonstrated that a new balance of power centred on Germany had come into being,

but the treaties that had maintained coexistence between the European powers were replaced by a revised alliance system centring on the dual alliance between Germany and Austria, which was to keep the peace in Europe by preventing conflict between Austria and Russia.[60] This system was based on deterrence with no underlying common rules of state conduct, giving rise to repeated instances of alliance defection, threats of war and diplomatic deception to conceal gaps between strategic capacity and political goals. Of course, such dynamics also characterized periods such as the Cold War. However, during the second half of the twentieth century, these dynamics were mainly at play at the fringes of the system rather than at the centre and hence did not significantly threaten the system of coexistence established between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The theoretical framework above is based on the argument that stable power balancing is not merely achieved through equilibrium of power but also depends on agreement between the major powers on a system of coexistence that allows for conflict resolution on the basis of common constraints on the use of force, common definitions of regime legitimacy, and agreement on the institutions used for the management of international order. Sino-US policies on Asia–Pacific security suggest that stable power balancing has yet to emerge.

Asia-Pacific security in the 21st Century

The last decade has seen very little progress in the direction of stable Sino–US power balancing underpinned by coexistence. Sino–US policies on these issues demonstrate that instead of focusing on areas of compromise, the United States and China adhere to competing concepts of regional order. Despite several points of agreement, Sino–US Asia–Pacific policies do not facilitate stable power balancing based on coexistence. Two characteristics bear mentioning. First, the sub-region furthest from coexistence is China's near abroad, viz. Northeast Asia. The US alliance system is here at its strongest, and China's UN-based institutional network is at its weakest. As a consequence, China has not established an effective counter-weight to US attempts at consolidating its version of regional order in Northeast Asia, and the pattern of Sino–US rivalry is less consistent. China cannot afford to opt out of the game of power balancing this close to home. However, at the same time it cannot adopt its preferred foreign policy principles as convincingly as is the case in the other sub-regions because the United States has such a strong foothold here at the same time as the local middle power, South Korea, is comparatively weak. Northeast Asia is therefore the most volatile sub-region in the Asia–Pacific and the risk of violent conflict directly involving the United States

---

[60] Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace*, pp. 106-108.

and China is the greatest. The parts of Northeast Asia lying beyond the Korean peninsula are hence not characterized by the simultaneous presence of Sino–US structures of order to the same extent as is the case in Southeast, Central and South Asia. In the three sub-regions where such structures have emerged, there is a tacit kind of rivalry involving Chinese poaching on US alliances and strategic partnerships, the promotion of competing Sino–US guidelines of state conduct, and US advocacy of liberal democracy and the rule of law. At the same time, China pursues implementation of a system of hierarchical bandwagoning and maintains a historical understanding of sovereignty.

This uneasy kind of simultaneous presence does not promote stability, but it ensures that states act on the basis of certain rules and structures of state conduct. Even if these are not compatible because the indigenous powers tend to pick and choose between competing guidelines, it ensures that China and the United States are engaged in a simultaneous contest for influence. This contest may form the precursor of an order based on coexistence provided China and the United States, at some point in the future, manage to establish common rules of state conduct transcending their differences on issues such as human rights, the UN system, etc. In Northeast Asia, a competing set of guidelines for state conduct is not available for the quadrangle consisting of China, Japan, Taiwan and the United States. Here, China is alone in defending its version of international order towards Washington and its core Japanese ally and close Taiwanese strategic partner. Japan and Taiwan accept the full packet of regional order offered by the United States, hoping that Beijing will have to succumb to Washington's demands in the future. Therefore, China cannot respond by promoting its own version of regional order by means of shadow boxing, leaving its strategies and intentions unclear; instead, China is forced to reject the terms of order directly because Japan and Taiwan are central to the kind of order implemented in the Asia–Pacific in their capacity as fairly strong powers at the core of the US alliance system.

In the case of Taiwan, China does not use its preferred contemporary strategy of shelving sovereignty disputes, leaving the question of formal jurisdiction to be solved at a later date. Instead, China accepts no compromises as regards the 'one China' principle and mainland China's sovereignty over Taiwan.[61] This policy ensures that Taiwan remains excluded from the majority of international institutions and networks, especially in the area of security. Taiwan is hence a member of APEC, which deals with economic issues, but it remains excluded from central regional and global formal security institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the United Nations.

---

[61] Christopher R. Hughes (2006), *Chinese Nationalism in the Global Era*, London: Routledge, pp. 139-146.

Similarly in the case of Japan, China cannot use its preferred contemporary strategy of establishing strategic partnerships with major regional powers that also cooperate with the United States on strategic issues. Instead, China attempts to single out Japan as a morally deficient state whose foreign policy is solely based on the pursuit of its national interests, and who ignore the common interests of states. Chinese references to Japan's historical pursuit of territorial imperialism evoke a response in the region because, like China, numerous states also experienced the costs of Japan's so-called co-prosperity sphere. They are worried that a remilitarization of Japan and enhanced responsibilities for maintaining peace and stability in the region by military means might revive Japanese aspirations for regional dominance. Tokyo's continuous pursuit of a permanent seat at the UN Security Council is seen as an act of selfishness motivated by Japan's aspirations to implement its nationalistic designs for world order. By contrast, India's bid for a permanent seat is met positively as an attempt at redressing the imbalance between the developing and the developed countries in the UN, even if China's support to India is only at the rhetorical level. China's efforts do not stop Japan from pursuing regional free trade agreements, embarking on a military modernization process, and enhancing alliance relations with the United States.

China has been able to accommodate South Korea's demand for support for a strategy to gradually integrate North Korea into international society rather than a strategy of regime change and swift reform as recommended by the United States. Nonetheless, the 2002 US–North Korean nuclear standoff has also shown that there are flaws in China's version of Asia–Pacific order. China has succeeded in presenting itself as the convenor accommodating the interests of other states in contrast to the United States that is perceived as a power putting its own interests first. However, in practice Beijing prefers to maintain the Sino–North Korean alliance intact with North Korea as a China dependent without independent international involvement. The standoff has hence revealed flaws in China's claim that it subscribes to the UN system as a universal moral basis for its Asia–Pacific policy.

Altogether, these flaws are quite serious for several reasons because they rule out the emergence of power balancing based on coexistence. The security dynamics of Northeast Asia are substantially different from those of the Asia–Pacific as a whole in that they are dominated by raw power politics without being ameliorated by rules of state conduct. China is the dominant state in the sub-region, but it does not behave according to its ordinary scheme of state conduct. This is unfortunate because Northeast Asia is the key to Asia–Pacific order since it is home to China, the principal opponent of the United States. Moreover, Chinese foreign policy in Northeast Asia calls into question Beijing's long-term intentions with its current foreign policy in the Asia–Pacific as a whole. Northeast Asia is so central to Asia–Pacific security that it makes Beijing's claim that it intends to sustain a cooperative foreign policy appear unconvincing. And Beijing

cannot single out Northeast Asia as a special region where other rules apply because Beijing attempts to build the foundations of an order for the Asia–Pacific as a whole.

A second characteristic is that in the other sub-regions Southeast Asia, Central Asia and South Asia, Washington's influence is weaker and here, the flaws in the US version of regional order are revealed. In Southeast and Central Asia, Washington tends to prioritize stability before the spread of liberal democracy and human rights. This means that the United States supports authoritarian regimes systematically violating the civil rights instituted in the UN Charter although Washington claims to promote an order that puts these same rules on a par with those of absolute sovereignty and non-intervention. The United States defends this position by arguing that domestic stability is a precondition for the spread of democracy and the rule of law if these changes in domestic political structures are to constitute lasting, consolidated features of state and society and not just be a rhetorical device concealing that authoritarian political structures have been maintained. The problem with this argument is that in South Asia, the United States prioritizes authoritarian Pakistan rather than democratic India. In Southeast Asia, Washington prioritizes authoritarian Singapore while remaining fairly critical of Indonesia despite Jakarta's efforts to establish democracy and the rule of law.[62] In Central Asia, the United States prioritized Uzbekistan as its main strategic partner until recently despite the fact that it is one of the most totalitarian states in the sub-region. Therefore, the real reason for US priorities is apparently not the argument that stability must come before democracy, considering that Singapore has been a stable authoritarian regime for decades and India a consolidated secular democracy for even longer. Instead, US policies are most likely influenced by its concern to preserve US pre-eminence in the Asia–Pacific.

As a consequence of the change in US policies on India, another flaw has emerged involving US acceptance of India's refusal to commit to the Non-Proliferation Treaty despite the centrality of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the US scheme for Asia–Pacific order. Although the proposal has not yet been approved by the US Congress, it represents a long-term policy change in US policies on the subcontinent. In the short term, Pakistan has become a core US ally because Washington needs Islamabad's assistance in its efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the current authoritarian regime in Pakistan is threatened by the Islamic domestic opposition that in the eyes of Washington constitutes an undesirable alternative to the Musharraf administration. In the long term, the United States intends to prioritize New Delhi because if India becomes a loyal strategic partner of Washington the US

---

[62] In principle, Singapore has a parliamentary form of government. In reality, however, no viable opposition exists to the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) due to insufficient resources, manipulation with the geography of the constituencies, prosecution of government-critical voices, etc.

version of Asia–Pacific order is likely to dominate South Asia. The United States has taken the risk of compromising its own principles of state conduct with regard to India because it wants to avoid that India, who is very critical of US policies on regional order, ends up siding with China as did Russia.

Such flaws in US designs on the Asia–Pacific encourage indigenous powers to enlist at least partial support for China's version of regional order to avoid the consolidation of a *Pax Americana* in the Asia–Pacific. Even if the majority of states partially siding with China prefer the US version of regional order, they are also aware that if the United States comes to dominate regional policies in the Asia–Pacific, US policies are likely to be much less tolerant and accommodating towards the demands and interests of indigenous powers than is the case at present. These states are particularly keen to support the parts of China's regional policy encompassing the ideas of cooperative security, multipolarity and preservation of the UN system of the Cold War because these policy elements prevent the United States from becoming too dominant. Some of them, such as Malaysia and Russia, are particularly opposed to the US commitment to spread liberal democracy and the rule of law. Others, like India and South Korea, are concerned about the US departure from the Cold War principles invested in the UN system and its tendency to resort to unilateralism and military solutions to security problems. On the other hand, they will not buy the whole packet on offer from Beijing because a Sino–centric order is not a desirable alternative.

The United States and China appear to continue to work at cross-purposes in the Asia–Pacific. The proliferation in strategic partnerships and *ad hoc* collaboration with numerous powers reflect China's success in postponing the settlement of a permanent order for the Asia–Pacific as a whole. But it also reflects that secondary regional powers and entities such as ASEAN, Russia, South Korea and India have proved unwilling to chose between the two, and nor do they have to due to the inability of the United States and China to agree on fundamental rules of state conduct. For Washington, there seems to be two alternative ways of preserving US pre-eminence. One solution would be to accommodate Chinese demands for regional order and renounce on some of the principles of the US version of regional order. Washington's prioritization of its Northeast Asian ally Japan and its strategic partner Taiwan uses its efforts to build up their force postures since mainland China maintains its claim to jurisdiction over Taiwan and Sino–Japanese enmity prevails. A Sino–US agreement based on an order of coexistence requires that the United States limits its aggressive pursuit of consolidating its alliance system. This policy encourages China to respond by raising defence expenditures. It may well be because of this US policy that Beijing continues to rely on a passive form of unilateralism instead of making a whole-hearted commitment to a cooperative foreign policy with a permanent focus on policy coordination and cooperation based on the common interests of states.

Perhaps more importantly, Washington's pursuit of the spread of liberal democracy and the rule of law is not acceptable to China. Even if Washington tends to prioritize stability before democracy and human rights, it does pursue the latter goals when a convenient occasion appears. This was the case with the 2005 Andijon killings in Uzbekistan, or when US national security interests are considered threatened, as was the case with the 2001 intervention in Afghanistan. At the end of the day, the United States is awaiting a democratization of mainland China itself because that would imply the defeat of Beijing's version of regional order. These plans constitute the main long-term threat in the eyes of Beijing that prevents reconciliation between the US and Chinese demands for regional order because the communist regime cannot risk buying into a US scheme of regional order that involves its own fall. If China had an alternative model of domestic political authority appealing to neighbouring states, Sino–US disagreement on the issue of legitimacy might ironically have been minimized. Washington would then have realized the infeasibility of trying to spread liberal democracy and the rule of law in the Chinese part of the world, just as the United States learned to accommodate the communist regime in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The political philosophy of Confucianism, which is based on collective and hierarchical principles, has occasionally been suggested as a possible basis for constructing an alternative model of state–society relations if translated into workable political arrangements. However, it remains to be seen if such a process is set in motion. So far, Confucianism has been used as a pretext to fend off demands for liberal political reform rather than as a basis for constructing a viable model of domestic legitimacy. And the majority of China's neighbours perceive hierarchical bandwagoning as a major drawback to a Sino–centric order. The second alternative attempt to consolidate a *Pax Americana*, which ultimately forces Beijing to accept the US principles of state conduct, hence appears to be the more attractive option.

Since China cannot come up with a viable alternative to the US version of domestic order, its best bet is to advocate the preservation of the Cold War UN system. It allows for the prevalence of heterogeneous political systems due to its principles of absolute sovereignty and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states. This is a negative solution in that it serves to prevent the United States from enforcing its own principles of domestic conduct without suggesting viable alternatives. This is a weakness in China's proposal which provides Washington with an outstanding chance to invest Asia–Pacific order with its own values of state–society relations. The prospects of a compromise between the United States and China that might allow for power balancing founded in coexistence hence look bleak.

Conclusion

The question is whether this type of unstable order will stay with us for so long that this is the kind of order we will have in the twenty-first century. If so, its principal characteristics are already known: The absence of binding alliance commitments, a highly unpredictable international environment but also a considerable freedom of action allowing for swift foreign policy adjustments.

This kind of prolonged interim order has advantages as well as drawbacks. For the United States, the advantage of the current order is that it allows Washington to pursue its economic interests almost wherever it wants. China's embrace of market economic structures that are so central to US demands for regional order is hence a vast improvement compared to the communist alternative adopted by the East bloc during the Cold War order. Moreover, the United States has an outstanding chance of promoting its version of domestic political order, not only because China has not suggested an alternative, but also because the strengthening of the US alliance system serves to enhance the democracies forming the core of the system. The costs of the current order are of course higher than if the United States dominated Asia–Pacific order. In particular, the critical voice of the secondary powers carries much weight in Washington because China provides them with an alternative. Russia's change of policy in the 1990s has been most remarkable. In the early 1990s, Moscow sided with the United States. However, disappointment as to the returns from this partnership and concern about the consequences of US policies on legitimacy caused Russia to align with China from the late 1990s. Arguably, Moscow's change in priorities has encouraged the United States to compromise with its anti-WMD principles to accommodate the equally US-critical Indian political establishment with the purpose of ensuring that India gravitates towards the United States rather than China. Similarly, ASEAN's rapprochement with China implies that the United States has to conduct a relatively conciliatory policy towards the Southeast Asian states. For example, one reason that Washington had to retreat from its demand to send troops to assist patrolling the Malacca Strait is arguably that the Chinese supported a request from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to remain in control of the strait.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day the United States benefits substantially from the current order since it remains the only dominant power in the Asia–Pacific. For example, it could afford to stay away from the ASEAN Regional Forum's summit in 2005, making Beijing subsequently follow suit. This demonstrated that Washington remains the first among equals. And as much as Beijing attempts to poach on US alliances and strategic partnerships, the majority of Asia–Pacific states continue to rely on Washington for the most vital means of survival, viz. security guarantees, which Beijing cannot provide. The majority of Asia–Pacific states would not want to rely on Beijing even if China had the military capabilities to do so since, if forced to choose, they would opt for a *Pax Americana* rather than a Sino–centric order. This characterizes the priorities of the majority of ASEAN member states, South Korea and India and of course states such as

Taiwan, Japan, Australia and New Zealand that are at the core of the US alliance system. Russia relies on its own extensive military capabilities instead. In a perfect world, Washington would prefer to be able to implement its version of regional order in its totality, and its efforts to contain China points to the fact that it continues to work towards the goal of regional hegemony. Current conditions are, nevertheless, sufficiently satisfactory for the United States to profit substantially from the present order in the Asia–Pacific, and since Washington has to take into account the views of the secondary powers, US policies will most likely contribute to the maintenance of contemporary order in the Asia–Pacific.

Chinese foreign policy also seems to sit well with a high level of unpredictability and a low level of commitment, which gives an enigmatic impression of its strategies and goals. To some extent, this has been a deliberate Chinese strategy since the late 1970s, designed to safeguard it against pressures from superior powers at odds with Chinese interests. Although, after Secretary of State Kissinger visited Beijing in 1971, the Asia–Pacific was often described as tripolar, the Chinese did not in any serious way challenge the status which the dominant powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, enjoyed during the Cold War. It seems more reasonable to describe China during the later years of the Cold War as a middle power sufficiently strong to avoid subservience to great power demands and capable of conducting a foreign policy founded in alternating gravitation towards the United States and the Soviet Union. China's nuclear capability combined with substantial low-technological conventional capabilities allowed this policy. In addition, China's willingness to use force against foreign encroachment of the territorial integrity of what was defined as the Chinese motherland was well proven. Second, a significant pragmatic element pervaded Chinese foreign policy thinking, as implied by its willingness to side with the liberal as well as the communist bloc. Third, China based its foreign policy decisions firmly on an estimate of which partnership would result in the highest returns for China's national interests. Its foreign policy profile points to the existence of an alternative programme for international order to that of the United States and the Soviet Union. China was presented as a developing state aiming for peaceful coexistence, a new economic world order and defiance of alliances. In contrast to the great powers, China did not occupy a position allowing it to export its development model to other countries to any significant extent. In the main, the alternative political framework remained a rhetorical device designed to highlight China's foreign policy independence since Beijing did not command sufficient influence to have an impact on the fundamental principles of state conduct. China's principal gain was the considerable strategic, economic and political benefits it was able to extract by its foreign policy. It did not contribute to or alter the political framework used by the United States and the Soviet Union for the management of international order.

China's influence in the international realm has been out of proportion to its actual economic and military capabilities since then. One explanation is its skilful manoeuvring between the United States and the Soviet Union. They were not at ease with a state that refused to take sides, and opted for a high level of freedom of action that enabled it to adjust quickly to changes in the bipolar balancing pattern. If interpreted in this way, the present order is not intermediate, but has already been adjusted to serve Chinese interests.

The difference between the present order and that of the Cold War is, however, that China no longer acts as a middle power alternating between alliances. Instead, the pattern of Chinese foreign policy in the Asia–Pacific resembles that of a great power *in spe*. It is difficult to utilize this potential under conditions of high unpredictability, as indicated by its calls for a stable international environment allowing it to concentrate on economic development. The costs of constant foreign policy adjustments are high in a situation where China prefers to direct the majority of resources towards the economic sector. But if the United States remains determined to establish a *Pax Americana*, China is left with few choices but to continue its present foreign policy.

The paper has examined post-Cold War balancing patterns in the Asia–Pacific, focusing on the contribution of Washington and Beijing to regional stability through power balancing embedded in rules of coexistence. To address this problem, the paper has revisited studies from the first generation of English school scholars on international order. They subscribed to the view that fundamental strategic concerns must be resolved before non-strategic dynamics may translate into cooperative international orders. The preceding analysis of US and Chinese policies on Asia–Pacific security demonstrates that very little progress in the direction of stable Sino–US power balancing underpinned by coexistence has taken place and that the United States and China promote competing versions of order. This conclusion suggests that there is still some merit to the arguments of Manning, Wight, Butterfield, Bull and Northedge.

.