

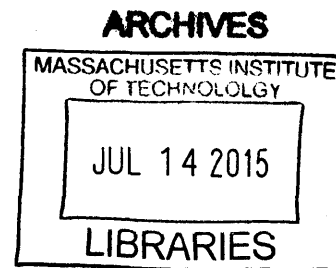
Fear and Frustration: Rising State Perceptions of Threats and Opportunities

by

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Submitted to the Department of Political Science on December 4, 2014 in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

ABSTRACT

Do a dominant state's policies have a greater effect on a rising state's threat perceptions or its assessment of the dominant state's resolve? Existing theory, rooted in Jervis's spiral and deterrence models, contends that the answer depends on whether the state has status quo or revisionist intentions. Rising states are typically seen as revisionist, a type of state that is said to be easily emboldened by conciliation but not easily threatened by competition.

This project, on the other hand, argues that rising states – even those with revisionist aims – are more easily threatened than emboldened. Anarchy and uncertainty surrounding the dominant state's intentions give all rising states incentive to be cautious in their assessments. Underestimating threats could leave a rising state more vulnerable to coercion or unprepared for war with a materially stronger dominant state. Rising states, therefore, increase their threat assessments in response to almost any kind of competition by the dominant state. The risks of underestimating the dominant state's resolve are also significant: a resolute dominant state might respond to a challenge with overwhelming force. Therefore, rising states only downgrade their assessments of the dominant state's resolve in the face of very strong signals, such as large, militarily useful concessions.

This dissertation tests these competing arguments during periods when Britain was a dominant state facing a rising, revisionist power – the United States (1837-1846) and Wilhelmine Germany (1894-1898). Detailed, historical analysis identified each British policy change and assessed the impact on U.S. and German perceptions. The results suggest that existing theory overstates the risks of conciliating rising states and understates the impact that competition has on a rising state's threat perceptions. Rising states may be ambitious, but they do not lose sight of their material weakness, the threats they face, or the limits to what they might gain.

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List of Abbreviations

ADM	Admiralty (British)
CINC	Composite Index of National Capability
CO	Colonial Office (British)
ESRI	Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc.
FO	Foreign Office (British)
TNA	The National Archives of the UK
WO	War Office (British)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since Barack Obama became president, his critics have argued that his foreign policy has been excessively conciliatory. They contend that America's adversaries have been emboldened by Obama's "feckless" foreign policy: Russia annexed Crimea, Iran grew intransigent during nuclear negotiations, and China became more aggressive in the South China Sea.¹ Had the United States taken a firmer stand by imposing tougher sanctions on Iran or strengthening alliances in Europe and Asia, the logic goes, these states would never have doubted American resolve or challenged U.S. interests. Their analysis suggests that, despite U.S. military superiority over potential rivals, the United States can easily acquire a reputation for being irresolute: weaker states monitor American behavior and look for any indication that the United States lacks the will to defend its interests.

This logic has been particularly strong when it comes to a rising China. Many worry that China's growing capabilities make it ambitious and thus particularly attuned to information regarding American resolve. In 2010, the Obama administration came to the same view, concluding that its initial diplomatic overtures had emboldened China to pursue more assertive policies in East Asia. In part to show American resolve, the administration reversed course and announced a "pivot to Asia" that would include a larger U.S. military presence and stronger alliances in the region.²

¹ For example, see, David Nakamura, "At AIPAC, John McCain Blames Obama's 'feckless' Foreign Policy for Ukraine Crisis," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2014, sec. Politics.

² Here, I focus on concerns about an adversary's perceptions, but U.S. policy is often motivated by the impact it will have on the perceptions and behavior of U.S. allies; United States, Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," January 2012, 2, http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf; Shawn Brimley and Ely Ratner, "Smart Shift: A Response to 'The Problem with the Pivot,'" *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (February 2013): pp. 177–81; David S. Cloud, "China Wary of U.S. Military Moves in Asia-Pacific," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/sep/16/world/la-fg-panetta-asia-20120916>; Mark Lippert, "The Rebalance: One Year Later" (presented at the Conference on US Rebalance to Asia - A One Year Assessment: Where Have We

However, even in this period of heightened concerns about perceptions of American resolve, the United States has not adopted a purely competitive stance in Asia. This is due partly to a countervailing concern, namely that a purely competitive stance might unduly threaten a rising China. That could trigger further security competition and create other undesirable outcomes, such as arms racing. In fact, for some time, U.S. foreign policy elites have agreed that the United States must follow a moderate middle path by mixing conciliatory and competitive policies rather than pursuing extreme policies of pure appeasement or pure containment.³ As one former member of the Obama Administration explained, “U.S. policy toward a rising China could not rely solely on military muscle, economic blandishments and pressure and sanctions on human rights.... At the same time, a policy of indulgence and accommodation of assertive Chinese conduct, or indifference to its internal evolution, could embolden bad behavior and frighten U.S. allies and partners. We would spend a good deal of effort during my time at the National Security Council fine-tuning an approach that avoided these extremes.”⁴

Been and Where are We Going?, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, February 27, 2013). Mark Landler, “Obama’s Evolution to a Tougher Line on China,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/21/us/politics/obamas-evolution-to-a-tougher-line-on-china.html>; Aaron L. Friedberg, “Future Tense: Are the United States and China on a Collision Course?,” *New Republic* 242, no. 4902 (2011): 10–11. Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011), 115.

³ Joseph S. Nye, “Work With China, Don’t Contain It,” *The New York Times*, January 25, 2013, sec. Opinion, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/26/opinion/work-with-china-dont-contain-it.html>; Thomas J. Christensen, “The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict,” *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2002): 10; Robert B. Zoellick, “Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?,” September 11, 2005; Evelyn Goh, “Understanding ‘Hedging’ in Asia-Pacific Security,” *PacNet*, no. 43 (August 31, 2006), <http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-43-august-31-2006-understanding-hedging-asia-pacific-security>; Evan S. Medeiros, “Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia-Pacific Stability,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2005): 145–67; Jeffrey A. Bader, *Obama and China’s Rise: An Insider’s Account of America’s Asia Strategy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 3; Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*, 252; Ashton B. Carter, Frank Sampson Jannuzi, and Carla A. Hills, *U.S.-China Relations: An Affirmative Agenda, A Responsible Course*, Independent Task Force (Council on Foreign Relations, April 2007); James Dobbins et al., *Conflict with China: Prospects, Consequences, and Strategies for Deterrence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), vii, http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP344.html.

⁴ Bader, *Obama and China’s Rise*, 3.

Apparently aware of the possible tradeoff, the Obama administration has been quick to argue that the pivot is not purely a competitive strategy: the policy mix includes conciliatory elements, including diplomatic dialogue to reassure China about American intentions. For example, one of the administration's defenders, former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, explained that the United States was clarifying its intentions by explaining its "strategic concept of relations with China and why 'hedging' policies by the United States and others are a reasonable reaction to worrisome Chinese behavior."⁵ Still, others contend that such efforts are not enough and that the pivot "unnecessarily compounds Beijing's insecurities and will only feed China's aggressiveness, undermine regional stability, and decrease the possibility of cooperation between Beijing and Washington."⁶ In this minority view, Obama's China policy has shifted too far in the direction of competition.

Despite these divergent viewpoints, commentators agree on core elements of the policy problem. First, they agree that American policies affect other states' threat perceptions and assessments of American resolve. These perceptions matter because they, in turn, influence policies that U.S. adversaries decide to pursue. Second, commentators note two important aspects of the international setting in which these perceptions are generated. The United States remains the dominant global power, but its adversaries are experiencing a relative rise. At the same time, most commentators worry that America's adversaries are or will become revisionist actors, meaning they might want to expand territorially or to change other international arrangements.⁷ Collectively, these views frame the policy question the United States faces

⁵ Robert B. Zoellick, "U.S., China and Thucydides," *National Interest*, no. 126 (2013): 22–30.

⁶ See, for example, Robert S. Ross, "The Problem with the Pivot: Obama's New Asia Policy Is Unnecessary and Counterproductive," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 6 (December 2012): pp. 70–82.

⁷ Doug Saunders, "Five Schools of Thought About Where the World May Be Headed Next," *The Globe and Mail*, September 28, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/five-schools-of-thought-about-where-the-world-may-be-headed-next/article20812161/>.

today: in what ways do a dominant state's policies affect the perceptions of a rising, potentially revisionist, state? More specifically, can a dominant state (i) take competitive steps to deter a rising state without also threatening the riser, or (ii) conciliate to reassure the rising state without emboldening the rising state to demand more?

The underlying disagreement on U.S. policy turns on how one answers these broader questions. The conventional wisdom contends that rising states are very sensitive to information regarding a dominant state's resolve, but are not easily threatened. Hence, rising states are easily emboldened by conciliation but not easily threatened by competition. The minority view contends the opposite, claiming that competitive policies usually threaten while conciliatory policies are unlikely to embolden.

This project informs the debate by developing the deeper theoretical logic behind these views and testing the hypotheses they produce. Its findings support the minority view. As discussed in Chapter Two, international anarchy gives rising states strong incentives to be alert to prospective threats and cautious about making challenges. The findings show that even in hard cases - when a rising state has clearly revisionist aims - conciliation by a dominant state is not mistaken for weak will, while competition by a dominant state is often seen as threatening. Rising states simply do not perceive a dominant state's policies as most policymakers and scholars expect.

The remainder of this introduction proceeds in four sections. First, I define core terms and clarify what I mean by perceptions of threat and resolve. Second, I discuss the existing literature on the relationship between a dominant state's policies and the perceptions of a rising challenger. Third, I present an overview of my argument, *insecurity theory* and an alternative,

opportunism theory, which captures the conventional wisdom. Finally, I explain how the theories will be tested and outline the remainder of the dissertation.

Perceptions of Threat and Resolve

The debate outlined above reveals a disagreement about how a dominant state's policies affect the rising state's (i) threat perceptions and (ii) assessments of the dominant state's resolve. By *threat perception*, I mean a state's assessment of the likelihood that it will lose things it already possesses, including territory, physical safety, sovereign rights, or access to the materials needed to keep the economy running.⁸ In effect, the rising state asks itself: does the dominant state have expansionist aims? And is it likely to use force against my existing holdings? Threat assessments are chiefly concerned with the actions the dominant state might take rather than its deeper motivations.⁹ The dominant state may be motivated by either greed or security, but in either case, a rising state is threatened if it believes that the dominant state will adopt policies that harm the rising state. Conversely, a rising state is reassured if it believes that the dominant state is pursuing fewer expansive policies or willing to expend less effort to achieve those aims. The rising state may view the dominant state as entirely revisionist or purely status quo. Alternatively, the rising state might believe that the dominant state's intentions vary by issue or by region.

While threat perceptions are concerned with losses, assessments of the dominant state's *resolve* are concerned with gains the rising state might make. An assessment of resolve is the

⁸ Barry R. Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (February 2013): 116–28.

⁹ On the distinction between motives and intentions, see, Charles L. Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models," *World Politics* 44, no. 4 (July 1992): 497–538.

rising state's belief about the likelihood that it will face resistance if it pursues aggrandizement at the dominant state's expense.¹⁰ Here, the rising state asks: will the dominant state respond to a challenge to its existing holdings and what resources it is willing to expend to do so? If it sees the dominant state as highly resolute, the rising state may expect its challenges to be repelled and to face further punishment and loss.¹¹ Just as threat perceptions can vary by issue, so too can assessments of resolve. For instance, the rising state might assess that the dominant state is highly resolute to defend its homeland, but much less committed to defend a distant colony.

This study focuses on perceptions of threat and resolve because they affect a wide range of state behavior and international outcomes (Figure 1.1).¹² Traditionally, elevated threat perceptions are associated with undesirable outcomes. All things being equal, the more a rising state feels threatened, the more likely it is to pursue security-motivated expansion, engage in arms racing, and refuse to cooperate with the dominant state. These behaviors, in turn can make war more likely as international tensions mount and spirals of insecurity occur. However, elevated threat assessments can sometimes lead to desirable outcomes. A state that is threatened, might, under some conditions, be more likely to comply with a dominant state's demands, fearing that refusal could lead to war. Similarly, low assessments of resolve are traditionally associated with undesirable outcomes. When a rising state has a low assessment of the dominant state's resolve, it is more likely to make challenges and dismiss the dominant state's threats.

¹⁰ Mercer uses the term resolve to mean a state's willingness to use force to achieve any of its aims, from defending what it already has to seizing things from another state. That definition is not appropriate for this project, which allows that a state might have different beliefs about another's willingness to use force to expand versus to defend what it already has; Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1996).

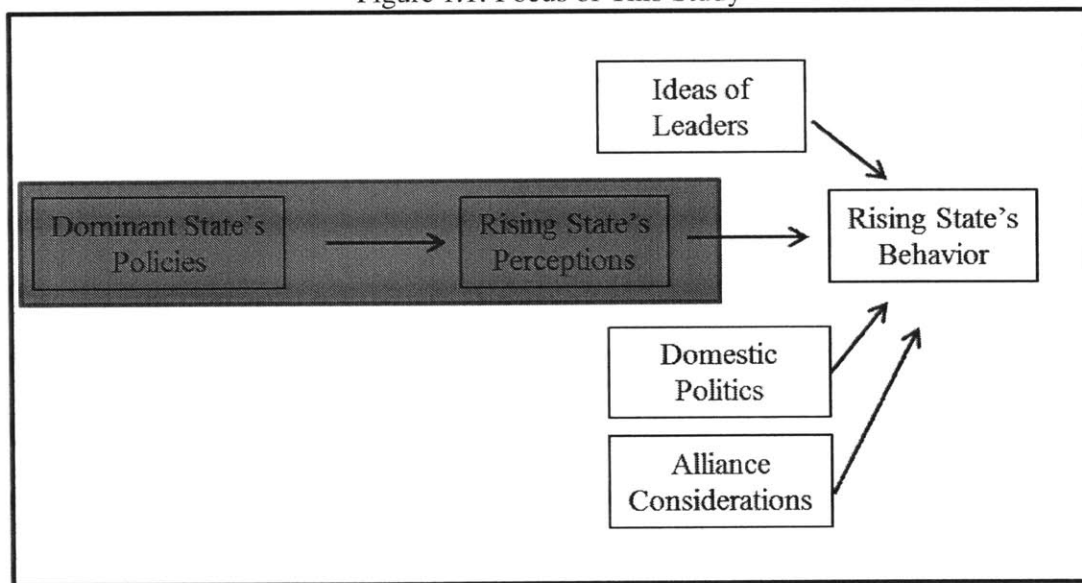
¹¹ This kind of loss, which results only from a direct attack on the dominant power, is distinct from threat perceptions. For example, the rising state may feel that it has a claim to a piece of disputed territory that it does not control. The rising state is not threatened if it believes its own efforts to get that piece of land will be met with force. Instead, it simply understands that the dominant state is resolved to maintain its existing holdings.

¹² Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 28–31.

However, high assessments of resolve can also lead to undesirable outcomes. For example, a rising state that seeks changes to the status quo, but faces a highly resolute dominant state, might embark on large arms buildup, believing it is the only way to gain an adjustment.¹³

Given these many potential consequences, Jervis argued that the impact of a policy choice on perceptions might be even more important than the material value of the immediate interest defended or conceded.¹⁴ A theory about how policies affect perceptions is, therefore, a first step to understanding larger questions about how a dominant state's policy choices affect a rising state's behavior and the course of the power transition.

Figure 1.1: Focus of This Study



¹³ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁴ Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy"; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 58; Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 3.

Existing Literature

Jervis's deterrence model is the most enduring treatment of revisionist state perceptions. In this model, revisionist states look to the policies of others primarily to find opportunities for gain. A revisionist state sees conciliation as a signal that its adversary is irresolute and likely to concede if challenged. Therefore, conciliation emboldens a revisionist to make new demands or initiate more challenges. Competition, on the other hand, shows the dominant state's resolve and may deter the revisionist state from making a future challenge.¹⁵

Jervis contrasted a revisionist with a status quo state, whose only concern is maintaining its existing holdings. Status quo states have no expansive aims and so have no reason to assess another's resolve. Instead, in the spiral model, he predicts that status quo states only assess threats. These states are threatened by competition and, in some cases, reassured by conciliation.¹⁶

Jervis's framing of the problem has deeply affected policy and scholarly debates about the link between policies and perceptions. Two important shortcomings of these models may explain why this debate remains unresolved. First, the logic behind Jervis's models has never been fully developed.¹⁷ The models simply assume that a state's type – status quo or revisionist – is always the most important factor in how it interprets the policies of others. The models do not explain why a revisionist makes such different assessments or how exactly its calculations differ from those of a status quo state. Reflecting this ambiguity, the spiral and deterrence

¹⁵ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 58–67, 101–102. Glaser argues that this tendency to be emboldened by conciliation is particularly strong when states seek to change the status quo for non-security reasons, such as ideology, religion, prestige, or immediate economic gain. Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 38.

¹⁶ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.

¹⁷ For a partial exception, see Glaser, which did propose some refinements. Glaser's work did not, however, explain why states vary so much in how they make calculations or lay out exactly how those calculations are made; Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy."

models talk past one another: despite the centrality of threats in the spiral model, the deterrence model is silent on how (or whether) revisionist states assess threats. Likewise, the spiral model is silent on whether there are any conditions under which a status quo state might become concerned with questions of resolve.

Second, actual tests and applications of Jervis' models have been limited. This is largely because there is no agreement on the criteria for identifying revisionist states.¹⁸ First, there are varying definitions about the type of gains that a revisionist hopes to make. In the narrowest definition, revisionists are states that have enduring territorial ambitions, usually for reasons unrelated to the security of the homeland.¹⁹ However, others also include states that have low participation rates in international institutions, violate international law, or seek changes to international norms or institutions. Second, there is no standard for how expansive a state's aims must be before it qualifies as revisionist. It is not clear whether a state that claims a small part of another's territory qualifies, or whether a state must claim large areas or make multiple claims in order to be considered revisionist.²⁰

There are two broad ways to move beyond the current literature. The first approach is to continue to develop criteria to categorize states by type and to develop the logic of the spiral and

¹⁸ James D. Fearon, "Two States, Two Types, Two Actions," *Security Studies* 20, no. 3 (2011): 438–439.

¹⁹ Conversely, status quo states, most agree, seek only to maintain their existing holdings. Such states might, in the face of an extreme external threat, expand to defend the homeland. However, in general, these states do not think about or pursue expansion.

²⁰ Some definitions include maintaining close relations with other greedy states or having domestic practices and institutions at odds with existing international norms. Alastair I. Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 5–56; Peter Hays Gries and Thomas J. Christensen, "Power and Resolve in U.S. China Policy," *International Security* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 155–65; Jeffrey W. Legro, "What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 03 (2007): 515–34; Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?," *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (1996): 92; Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, 35; Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), 125. Other notable examples of arguments that rely on state type include Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 36–39; A. F. K. Organski and J. Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*.

deterrence models a bit more. This project pursues a second approach. It acknowledges that the state type framing is problematic and, instead, uses a different starting point. Others have rightly pointed out that ideal type states are empirically uncommon.²¹ Most states have a mix of goals: they care both about maintaining what they have and about making gains. This project therefore begins from such a state and instead asks: how do the incentives of the international system affect its calculations about threat and resolve?

Insecurity Theory

This project argues that most rising states – whether status quo or revisionist – are more sensitive to the possibility of threats than to the possibility of gains. Insecurity theory assumes that states exist in anarchy and are uncertain about each other's present and future intentions. In this setting, a dominant state might use its power to coerce or attack the rising state at any moment. Moreover, the rising state is aware that once force is used, minor disputes can sometimes escalate into long, costly conflicts. Underestimating threats can therefore have serious consequences: the rising state might be unprepared for a fight with the materially stronger dominant power. As a result, rising state's threat perceptions are sensitive – even moderate forms of competition will provoke a reassessment. Insecurity theory, therefore, argues that the spiral model's predictions about threat perceptions hold even if the rising state is revisionist.

These same incentives affect how rising states make calculations about opportunities for gain. If the dominant state is resolute, it might respond to a challenge with overwhelming force. The weaker state is therefore cautious about how it makes assessments of the dominant state's

²¹ Fearon, "Two States, Two Types, Two Actions."

resolve. The rising state will only downgrade its assessment of the dominant state's resolve in response to more extreme policy changes that cause a significant, favorable shift in the distribution of power. Most of the dominant state's policies, which have little impact on the distribution of power, will not be enough to provoke a reassessment. Put another way, rising revisionists are not as easily emboldened as the deterrence model expects.

Opportunism Theory

This project tests insecurity theory against a modified version of the deterrence model. As discussed above, the deterrence model is under-theorized. However, other analysts have argued that revisionism results from some kind of domestic-level dysfunction.²² I therefore draw on insights from the literature on the psychology of foreign policy decision making to explain how a revisionist states might make calculations about both threat and resolve.

This logic, which I term opportunism theory, contends that leaders of revisionist states adopt a benign view of the dominant state's intentions and downplay the risks of escalation in the international system. These beliefs take hold and endure because they help the rising state's leaders reduce psychological stress. A belief that the dominant state has a strong and enduring preference against fighting allows the rising state's leaders to believe that there are no tradeoffs associated with pursuing expansion. These views become deeply entrenched and affect how the rising state interprets new information. Even moderately conciliatory policies validate the rising state's worldview and embolden it to make a challenge. On the other hand, it takes very strong

²² See, for example, Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 20–22.

competitive signals, such as a large-scale military build-up by the dominant power, to threaten a revisionist state.

Methodological Approach

This project tests insecurity and opportunism theory in two longitudinal cases studies. The case selection criteria were designed to both address shortcomings in the existing literature and to set up a hard case for insecurity theory. First, I chose states that have shown an enduring interest in territorial expansion. As discussed earlier, the lack of agreement on criteria for revisionism has limited testing of the deterrence model. Rather than proposing a new set of criteria for identifying all revisionist states, I adopt the narrowest possible definition of revisionism. An interest in territorial expansion is common to most, if not all, competing definitions.²³ Since even status quo states might rarely expand if they are under a deep security threat, one instance of expansion is not sufficient to qualify. Rather, I choose states that have strong domestic forces – ideological, economic, cultural, and so on – pushing for expansion over multiple decades.²⁴ By choosing these so-called *greedy revisionists*, there can be little dispute that the states in question meet the basic criteria of revisionism.

Second, by selecting greedy revisionists, I set up an easy test of opportunism theory and a hard test for insecurity theory. Opportunism theory contends that, in such states, domestic pressures for expansion could create deep psychological stress for leaders who must face a tradeoff between their domestic and international goals. Leaders under such conditions should

²³ For a similar argument, see, M. Taylor Fravel, “Power Shifts and Escalation: Explaining China’s Use of Force in Territorial Disputes,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/2008): 45.

²⁴ Glaser generally considers economic motives to be greedy. However, if the economic gain is very substantial, enough to add to a nation’s long-term power, some might consider it to be a security motive. There is therefore some grey area. For the purposes here, a sharp distinction is not necessary. I classify economic motives as greedy if they serve a narrow interest group or do not substantially affect the size of a nation’s overall wealth; Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*.

be among the most likely to adopt a benign view of dominant state in order to dismiss the possibility of such tradeoffs and reduce their psychological stress. In other words, these states should be an easy test of opportunism theory. At the same time, a state with a strong domestic drive to expand represents a hard test for insecurity theory. If, as insecurity theory expects, international conditions dominate calculations of threat and resolve even in these states, then the theory has passed a very important test.²⁵

This dissertation tests these theories during the periods when the United States (1837-1846) and Germany (1894-1898) were rising states and Britain was the dominant state. As will be discussed in further detail in later chapters, the United States and Germany were both rising revisionists. The United States had pursued continental expansion since independence, and near the turn of the century, Germany continued look toward overseas expansion.

These cases are also attractive for a number of two reasons. First, British cases are attractive for their policy relevance. Hard cases are an attractive starting point for testing theories, but some might question whether the findings apply to current policy problems if the theories are tested in dramatically different situations. From the perspective of policy relevance, therefore, it is helpful to find cases that share some strategic similarities to the United States today. British cases offer two important similarities. First, Britain was not just dominant in one region; it was the world's strongest power. Though 19th century Britain was never as powerful as the United States is today, it is the most recent example of a dominant global power that consciously dealt with its own relative decline. Second, in the periods under consideration here, Britain pursued the type of strategy that the United States is considering today, a mixed approach

²⁵ The easiest case for insecurity theory and hardest for opportunism theory is a rising state that only has an interest in protecting its security and does so without seeking to change the status quo. I avoid such cases, instead choosing difficult cases for my theory. If my theory passes a hard test, there is a stronger reason to believe its logic is at work.

that combines competition and conciliation rather than opting for one or the other. The greatest potential drawback to these tests is that they took place in the pre-nuclear era. But as will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion, even when states have nuclear weapons that ensure their survival, they continue to compete over important questions.

Second, these are historically interesting cases. Many point to the rise of the United States as the best example of a peaceful power transition in history. Those who point to the dangers of power transitions often look at the rise of Germany in the decades leading up to World War I. Though this project does not address all questions about what causes a peaceful rise, the analysis presented here can contribute to that broader debate.

Plan of the Dissertation

The next chapter develops the logic of insecurity and opportunism theories in detail and proposes hypotheses about how the dominant state's policies affect the rising state's perceptions. Chapters 3 to 5 test these theories. Chapter 3 focuses on disputes from 1837 and 1841. During this period, British pursued several competitive policies. Therefore, this chapter focuses primarily on the question of whether rising revisionists are easily threatened by competition. Chapter 4 considers American perceptions of British policies from 1842-1846. During this period, Britain pursued a broader array of competitive and conciliatory policies. This chapter, therefore, allows consideration of the question of whether a rising revisionist is easily emboldened by conciliation. The documentary evidence in these chapters supports insecurity theory. The United States was easily threatened by British competition, but was not emboldened by British conciliation. Moreover, discussions between American leaders show that they thought

according to the logic of insecurity theory. In particular, they worried that minor disputes might escalate to major conflict.

Chapter 5 shows that these findings travel outside of the Anglo-American context. This chapter considers the period from 1894 to 1898, before Britain and Germany began competing over naval power and the security of their geographically proximate homelands. In this period, the two had conflicting interests in Africa, the Mediterranean, and Samoa, a group of Pacific islands. When Britain chose competitive policies, German leaders were threatened, seeing it as a signal that British aims were expanding. Though Britain made concessions to Germany during this period, German leaders never assumed that Britain was irresolute. Rather, German leaders believed that Britain was so resolute that the only way to convince Britain to concede was to build up German naval capabilities. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes by discussing the limitations of these findings as well as the lessons that might be drawn for current policy debates.

Chapter 2: Theory

Chapter 1 presented the current policy discourse about how America's adversaries perceive U.S. policies. The continued disagreements point to the need for a theory to explain the ways in which dominant state policies affect the perceptions of rising states, even those with expansionist aims. This chapter develops the logic underlying to possible explanations: insecurity theory and opportunism theory. To do so, I begin by explaining the full range of policies that the dominant state could pursue and identifying the policies of interest in this project: moderate forms of competition and conciliation that the United States is considering today. Then, I present the two theories and their predictions as to how a rising state might interpret these policies. Finally, I discuss testing and measurement procedures.

Dominant State's Policy Choice

Many events can create a moment of policy choice for the dominant power: regular interactions with the rising state can lead to disagreements, domestic groups may lobby for policy change, the rising state may make new demands that require a response, or new technologies and economic patterns could produce new conflicts of interest. The dominant state can choose to respond to any of these situations with a range of policies with vary according to their level of competitiveness. The least competitive, *conciliatory policies*, include cooperative approaches to a conflict of interest or unilateral concessions by the dominant state.²⁶

Competitive policies include any active steps to diplomatically outmaneuver or militarily outgun the rising state.

²⁶ Glaser and others use the term "cooperative" to refer to policies that are not competitive. However, I do not use this term because it implies policy adjustment by both states, excluding unilateral actions that a dominant state might take. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, 51.

At the conciliatory extreme, the dominant state could take steps to decrease its available military power by drawing down its forces or conceding militarily significant territory.²⁷ In the context of the U.S-China relationship, an extreme conciliatory policy - one that would substantially reduce the U.S. power projection capability against China - would be a U.S. withdrawal of its air and naval bases in Japan and the Pacific. Reducing the number of ground forces in Korea, which would not be central to a U.S.-China fight, would not constitute an extreme form of conciliation.

At the competitive extreme, the dominant state can take steps to increase its available military power. It might do so by substantially increasing its defense spending (a policy known as internal balancing) or seeking a military alliance with another great power (a policy of external balancing).²⁸ Other extreme forms of competition include initiating a massive mobilization on the rising state's border or - most extreme of all - launching a preventive war to destroy the rising state's capabilities.

In reality, few of a dominant state's policies fall into one of these extreme categories.²⁹ Most are more moderate, meaning they have little immediate impact on the overall distribution of military capabilities. Within this moderate range, the dominant state's policies can take on four values ranging from the most to the least competitive: material competition, diplomatic competition, diplomatic conciliation and material conciliation (Figure 2.1).³⁰

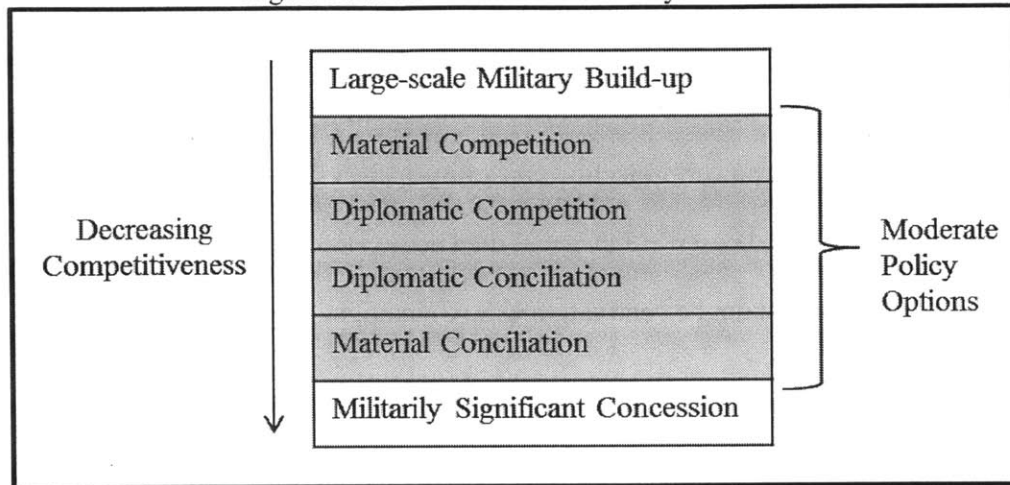
²⁷ Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

²⁸ Diplomatic promises to support another state would not be enough to constitute extreme conciliation. Rather, to be considered an extreme policy that affects the distribution of power, it would need to involve substantial material cooperation between the states.

²⁹ On the infrequency of militarily useful concessions, see Evan Braden Montgomery, "Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma: Realism, Reassurance, and the Problem of Uncertainty," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 151-85.

³⁰ This section draws on the Conflict and Mediation Event Observations (CAMEO) project which uses the conceptually equivalent categories to study intra- and inter-state political instability in the Middle East, Balkans, and West Africa. Though its policy coding is not ideally suited to the study of interstate deterrence and reassurance, it is

Figure 2.1: Dominant State's Policy Choices



First, the dominant state might choose material competition. This category includes policies that have no immediate impact on the distribution of power, but nonetheless have a material cost, including the use of force, mobilization or deployment of forces, displays of force, or imposition of economic sanctions (Table 2.1).³¹ Second, the dominant state can choose diplomatic competition – choosing policies that have no immediate material cost such as making demands, threats, or diplomatic protests. Diplomatic competition can also include downgrading or ending diplomatic relations, refusing to negotiate, or criticizing the other state, as well as low-cost diplomatic policies such as the initiation of investigations into crimes and violations by the other side.³² The dominant state might also take steps to strengthen diplomatic relations with an ally or coordinate these competitive activities with other states.

used as a guide to the coding criteria discussed here. Deborah J. Gerner et al., “The Creation of CAMEO (Conflict and Mediation Event Observations): An Event Data Framework for a Post Cold War World,” Prepared for Delivery at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 29 – September 1, 2002,” 2002, 22, 26–27; Philip A. Schrodt and D. J. Gerner, “An Event Data Analysis of Third-Party Mediation in the Middle East and Balkans,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 3 (2004): 310–30.

³¹ CAMEO includes policies meant to coerce. However, this action is more accurately captured separately by the type of coercion: the movement of military forces or the issuance of threats. Gerner et al., “The Creation of CAMEO,” 22, 26–27. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, 51.

³² Gerner et al., “The Creation of CAMEO,” 22, 26–27.

Table 2.1: Policies by Level of Competitiveness

	Policies
Extreme Competition (shifts the distribution of power in the dominant state's favor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large-scale military build-up (internal balancing) • Military alliance with another power (external balancing) • Preventive war
Material Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale use of force • Mobilize forces or make military demonstration • Impose sanctions
Diplomatic Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refuse to negotiate • Make threats or demands • Protest or express disapproval
Diplomatic Conciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propose cooperation • Apologize for past behavior • Engage in diplomatic dialogues or negotiations • Intelligence sharing
Material Conciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease sanctions • Engage in military cooperation • Make material concessions • Demobilize military forces • Show restraint in the face of minor expansion by the rising state
Extreme Conciliation (shifts the distribution of power in the rising state's favor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military drawdown • Militarily useful territorial concession • Fail to keep pace with rising state's military increases

Third, diplomatic conciliation includes positive statements such as proposing or requesting cooperation, expressing intent to cooperate, praising the other state's behavior, and apologizing for past behavior. This also includes participating in negotiations and dialogues with the rising state or intelligence sharing. Finally, material conciliation includes material concessions such as the lifting of sanctions, the demobilization of forces, or restraint in the face

of minor territorial expansion by the rising state. It also includes extensive, material cooperation, such as coordinated or joint military operations.³³

Though these moderate policies are less dramatic than those that change the immediate distribution of power, they are of particular interest in this study. First, they are the most common type of policies that states pursue. Second, these moderate policies are of particular interest for today's policy debates. The United States is not planning a massive build-up in net military capability or a large territorial concession. Instead, today's debates center on more moderate options such as deploying more of the existing U.S. force to Asia or participating in more military-to-military dialogues. Finally, and above all, there is much more room for disagreement about the impact of such policies on perceptions. There is, on the other hand, little debate about as to how extreme policies affect perceptions. Most would agree, for example, that a large-scale build-up or use of force is threatening and that a massive drawdown is reassuring. Although many contend that moderate policies have a substantial impact on the rising state's perceptions, its behavior, and ultimately, the course of the power transition, there is little agreement on exactly how.³⁴

Rising State's Perceptions

The theories that follow assume that the rising state is revisionist— meaning that it hopes for and even pursues expansionist policies. The scope is, however, limited to states that are risk averse with respect to gains. Such states are unwilling to expose themselves to the possibility of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*; Avery Goldstein, "Power Transitions, Institutions, and China's Rise in East Asia: Theoretical Expectations and Evidence," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4 (2007): 641–647; Randall L. Schweller, "Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory," in *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1–31.

a very significant loss just for a chance at making a very large gain. Put simply, when pursuing gains, these states prefer a certain outcome to a major gamble. This scope condition is common – many formal models explicitly assume that states are risk-neutral or risk averse and the same assumption underlies most defensive realist thinking.³⁵ Many others have argued that, empirically, states are rarely risk-acceptant with respect to gains. Therefore, this scope condition only excludes extreme outliers in the international system such as Hitler’s Germany.³⁶ These states are rare because states that take such major risks with their security are likely to be met with a balancing coalition or defeated militarily.³⁷ Moreover, domestic political forces tend to make the rule of highly-risk acceptant leaders short-lived.³⁸ While these states last, they may interpret other’s policies in a very different way than the typical state.³⁹ Although the scope condition limits the range of situations in which the theories apply, it is consistent with the existing literature and includes most rising states. Within this scope, this section develops two theories about how the dominant state’s policies will affect a rising state’s perceptions of threats and assessments of the dominant state’s resolve.

³⁵ See, for example, James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 386.

³⁶ Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, 37; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 51. Even Schweller, who argues that risk-taking in pursuit of gains is more common than many realists believe, identifies only one modern example: Hitler’s Germany; Schweller, “Neorealism’s Status-Quo Bias.” Some have argued that most states are risk-acceptant with respect to losses, a possibility that is not considered here; Barbara Farnham, *Avoiding Losses / Taking Risks: Prospect Theory and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

³⁷ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 126; Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, 37. Schweller disagrees that the system works against risk-takers. He argues that states are often slow to balance against threats, which allowed, for example, Germany to grow so powerful in the run-up to World War II; Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University, 2006).

³⁸ For example, Colgan argues that states in the immediate aftermath of a domestic revolution sometimes display this tendency. Revolutionary leaders tend to have risk-acceptant personalities and face low levels of domestic constraints. Over time, new domestic structures constrain such actions and other, more risk-averse leaders come to power. Jeff Colgan, *Petro-Aggression: When Oil Causes War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁹ Although these states are certainly worthy of study due to their highly disruptive impact on the international system, they are not the subject of the current study. For a theoretical discussion of such states, see, Glaser’s points on “purely greedy” states in Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*.

Insecurity Theory

Insecurity theory contends that two factors – anarchy and uncertainty about the dominant state’s present and future intentions – cause rising revisionists to be more easily threatened than emboldened. First, I describe the permanent features of the international system and explain the incentives they create for a materially weaker rising state. The next two sections explain how these incentives affect the way the rising state perceives the dominant state’s policies and make specific predictions.

Insecurity theory begins with typical realist assumptions about the setting in which states interact. The rising state exists in anarchy and faces a dominant state with some offensive military capability. At the same time, the rising state has imperfect information about the dominant state’s present intentions and faces massive uncertainty about its future intentions.⁴⁰

This situation has two major consequences for the rising state. First, in anarchy, there is nothing to stop the dominant state from using force. The possibility of violence therefore hangs over all of the rising state’s calculations and interactions with the dominant state.⁴¹ Even when the two have no active disputes, the rising state faces some risk that the dominant might suddenly pursue unprovoked aggression. And, when negotiating with the dominant state, the rising state knows that war is the alternative it must consider as it decides how much to demand or concede.

The second implication is that once force is used, there is always a possibility that a minor dispute will escalate to major war. The rising state does not just face the possibility of minor skirmishes with the dominant power. Instead, the rising state has to worry about the possibility that fighting will expand and that the full weight of the dominant state’s power will be

⁴⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), 30–32.

⁴¹ Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 60.

brought to bear. This possibility of escalation results from the reality that the dominant state's intentions may expand once fighting has begun. First, the dominant state might intentionally adopt more aggressive war aims once fighting begins. With the conflict underway, the dominant state might decide that the time is right to settle other disputes or to destroy more of the rising state's military capacity to weaken the rising state in case of a future war.⁴² Second, the dominant state's war aims might expand through a process of unintended escalation. The practice of warfighting makes it very difficult to signal limited intentions. For example, even if the dominant state's only goal was to destroy a single target, its air force might bomb a large number of air defense targets along the approach. Such a campaign to suppress the rising state's air defenses is indistinguishable from the start of a much wider campaign. Unsure of the dominant state's intentions, the rising state may start to make preparations for a wider conflict. An unintended action-reaction process can lead each state pursue a wider range of targets or increase the level of violence. To be clear, not all fighting escalates to all-out war. The dominant state's aims could indeed remain limited and the two sides might find ways to keep fighting contained. Nevertheless, the possibility that fighting can escalate means that war, once initiated, can be very costly.

Combined, these conditions create a strong set of incentives for a rising state to be cautious when it assesses threats and resolve.⁴³ First, rising states are highly attuned to signs

⁴² Eric J. Labs, "Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims," *Security Studies* 6, no. 4 (1997): 1–49. Robert Powell, "Uncertainty, Shifting Power, and Appeasement," *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (December 1996): 749–64.

⁴³ Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (October 1997): 171–201; Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, 502. On the general importance of state's position in the international system to a state's calculations, see, Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 96–99. Though threats loom large, rising states do assume the worst about the dominant state's intentions all of the time. The rising state has limited resources, so must make tradeoffs between pursuing domestic development, security, and gains in the international system. As a result, the rising state

that the dominant state's aims might be expanding. The rising state is likely to discount long-term trends in the distribution of power - which may be heading in a favorable direction - and instead makes calculations based on its current material weakness. A rising state has fewer capabilities to deter attacks and defend its holdings than the dominant state. The rising state might make matters worse if it underestimates the threats it faces. For instance, it might devote insufficient resources to overall defense, misallocate its defense spending, or fail to mobilize its forces at the right time. Any of these mistakes could leave the rising state more vulnerable to coercion and more likely to suffer if war comes. The system therefore incentivizes the rising state to err on the side of caution. These states worry more about underestimating than overestimating threats.

Second, the dangers in the international system affect how rising states assess the dominant state's resolve. If the rising state initiates a challenge and the dominant state proves unexpectedly resolute, the dominant state might act with restraint, choosing to simply mobilize forces to communicate its resolve and then demobilize as soon as the rising state backs down. However, a second possibility looms large: the dominant state's aims might grow during the course of the challenge and become more aggressive. In this case, events could escalate according to the logic outlined above and lead to a long, costly war. This does not mean that the rising state gives up all hope of making gains - there might be areas where the dominant state is truly irresolute - but it these incentives introduce caution into the rising state's calculations.⁴⁴

must make more fine-grained assessments about where and when it is most likely to face a threat; Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, Chapter 2. For other views on how states make such assessments, see, Stephen M Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Keren Yarhi-Milo, "In the Eye of the Beholder: How Leaders and Intelligence Communities Assess the Intentions of Adversaries," *International Security* 38, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 7-51.

⁴⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. Mearsheimer argues that the international system incentives states toward aggression. Even the strongest states look for more because they never know what tomorrow might bring. However, he argues that states only pursue such gains when the time is right. They must consider their position in

Underestimating the dominant state's resolve is dangerous: the pursuit of new objectives could imperil the possessions and physical security the rising state already enjoys. At the same time, overestimating the dominant state's resolve has a much less serious downside: the rising state might have to wait to make gains until the distribution of power has shifted further in its favor. Given these incentives, the rising state is more worried about underestimating the dominant state's resolve than overestimating it.

The possibility of escalation and major war affects a rising state's calculations even as it approaches parity with the dominant state. As a rising state gets stronger, the system becomes somewhat less constraining, insecurity is less acute, and challenges are less risky. However, war with a peer competitor remains a costly and uncertain endeavor. Therefore, the incentive for caution in the rising state's calculations remains. Insecurity theory therefore contrasts with power transition theory, which expects that a rising state, while still weaker than the dominant state, might intentionally start a war with the dominant state.⁴⁵ The next two sections generate specific hypotheses as to how this caution affects the way the rising state perceives the dominant state's policies.

Competitive Policies Threaten

The rising state's insecurity means it is easily threatened by competitive policies. Competition can threaten in one of two ways. First, competitive policies might be an indication that the dominant state already has aggressive intentions.⁴⁶ The dominant state might deploy

the distribution of power and the likelihood that a challenge will be met with a response. Therefore, he too suggests that the system gives weaker states a reason to be cautious; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 37.

⁴⁵ A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1958).

⁴⁶ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 68; Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," 178.

naval forces, intending only to deter the rising state from expansion. However, to the riser, this deployment could easily be a prelude to an aggressive policy of attacking the rising state's commerce, imposing a blockade, or attacking shore-based facilities. The risks of underestimating threats are high, so the rising state is unlikely to assume that the dominant state's motives are purely defensive. Instead, it is more likely to worry that a competitive policy is evidence that the dominant state is "actively contemplating hostile actions."⁴⁷

Second, even if the dominant state's intentions are actually benign, competitive policies can threaten by creating conditions where the dominant state's aims are more likely to expand. In other words, competition can make unintended escalation more likely. When the dominant state competes, the weaker state may feel that it has to respond with competition of its own to deter the dominant state from trying to change the status quo or in the future.⁴⁸ The rising state's competitive response can lead to more competition from the dominant state, leading to an escalatory action-reaction cycle.⁴⁹ Under these conditions, war that was never intended at the outset may become more attractive. There are three pathways. First, the dominant state might decide that maintaining a deterrent has become too costly and that it makes more sense to settle an issue once and for all by fighting.⁵⁰ Second, either side might feel increasing pressures to pre-empt if war appears inevitable. Third, accidental wars are more likely to happen when forces are at a higher state of alert, deployed closer to one another. Minor movement by one side can be misinterpreted as the start of a conflict, causing the other to launch an attack of its own.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Jervis makes this point more generally, not in the specific context of a rising power; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 68; Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, 92.

⁴⁸ Todd S. Sechser, "Goliath's Curse: Coercive Threats and Asymmetric Power," *International Organization* 64, no. 4 (2010): 627–60.

⁴⁹ Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, 35, 38, 42–43.

⁵⁰ Robert Powell, "War as a Commitment Problem," *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (2006).

⁵¹ Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, 35, 38, 42–43.

The rising state's awareness of these dangers makes it very sensitive to any type of competition, whether military or diplomatic. Material competition - a policy with a significant material cost, such as the deployment of military forces – is the most threatening. Yet, even harsh diplomatic statements or threats can signal that the dominant state is turning in the rising state's direction, making war more likely.

Although the rising state is easily threatened, it is not easily reassured. The dangers of underestimating threats are high, so the rising state is cautious about which signals it relies on. Diplomatic conciliation is simply not enough to downgrade its assessment. The dominant state is the only one that knows its own intentions, and its leaders have an incentive to misrepresent this private information. They may hope, for example, to hide the extent of their aims in order to lull the rising state into a false sense of security. Since any state could say it only seeks to defend the status quo, diplomatic assurances are considered cheap talk. Meetings, dialogues, and symbolic concessions therefore do little to communicate a state's true aims.⁵²

By this logic, the rising state's fears are only reduced by material conciliation that signals benign intentions or reduces the risk of unintended escalation. Since a state with expanding aims would be unlikely to withdraw military forces or to make material concessions, such policies are considered costly signals that the dominant state's intentions are benign.⁵³ Material conciliation can also reduce the risks of escalation described above. For instance, making a material concession that settles a substantial conflict of interest can reduce the number of issues in dispute between the two countries, leaving fewer opportunities for conflict.⁵⁴ Similarly, the dominant state can take steps to reduce the level of alert of forces and to withdraw forces from the

⁵² Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," 39.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ In theory, there might be a purely diplomatic settlement – one that involves no territorial concessions – that settles a significant conflict of interest. If this were to be the case, the theory would expect the rising state to be reassured.

immediate area. Such steps give more time for negotiations to work and make misunderstandings and accidents less likely.⁵⁵

Conciliation Does Not Embolden

Since the consequences of underestimating the dominant state's resolve are significant, the rising state is not easily emboldened. More specifically, it is unwilling to rely on moderate forms of conciliation as a signal that the dominant state is irresolute.⁵⁶ The rising state instead looks for stronger signals. The rising state might reassess in the unlikely event that the dominant state chooses an extreme form of conciliation, such as a militarily significant concession. Alternatively, a reassessment might occur due to trends that change the dominant state's interest in a particular issue. For example, technological change might make a particular piece of territory less important to the dominant state's defense or a change in economic patterns could make a certain colony less central to the dominant state's economy. Alternatively, the rising state might reassess the dominant state's resolve in the long-term, if the dominant state's military can no longer defend the status quo.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Andrew Kydd, "Game Theory and the Spiral Model," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 371–400; Andrew Kydd, "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation," *International Organization* 54, no. 2 (2000): 325–57; Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167–214.

⁵⁶ Mercer comes to a similar conclusion, but for different reasons. He contends that due to psychological factors, adversaries can never get a reputation for being weak-willed; Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*. Press makes a similar argument in the context of a slightly different problem. He argues that, during a crisis, states do not look to past behavior to assess an explicit threat to use force. Here, I contend that the same logic applies one step earlier: states do not look to past conciliation when making a decision provoke a crisis in the first place; Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005). Similar views can be found in John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 89–90; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 96–99.

⁵⁷ This means that if the dominant state does not keep its commitments in line with the resources available to defend them, the rising state may begin to challenge the dominant state's more peripheral interests. Press, *Calculating Credibility*; Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy."; Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, 61.

Caution also dictates that the rising state will increase its assessments of the dominant state's resolve in response to competition.⁵⁸ However, on many issues, the rising state will generally have a high pre-existing assessment of the dominant state's resolve. Therefore, any further increases may be difficult to detect. Above all, a rising state is cautious about downgrading its assessment of the dominant state's resolve, so is not easily emboldened by conciliation.

Opportunism Theory

In contrast to insecurity theory, the conventional wisdom rejects the claim that all rising states see the incentives of the international system in the same way. While it accepts that status quo states operate according to a logic similar to insecurity theory, many commentators contend that revisionists do not. Instead, they believe that revisionists see a different set of incentives in the international system, frequently test the dominant state's resolve, and are easily emboldened by conciliation.

The literature on revisionism assumes that a revisionist's ambitions are the result of any number of state-level variables. For example, an unpopular government might try to rally nationalism through external expansion. Alternatively, powerful economic interests might lobby for the acquisition of colonies. Or, a strong autocratic leader might simply seek expansion for personal glory. Irrespective of whether expansionist aims result from economic, ideological, cultural, personality, or institutional factors, revisionist states share a strong interest in making

⁵⁸ The theory predicts that the rising state will reassess the dominant state's resolve and the risks involved in any challenge. This reassessment may or may not change the rising state's behavior. For example, if a rising state had decided to challenge on an issue where the dominant state was seen as irresolute, a small increase in the rising state's assessment of the dominant state's resolve might not be enough to make the rising state entirely change course. Instead, it might simply devote more resources to the challenge.

gains that animates its leaders' thinking and behavior.⁵⁹ Therefore, labeling a state as a revisionist type does not just identify the nature of its goals, it says something about the state's character and how it looks at the world. By definition, this means that the state's type is unlikely to change or vary issue by issue.⁶⁰ Instead, revisionism affects all of a state's interactions and calculations, including about threat and resolve.

Although this perspective on revisionism is widespread, the logic behind it has not been fully developed. The next section draws on the literature on the psychology of foreign policy decision making to explain why revisionists might think so differently from status quo states.⁶¹ Subsequently, I use this logic, which I term opportunism theory, to generate hypotheses as to how a dominant state's policy changes should affect a rising revisionist's perceptions.

Psychology of Revisionism

The literature on the psychology of foreign policy decision-making emphasizes that leaders are not perfectly rational actors. When making decisions about complex questions, they do not consider every possible interpretation of a situation and do not dispassionately weigh every alternative policy option. Rather, leaders are human beings with cognitive limitations and psychological needs. Leaders rely on images of other states and causal beliefs about how the international system works in order to understand the problems they face and to weigh policy options. At the same time, decision-making is affected by the human need to reduce psychological stress. To avoid the stress associated with difficult decisions, leaders adopt beliefs

⁵⁹ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 15–17; Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, 20–22.

⁶⁰ For an example of this view, see, Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, 19.

⁶¹ There are, of course, other theories one might draw on to further develop the logic underlying the conventional wisdom. For example, one could assume that revisionist states are self-consciously risk acceptant and are therefore willing to rely on the slightest conciliatory policy as evidence that the dominant state is irresolute.

that allow them to dismiss the potential downsides of their preferred policy and that rationalize their desires.⁶² Psychological theories expect that these beliefs will become entrenched and bias how revisionist leaders process new information. Because these beliefs serve important functions - addressing cognitive limitations and reducing psychological stress - leaders do not often reassess the underlying beliefs. Instead, they dismiss or reframe potentially disconfirming evidence in order to protect these beliefs.⁶³

These psychological considerations could explain why a revisionist state's leaders, who have a strong motivation to pursue expansion, make different calculations than insecurity theory expects. In reality, the revisionist leader faces a tradeoff. On the one hand, the international system makes challenges risky, but on the other, the revisionist leader faces consequences at home if he or she fails to expand. To reduce the stress inherent in this decision, a revisionist leader might accept a set of beliefs that suggests pursuing gains in the international system is not that dangerous and that there is no major tradeoff in the decision.⁶⁴

In particular, the rising state might convince itself that the dominant state has a strong and enduring preference against expansion and war.⁶⁵ If the dominant state is very reluctant to fight, its responses to challenges will be moderate. It will not respond with overwhelming force. Instead, if the rising state challenges and the dominant state is actually

⁶² Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 130; Janice Gross Stein, "Building Politics into Psychology: The Misperception of Threat," *Political Psychology* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 1988): 257; Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 102–112.

⁶³ For an overview of these unmotivated biases, see, Jack S. Levy, "Political Psychology and Foreign Policy," in *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, ed. David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62–63.

⁶⁴ The origins of these ideas are varied. Individual leaders may generate these ideas on the own. Or, they might adopt arguments put forward by interest groups that have the most to gain from expansion Snyder, *Myths of Empire*.

⁶⁵ Psychological theories cannot predictions which specific ideas will take hold. I chose this particular belief because it could give rise to the predictions of the deterrence model. Snyder proposed another idea that could justify and sustain revisionist policies: the belief that security requires expansion; Ibid.

resolute, it might mobilize forces to show its resolve. As long as the rising state backs down at this point, that should be the end of the crisis. With enduring preference against fighting, the dominant state is unlikely to expand its aims during the crisis. In other words, the rising state does not worry that challenges could lead to all-out war, as insecurity theory expects.

There are several alternative lines of reasoning the rising state might adopt to justify this benign image of the dominant state. First, the rising state might reason that the dominant state is reluctant to escalate minor disputes because doing so could sap its already waning material strength. Second, the rising state could believe that the dominant state's preferences come from its domestic politics or institutions. Third, the rising state could reason the dominant state avoids aggression to preserve the order and norms of the international system it created. Finally, the rising state might note the dominant state's many global interests and reason that the dominant state does not wish to get tied up in a long or costly war over any one issue. Whatever the specific line of reasoning, the general logic is the same: a benign image of the dominant state allows the rising state to convince itself that it can pursue expansion without substantial negative consequences.

This belief leads the rising revisionist to see very different incentives in the international system and to make different calculations. First, the rising state's assessment of the dominant state's resolve is very sensitive to conciliation by the dominant state. The rising state faces few international consequences if it underestimates the dominant state's resolve. At the same time, missing an opportunity for gain might have significant consequences at home. The rising state would, therefore, rather err on the side of underestimating resolve. Second, the benign view of

the dominant state also affects the rising state's threat perceptions.⁶⁶ If the dominant state is unlikely to fight major wars, then its significant material advantages do not weigh on the rising state's thinking and the rising state is not that insecure. In this context, the risks of underestimating threats are not that great. At the worst, the rising state might face a minor loss if the dominant state were to pursue some small-scale adjustment to the status quo. But there is little reason to worry about large-scale, unprovoked aggression. On net, the rising state worries more about underestimating opportunities than underestimating threats. Moreover, since the rising state's leaders have a psychological need to hold onto a benign image of the dominant state, it will not be easily changed. The dominant state's moderate policy changes are unlikely to fundamentally alter the revisionist's thinking. Instead, it takes extreme competition to alter the revisionist's worldview, as will be discussed in the next section.

Conciliation Emboldens

The revisionist's assessment of the dominant state's resolve is very sensitive to conciliatory policies. The revisionist state is anxious to make gains and is constantly monitoring the dominant state's policies to see what opportunities might be available. The revisionist state is not reckless; it knows it should not challenge the dominant state where it is resolute. But as described above, the revisionist state does not see challenges as especially risky. So, the revisionist state is willing to rely on even diplomatic conciliation as an indication that the dominant state's resolve might be weakening.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Psychological theories tell us that leaders tend to strive for cognitive consistency, so the rising state is likely to use the same image of the dominant state in its calculations of threat and resolve; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 128.

⁶⁷ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 55. James D. Fearon, "Selection Effects and Deterrence," *International Interactions* 28, no. 1 (2002): 5–29. Paul K. Huth, "Reputations

Conversely, military mobilization and deployments are the way that the dominant shows when and where it will protect the status quo. The rising revisionist expects the dominant state to bluff about its resolve in order to extend its hold on the status quo as its power wanes. Therefore, diplomatic competition, such as threats, will have little impact on the rising state's assessment of the dominant state's resolve. Instead, the onus is on the dominant state to constantly choose material competition, such as deploying military forces, to signal that it is willing to defend its existing holdings. As Jervis explained in the deterrence model, "great dangers arise if an aggressor believes that the status quo powers are weak in capability or resolve...to avoid this disastrous situation, the state must display the ability and willingness to wage war."⁶⁸

Competition Does Not Threaten

The revisionist rising state is not easily threatened: it is hard to change the revisionist's benign image of the dominant state. The rising state will not see competition as an indication that the dominant state is pursuing new, offensive aims, as insecurity theory expects. Instead, opportunism theory contends, the rising state will see competition as a signal about the kinds of things the dominant state is still willing to fight to protect.⁶⁹ A military deployment to a disputed

and Deterrence: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment," *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (1997): 83; Press, *Calculating Credibility*.

⁶⁸ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 58; Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, 96; Fearon, "Selection Effects and Deterrence"; Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence." Many deterrence theorists have focused on the risks of backing down in the face of a direct military challenge rather than the risks of conciliatory policies more generally. Specific theorists might debate how much a particular concession on a particular issue should be expected to embolden a rising state. But the literature as a whole expects that conciliation, especially on important interests or in the face of military threats, should have a clear observable implication – there should be significant changes in the rising state's assessment of the dominant state's resolve and its subsequent demands. Press, *Calculating Credibility*, 20.

⁶⁹ For similar predictions, see, Kydd, "Game Theory and the Spiral Model," 390, 397; Thomas J. Christensen, "Shaping the Choices of a Rising China: Recent Lessons for the Obama Administration," *The Washington Quarterly*, July 2009, pp. 89–104; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 60.

region, for example, could plausibly be interpreted as a sign that the dominant state is trying to deter the weaker state's expansionism, not an indication that the dominant state intends to seize the area. This interpretation fits with the revisionist's benign image of the dominant state and protects the revisionist's world view. Even if the dominant state seeks a minor revision of the status quo, the revisionist will not entirely reassess its threat perceptions. It will acknowledge that the dominant state has engaged in an expansionist policy. In order to protect its world view, the rising state's leaders will treat it as an isolated incident rather than changing its overall view of the dominant state. This does not mean that the rising state never updates its threat assessments. Extreme forms of competition, such a dramatic increase in military spending by the dominant state, might force the rising state to reexamine its optimistic assumptions. However, on net, most of competitive policies that the dominant state pursues will have little impact on threat assessments.

On the other hand, the revisionist state should be further reassured by conciliatory policies, even minor ones. These policies confirm the revisionist's world view and give reason for optimism that the threat level even lower. However, since the theory expects that the revisionist has a relatively low threat assessment to begin with, such changes might be difficult to detect.

Insecurity and Opportunism Theories Compared

Insecurity and opportunism theories make very different predictions both about how rising revisionists think about the international system. Insecurity theory contends that the conditions of anarchy and the rising state's material weakness weigh heavily and make the rising state insecure. Opportunism theory, on the other hand, contends that, for psychological reasons,

these states convince themselves that major war where the dominant state's advantages come into play are unlikely. This makes them much less insecure and generally less preoccupied with their material weakness.

The two theories also have very different predictions about how the dominant state's policies affect the revisionist's perceptions. Their answers to two questions are particularly important to policy and scholarly debates. First, do moderate forms of competition threaten? Insecurity theory says yes, contending that rising states are very sensitive to competitive policy shifts. Opportunism theory disagrees, arguing that it takes extreme forms of competition to make a revisionist abandon its benign view of the dominant state (Figure 2.2). Second, do moderate forms of conciliation embolden? Opportunism theory says yes: a rising state's assessment of the dominant state's resolve is very sensitive to conciliatory shifts. Insecurity theory disagrees, arguing that rising states have an incentive to be cautious, so are only emboldened by extreme conciliatory policies (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.2: Impact of Dominant State's Policy on Rising State's Threat Perceptions

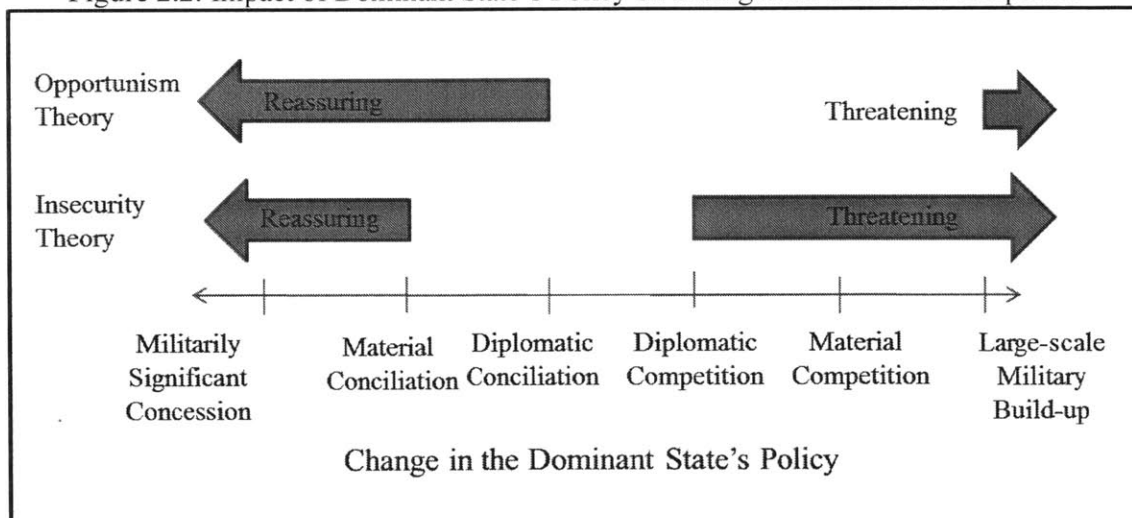
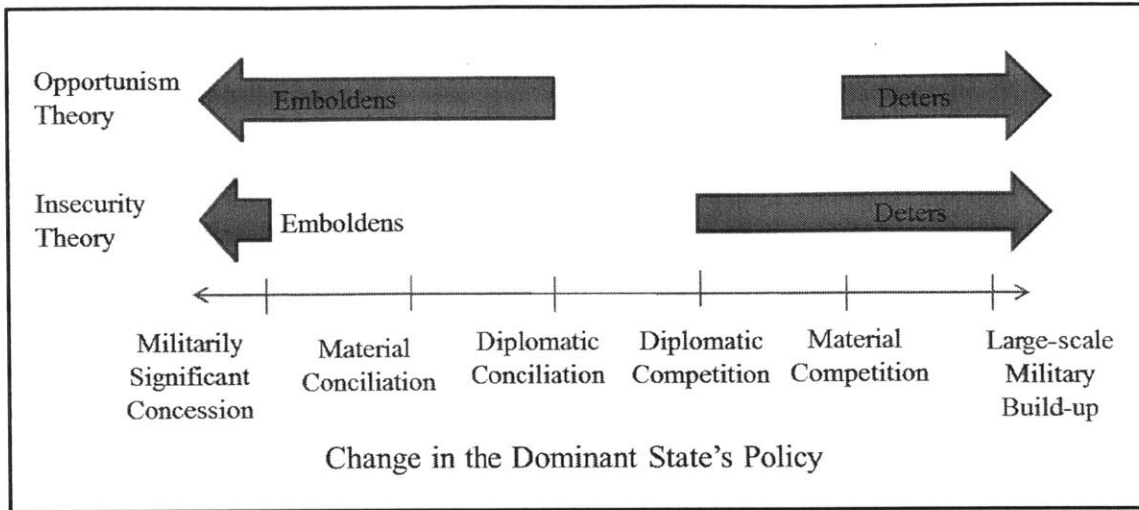


Figure 2.3: Impact of Dominant State's Policy on Rising State's Assessments of the Dominant State's Resolve



Indicators of Changes in Perceptions

Changes in threat perceptions and assessments of resolve cannot be measured directly. The study therefore looks for indications that these perceptions are changing primarily by looking at the actions and statements of the nation's top leaders. This generally includes the country's chief executive, such as a president or prime minister, as well as the nation's ministers of foreign policy and the defense establishments. These individuals have access to the fullest array of information about the dominant state, including secret intelligence and private diplomatic signals. Given their responsibility for the nation's foreign policy choices, their perceptions and decisions are also the most consequential. This approach excludes the perceptions of others who may hold divergent views, including military commanders, ambassadors, lower level officials, the public, and legislators. The position of some will prime them to privilege certain types of information: for example, because ambassadors' day to day work focuses on verbal messages, such officials might be more deeply affected by diplomatic policies than a military planner, whose job is to assess the other side's material capabilities.

Although the differential impact that a dominant state's policies have on different individuals and organizations is not the focus here, it is certainly worthy of continued study.⁷⁰

To reconstruct the how the rising state's senior leader assessed the dominant state's policies, I look at explicit statements about the dominant state, the nature and timing of the rising state's policy responses, and the stated logic behind these choices. For statements, I primarily rely on internal memos, private letters, and personal diary entries as these are more likely to reveal what leaders truly believe than public statements. When private records are sparse, public statements are used as an alternative source of information. Public statements are, admittedly, a less reliable source because policy makers do not always explain their true motivations as they sell a policy to the public. Nevertheless, such statements can provide insight into how the rising state's leaders think and speak about the dominant state when private sources are unavailable.⁷¹ Statements of any kind are stronger evidence when they are consistent with changes in the rising state's actions – military movements, budgetary changes, or diplomatic campaigns.

Threat Perception

Threat perceptions capture a state's belief about the possibility of loss due to the actions of another. Though threat perception is central to many theories about international politics, there is no uniform way of measuring changes in these assessments.⁷² Therefore, this section

⁷⁰ Diplomatic letters, military documents, and congressional documents can, however, reveal facts of the case and information about the views of senior leaders. For an example of work that considers the complexity of views within a state, see Yarhi-Milo, "In the Eye of the Beholder."

⁷¹ Charles Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 31.

⁷² There are many theories about what drives changes in threat perceptions but they offer no practical suggestions on measurement. For example, offensive realists contend that threat perception is driven by changes in the distribution of material capabilities. Other realists argue that threat perception can also be driven by changes in an adversary's intentions. Some within the democratic peace literature contend that a commitment to democratic norms can make a state less threatening. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*. Barbara

proposes several indicators that might be present if a rising state's threat perception is undergoing change.

First, the rising state's leaders discuss the dominant state's offensive aims. Statements that the dominant state has new plans to change the status quo at the rising state's expense indicate that the rising state is threatened. Conversely, the rising state is reassured if it believes that the dominant state is abandoning plans to change the status quo (Table 2.2).

Second, the rising state's leaders might discuss the costs that the dominant state is willing to pay to achieve those aims. The rising state is threatened if it believes that the dominant state is willing to pay a higher cost – for example, willing to use military force, not just expend diplomatic energy – than it was willing to pay in the past. Conversely, the rising state is reassured if it believes the dominant state is less committed to changing the status quo.

Table 2.2: Indicators of Change in Threat Perceptions

	<i>Evidence the rising state is threatened</i>	<i>Evidence the rising state is reassured</i>
<i>Dominant state's offensive goals</i>	Expanding	Contracting
<i>Price the dominant state is willing to pay to seize the weaker state's holdings</i>	Higher	Lower
<i>Risk of escalation to war</i>	Greater risk	Lower risk
<i>Likelihood that a concession will invite new demands</i>	Higher	Lower
<i>Likelihood that the dominant state will use force to get the things it wants</i>	Higher	Lower

Farnham, "The Theory of Democratic Peace and Threat Perception," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2003): 395–415.

Third, the rising state's leaders might make statements about the likelihood that disputes will escalate to war. Threat perception is higher if the rising state believes that force is more likely to be used to settle conflicts of interest or that negotiation is less likely to succeed. These could take the form of general views about how disagreements might be settled in the future, since states know that new, unexpected issues arise all the time.⁷³ Evidence can also be found in how a rising state looks at specific, long-term disagreements. States often have an incentive to put off settling ongoing territorial disputes because leaders fear the response of domestic audiences opposed to compromise.⁷⁴ However, a threatened state may see new risks in waiting. It might fear that leaving the issue unresolved is more likely to end in war.⁷⁵ On the other hand, a state will be reassured if it assesses that the likelihood of armed conflict with other the states is unlikely or if it believes conflicts are more likely to be settled through negotiation.

Finally, evidence about threat perceptions can be found in deliberations about making concessions to the dominant state. Two lines of thinking are consistent with an increase in threat perception. First, a state that is threatened might be more concerned that making concessions will invite new demands from the dominant state. In other words, the rising state might have new concerns about a slippery slope, believing that the dominant state's appetite will grow with a concession. Second, the threatened weak state faces a strong countervailing consideration about concessions. When a state is threatened, it believes that the dominant state is

⁷³ David M. Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs about Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers," *Security Studies* 12, no. 1 (2002): 3; Kydd, "Game Theory and the Spiral Model," 372; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 48–50. Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 20.

⁷⁴ M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 46–83.

⁷⁵ Given these new risks, it may be willing to work harder against internal resistance to reach an agreement or to make greater concessions to secure a settlement. But competition by the dominant state can also make such settlements harder, by inflaming nationalism and hardening the position of those opposed to compromise. The point here is not theorize on the net effect of these forces, but to point out that a threatened state will at least consider that there are greater risks to waiting.

more likely to use force to change the status quo. A threatened state may, therefore, see greater risks to holding out and believe that acquiescing to some of the dominant state's demands is necessary to avoid further escalation. Because fear creates these opposing considerations, the net effect may result in either a concession or a refusal to concede.⁷⁶ However, the presence of either line of thinking suggests that the weak state is concerned that the dominant state's aims are growing. Conversely, a state reassured state may assess that the risk of holding out are decreasing or that the concessions are less likely to invite new demands.

Statements about threat perceptions provide strong evidence if the rising state's leaders also adopt policies consistent with their stated beliefs. First, a threatened rising state might take steps to deter the dominant state from changing the status quo. To do so, it might issue threats or mobilize military forces. Second, if the rising state believes that the dominant state's expansionist policy is motivated by security concerns, the rising state might embark on a policy of diplomatic reassurance. Similarly, state that is reassured might demobilize its forces or even decrease military spending.

Before moving on, it is worth noting one indicator that this project does not use. Many analysts point to a rising state's belief that the dominant state is a "threat to its rise." This vague concept is not used here since it could indicate elevated threat perceptions or elevated assessments of the dominant state's resolve, depending on the specific logic the rising state holds. The rising state is certainly threatened if it believes that the dominant state is likely to launch a preventive war. However, the rising state is not threatened if it simply believes that the dominant state is unwilling to cede territory or grant new rights as the rising power gets stronger.

⁷⁶ A state might try to address both possibilities by coupling policies such as compliance with a rising state demand at the same time as deterring new demands. A state might also be highly conflicted about whether to comply. When states intentionally attempt to compel, they are hoping that the fear of the consequences of non-compliance will win out. On the fear of new demands undermining compellence, see, Sechser, "Goliath's Curse."

In those cases, the rising state is simply frustrated that the dominant state is resolute to defend the status quo. Therefore, this project tries to break down the specific concerns in order to more accurately assess whether the rising state's negative views of the dominant state are about fear (high threat perception) or frustration (high assessment of the dominant state's resolve).

Assessments of Resolve

As with threat perception, there is no uniform way of measuring one state's assessment of another's resolve. Generally, an assessment of another's resolve is its willingness to maintain its existing holdings, if challenged. In other words, it is an assessment of how hard the dominant state is willing to fight to keep what it already has. There are several different indications that assessments of resolve have changed.

First, the rising state might make statements about the dominant state's general willingness to defend its existing holdings. This type of statement would be an assessment of the dominant state as generally weak-willed or highly-resolute, independent of the importance of the particular interest at stake. This character judgment might then be used to assess the likelihood a dominant state will respond to any kind of challenge, even in situations that are different from those faced in the past (Table 2.3).⁷⁷

Second, the rising state might make statements about the dominant state's willingness to defend the status quo in a particular region or on a specific issue. The rising state may speak about the dominant state as weak- or strong-willed on a particular issue. But it might also talk in terms of changes in the dominant state's interests on a particular issue. A concession might be seen to reveal a lower level of interest in a particular ally or territorial claim. Conversely, the

⁷⁷ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*.

rising state's leader may make statements that the dominant state has a greater interest at stake in than previously believed. Deterrence theorists argue that states are much more likely to reassess another's resolve on a specific issue than to reassess another's general willingness to fight.⁷⁸ Since this is where the strongest evidence of an effect should exist, this project pays particular attention to this type of change.

Third, evidence of changed assessments of resolve might also be seen in discussions about the risk of making a challenge. A rising state that downgrades its assessment of the dominant state's resolve might believe that it will require few resources to make the challenge or that the consequences would be minimal. A state that increases its assessment of the dominant state's resolve might expect that a challenge will require more resources or involve greater costs.

Any of these statements might be accompanied by a change in the rising state's behavior. An increased assessment of the dominant state's resolve might cause the rising state to abandon plans for a challenge. Or, it might decide to devote greater military resources to a challenge than previously planned. If the rising state downgrades its assessment of the dominant state's resolve, it might make launch new challenges or make fewer military preparations.

⁷⁸ Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence." Press, *Calculating Credibility*.

Table 2.3: Indicators of change in Assessments of the Dominant State's Resolve

	<i>Evidence the rising state believes the dominant state is less resolved</i>	<i>Evidence that the rising state believes the dominant state is more resolved</i>
<i>Rising State Statements</i>	Dominant state is less likely to respond to a challenge	Dominant state is more likely to respond to a challenge
	Dominant state has a lower level of interest at stake	Dominant state has a greater interest at stake
	Statements that the risks of a challenge are lower than previously believed	Statements that the risks of a challenge are greater
<i>Rising state actions</i>	Make new demands	Reconsider a challenge
	Devote more resources to a challenge	Make fewer preparations for a challenge

Case Structure

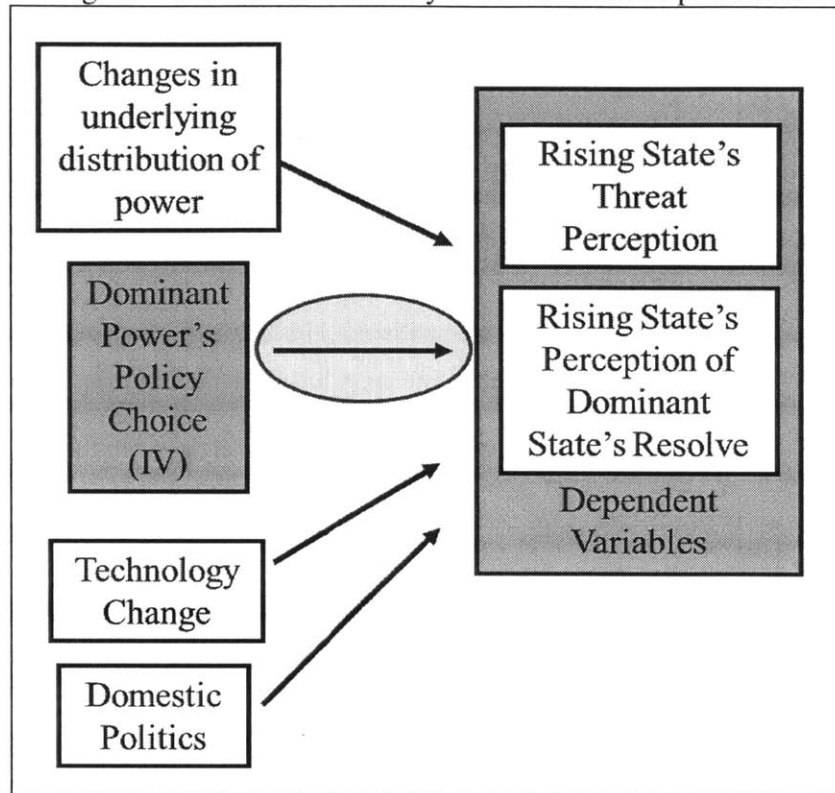
This section explains how these theories will be tested in the chapters that follow. As discussed in the introduction, the project tests insecurity and opportunism theories during periods when the United States and Germany rose to regional power. The chapters that follow provide evidence that the U.S and German cases fit within the scope of the theories: each state was growing, but was still significantly weaker than Britain, the dominant power. Then, I show that each had enduring interest in territorial expansion, making them revisionist states.

Rather than testing the theories in a series of unconnected case studies, my approach is to look at a continuous series of interactions between dominant and rising states. This longitudinal approach allows careful testing of the central claims in the opportunism and insecurity models. Both expect that the dominant state's policy will change the rising state's perceptions, evidence

of which might be found immediately after the interaction or in the lead-up to the next one. For example, opportunism theory claims that a conciliatory policy will cause a rising state to label the dominant state as irresolute. The rising state's leaders might immediately discuss concession as evidence of the dominant state's weak will. Alternatively, that changed assessment may appear later as the rising state's leaders consider whether to make new demands. A longitudinal study allows me to consider both possibilities.

Moreover, by following the rising state's internal debates and the timing of policy changes makes it possible to consider alternative explanations for changes in the rising state's perceptions or behavior (Figure 2.4). For example, a rising state may take steps, such as increasing its military forces that are consistent with changes in threat perceptions. But in reality, such increases might have little to do with security concerns; a naval increase might be the result of lobbying by the nation's shipbuilding industry. Alternatively, threat perception may have changed for reasons outside the dominant power's control. Worldwide changes in naval technology may suddenly have made its seaboard more vulnerable than it was in the past. Similarly, a rising state might suddenly make a new challenge, which could be seen as evidence that the dominant state's conciliation emboldened. However, a careful look at the case might reveal that the change came about due to the beliefs of a new leader, rather than the dominant state's policies. By looking at the internal debates, it is possible to identify whether the new build-up is motivated by the dominant state's policies or another variable.

Figure 2.4: Focus of This Study and Alternative Explanations



Most importantly, because this study considers rising states, it accounts for the possibility that their perceptions and behavior may be driven by the changes in the distribution of power rather than the dominant state's policies. The detailed, longitudinal approach deals with this possibility in two ways. First, it considers timing evidence. Although the rising state's power is generally growing over time with its economic growth, the mix of cooperative and competitive policies changes multiple times. If the policies are having an impact, the dependent variables should vary with the policy changes, rather than simply trending in one direction with the change in power. Second, as described above, the rising state's internal debates can distinguish between these variables. For example, imagine a rising power suddenly begins looking for a new naval base. If the rising state is doing so because of its growing power, internal debates may include

discussion about lobbying by domestic groups to support growing overseas commerce.

Conversely, if the rising state is responding to the dominant state's conciliatory policy, internal debates might point to evidence that the dominant state has indicated it is irresolute and unlikely to resist seizure of the naval base.

To summarize, for substantive dispute between the two states, I code each British policy change according to its level of competitiveness (independent variable). Then, I state each theory's *ex ante* predictions for changes in the rising state's perceptions of threat and - if it is an issue where the rising state has expansive aims - assessment of the dominant state's resolve (dependent variables). To assess the actual impact of the policies, I trace the entire process. First, I look for evidence that the rising state observed the change in the dominant state's policy. Then, I look for changes in the rising state's discourse or policy choices and consider several possible alternative explanations for the change. Finally, I ask whether there is evidence that the logic of the changes was consistent with the logic of the two theories.

Chapter 3: Anglo-American Border Disputes, 1837-1842

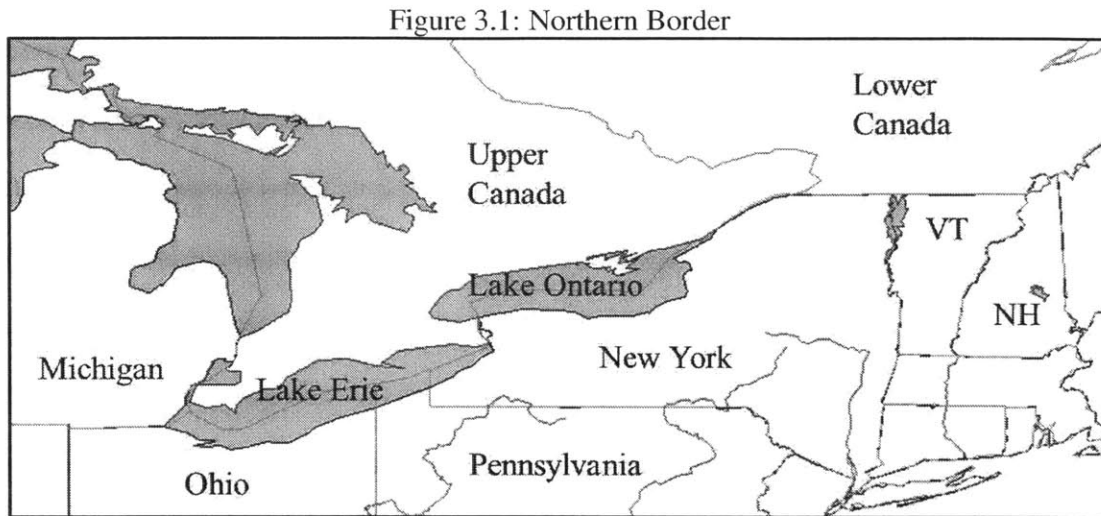
In the middle of the 19th century, a rising United States had a complex relationship with Britain, the dominant actor in North America. Economically, the relationship was mutually beneficial. Each state had become the other's most important trading partner: southern cotton was central to Britain's textile industry and American consumers demanded finished British goods. Increased cross-investment also made the financial relationship more important than ever.⁷⁹ However, in other areas, the relationship was conflictual. Globally, the United States objected to Britain's wartime policies toward neutral states and approach to the suppression of the international slave trade.

In North America, the two sides had a number of territorial disputes, including along the boundary between the British province of New Brunswick and the U.S. state of Maine. The unresolved dispute prevented both sides from fully accessing the area's valuable timber. The dispute also prevented Britain from building a military road to connect the Canadian provinces to the British naval base at Halifax. In the winter, the normal river routes were impassible, so a land connection was needed for communications, troops, and goods to reach the Canadian provinces. The two also had a territorial dispute in Oregon, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

In late 1837, just before this series of cases begins, a new issue emerged between the two countries. Rebellions against British rule broke out in Upper and Lower Canada, which shared a long, porous border with the United States. In some places Upper Canada and the United States

⁷⁹ D. P. Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers, 1861-1865* (New York: Wiley, 1974), 5–6; Howard Temperley, *Britain and America Since Independence* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 55; Jay Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 3; David G. Surdam, "King Cotton: Monarch or Pretender? The State of the Market for Raw Cotton on the Eve of the American Civil War," *The Economic History Review* 51, no. 1 (February 1998): 113–32.

were separated by the Great Lakes, but elsewhere, only a river separated their shores. Lower Canada (today's southern Quebec) shared a land border with New York, Vermont and Maine (Figure 3.1). The possibility of men and materiel crossing these borders raised new issues in Anglo-American relations.



Sources: Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), *USA (Rivers Generalized, 2000)*, Vector Digital Data (Redlands, CA: ESRI, 2000); ESRI, *USA (Lakes Generalized, 2000)*, Vector Digital Data (Redlands, CA: ESRI, 2000); ESRI, *World (Countries, 2006)*, Vector Digital Data (Redlands, CA: ESRI, 2006).

This chapter is concerned with how British policies toward these issues affected American perceptions between 1837 and 1842. As discussed in Chapter 2, insecurity and opportunism theories disagree on two major questions: Are rising states easily emboldened by conciliation? And, are these states easily threatened by competition? In this period, Britain chose a number of competitive policies, so this chapter focuses primarily on the latter question. Insecurity theory contends that rising states like the United States face serious consequences if they underestimate threats. Though the United States had ambition to expand, as will be discussed later, insecurity theory expects that it should have been more alert to threats than to

opportunities for gain. British competition should have threatened, creating concerns that British aims were already expanding or that they were more likely to expand in the future.

Opportunism theory contends that leaders of rising revisionist states adopt a benign view of the dominant state and conditions in international system in order to convince themselves that it is safe to pursue their ambitions. Absent a major event that disconfirms this view, this psychologically useful set of beliefs endures. The theory contends that the benign worldview affects all of a revisionist state's perceptions, across issue areas and over time - even on issues where the rising state has no ambition to expand. In this case, United States should not have been easily threatened by British competition. Instead, it should have interpreted British competition in ways that preserved this worldview and validated its ambitions.

The remainder of this introduction explains why this case is an appropriate test of insecurity and opportunism theories. First, I show that this case falls within the scope of the theories: although the United States was on the rise in the middle of the 19th century, Britain was still the dominant actor in North America. Second, I show that the United States was a greedy revisionist state, making this an easy case for opportunism theory and a hard case for insecurity theory. Then, the remainder of the chapter tests the predictions of the two theories in a series of cases. Each section marks a change in British policy. Although I explain the logic behind Britain's policy choices, assessing the extent to which Britain achieved its immediate or long-term goals is not the focus of the chapter. Rather, the primary goal is to understand how the United States perceived these British policy changes. To do that, I identify the degree of competitiveness of the British policy change, state the predictions of insecurity and opportunism theories, and assess the actual effect of British policies on American perceptions. Finally, this chapter concludes by assessing the evidence from these three disputes.

The documentary evidence largely supports insecurity theory's prediction that rising states are easily threatened. When the British chose competition, the United States feared that Britain's aims were more likely to expand and that small disputes were more likely to escalate to a general war.

Asymmetric Distribution of Power

This case takes place in a period when the United States was on the rise, but Britain was still the unquestioned global power.⁸⁰ As one American general put it, "Great Britain, secured by her insular position from all danger of attack from without, availing herself of her great natural wealth and mechanical skill, has called into action resources surpassing those of all other nations."⁸¹ And leaders on both sides of Atlantic agreed that Britain was, on net, the most powerful actor in North America. The United States was stronger on land: Britain's army and fortifications were not strong enough to prevent an American invasion of Britain's Canadian provinces. Therefore, in a general war, the United States planned to use its superior land power to gain control of the St. Lawrence and Montreal, cutting off Britain's access to Upper Canada and the Great Lakes.⁸²

However, Britain more than compensated for its weakness on land with dominance at sea. Britain kept a standing naval force on the North American and West Indies Station, an area

⁸⁰ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 127-130; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London: Fontana Books, 1981), 26; Bernard Porter, *Britain, Europe, and the World, 1850-1986: Delusions of Grandeur*, 2nd ed (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Michael Stephen Partridge, *Military Planning for the Defense of the United Kingdom, 1814-1870*, Contributions in Military Studies, no. 91 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 25; Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 214.

⁸¹ General Jesup to Secretary of War Joel Poinsett, March 2, 1839, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Received, 1832-1846*, n.d., J-5.

⁸² Secretary of War Lewis Cass to President Jackson, April 7, 1836 and Totten to Gratiot, March 29, 1836 in S.Doc. No. 293, 24th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 3, 56-58.

extending from Canada down to the islands of the West Indies and over to the Gulf of Mexico. Naval bases in Jamaica, the Bahamas, Bermuda, and Nova Scotia supported this peacetime force and would allow Britain to sustain a much larger force in the event of war. There was little the United States could do to stop attacks on the populated Eastern coast of the United States or American trade. Therefore, Britain relied on its naval strength to deter the United States from making use of its advantage on land.⁸³ As one British leader explained, Britain's North American colonies were "defenceless to a great extent. None, however, except Canada could be seriously endangered so long as we maintain a naval supremacy, and on that we must rely."⁸⁴ In spite of Britain's superior position, American and British leaders were aware that U.S. power was growing.⁸⁵ After the War of 1812, the demographic balance in North America shifted away from the British colonies and further toward the United States. At the same time, the American economy expanded and, as the United States industrialized, American products began to compete

⁸³ For America's view that its land forces were superior, see an 1836 War Department report; Lewis Cass to President Andrew Jackson, April 7, 1836, in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent to the President by the Secretary of War, 1800-1863*, vol. 4, Microfilm (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Service, 1971), 124-161. General Jesup to Poinsett, March 2, 1839, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Received, 1832-1846*, J-5. For an example of the American view that it remained the weaker naval power, see, Report of the Secretary of War in compliance with a resolution of the Senate in reference to the defence of the frontier of Maine, December 21, 1838, in 25rd Congress, 3rd Session, S. Doc. No. 35, p. 2 and Secretary of War John Bell to the President, August 30, 1841 in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent to the President by the Secretary of War*, 1971, 4:70-77. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 103, 208-211, 236; C Stacey, "The Myth of the Unguarded Frontier 1815-1871," *The American Historical Review* 56, no. 1 (1950): 5; Albert B. Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, The Relations of Canada and the United States (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1941), 151; Rebecca Berens Matzke, "Britain Gets Its Way: Power and Peace in Anglo-American Relations, 1838-1846," *War in History* 8, no. 1 (January 2001): 42-43; C. J. Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power, 1815-1853* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 233; Harold Hance Sprout and Margaret Tuttle Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power: 1776-1918* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946), 130-133.

⁸⁴ Lord Stanley to Sir Robert Peel, Secret, August 12, 1845, in Robert Peel, George Peel, and Charles Stuart Parker, *Sir Robert Peel: From His Private Papers*, vol. 3 (London: John Murray, 1899), 216.

⁸⁵ For some examples of America's views on its own rise, see Webster to Everett, April 26, 1842, Private, in Kenneth E. Shewmaker, ed., *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, vol. 1 (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983), 543. Polk to the Senate and House of Representatives, December 2, 1845, in James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, vol. 4 (National Bureau of Literature and Art, 1908), p. 398. Using purchasing power parity adjustments, the United States surpassed Britain's per capita income before 1870; Marianne Ward and John Devereux, "Measuring British Decline: Direct Versus Long-Span Income Measures," *The Journal of Economic History* 63, no. 3 (2003): 839-840. On wealth as the, long-term basis of military power, see, Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 55.

with British products in world markets.⁸⁶ The extent and pace of America's rise was far from certain; in 1837, a financial panic ended the boom of the 1830s and disputes over slavery threatened national cohesion.⁸⁷

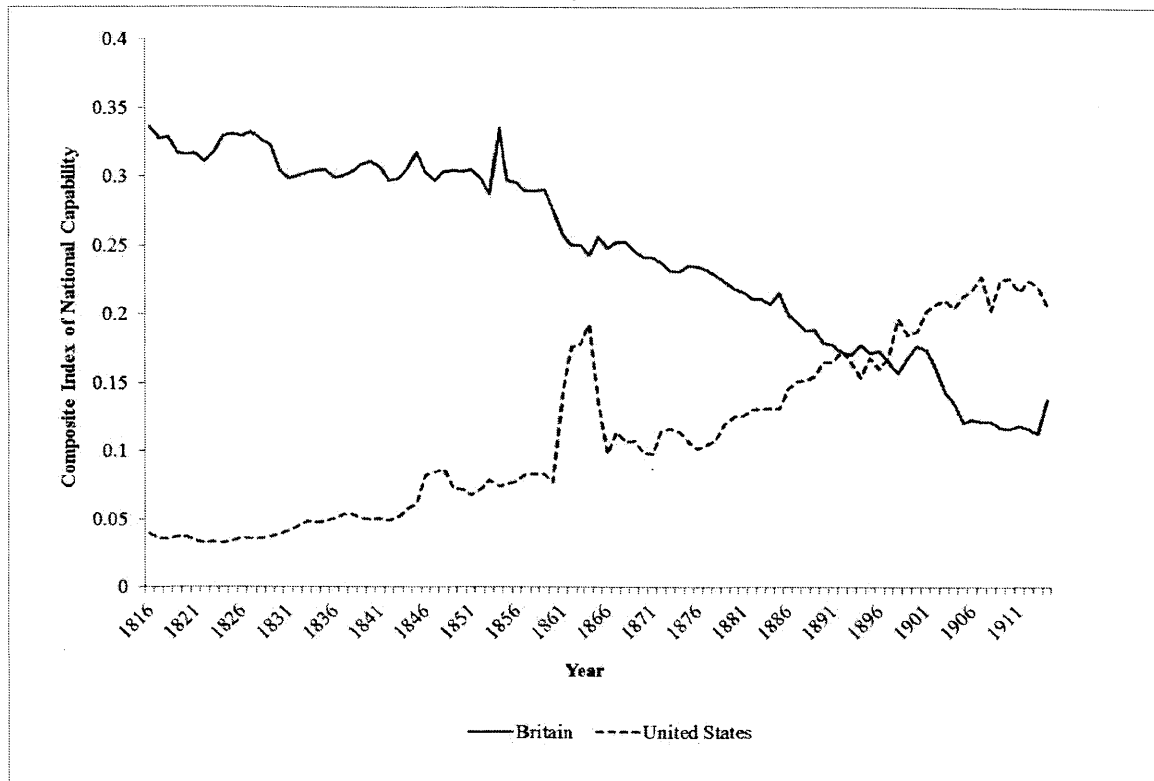
However, on net, both British and American leaders detected that a significant shift was underway. Figure 3.2 illustrates this general trend. It shows the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC), a rough measure of a state's power that is computed using a state's total population, urban population, military personnel, military expenditure, as well as energy, iron and steel consumption. The CINC score is an imperfect indicator, but during the 19th century, a nation's industrial capacity and ability to generate manpower to serve in its military was a reasonable estimate of national power.⁸⁸ If anything, this measure may overstate British power in North America in the late 1830s. Britain would have had to sustain forces over a large geographical distance from the homeland, while the United States would have been fighting in its own region. Still, Figure 3.2 captures the essential situation: the United States was on the rise, but Britain remained the dominant power.

⁸⁶ Brian Jenkins, *Britain & the War for the Union*, vol. 1 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), 72–73; G. W. Monger, "The End of Isolation: Britain, Germany and Japan, 1900–1902," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 13 (1963): 89; Temperley, *Britain and America Since Independence*, 54; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815–1908*, 204–208; Charles Soutter Campbell, *From Revolution to Rapprochement: The United States and Great Britain, 1783–1900* (New York: Wiley, 1974), 75–89.

⁸⁷ Donald Bellows, "A Study of British Conservative Reaction to the American Civil War," *The Journal of Southern History* 51, no. 4 (November 1985): 509; Ephraim Douglass Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838–1846*, The Albert Shaw Lectures on Diplomatic History 1909 (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1963), 221; Martin Crawford, *The Anglo-American Crisis of the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Times and America, 1850–1862* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 40–45; Temperley, *Britain and America Since Independence*, 57; George L. Bernstein, "Special Relationship and Appeasement: Liberal Policy towards America in the Age of Palmerston," *The Historical Journal* 41, no. 3 (September 1998): 725–726; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815–1908*, xi, 244–245.

⁸⁸ J. David Singer, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey, "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820–1965," in *Peace, War, and Numbers*, ed. Bruce M. Russett (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1972), 19–48.

Figure 3.2: Composite Index of National Capability for Britain and the United States, 1816-1914



Source: Correlates of War, National Material Capabilities (v3.02)

Note: The spike in the U.S. CINC score in the 1860s is due to the military build-up during the civil war.

American Revisionism

By the mid-19th century, the United States had been a territorial revisionist for several decades. Since its earliest days as an independent nation, the United States had expanded into Native American lands. The United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803. Then, in 1819, after American threats and incursions into its holdings, Spain ceded East Florida and its claims in the Pacific Northwest to the United States.⁸⁹ During the 1820s and 1830s, the United States hoped to buy the territory of Texas from Mexico. Finally, in two

⁸⁹ Lois Bannister Merk and Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 16; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 242.

territorial disputes with Britain, over the Maine-New Brunswick boundary and the division of Oregon, the United States had repeatedly made claims to territory that was under British control.

At least some of the motivations for U.S. expansion were greedy, meaning they were driven by domestic political forces such as ideology or hope for commercial gain.⁹⁰ President Thomas Jefferson, for example, had seen expansion as a way of sustaining the United States' agrarian culture, which he believed was the life-blood of American democracy. The term "manifest destiny" had not yet been coined, but the idea that American expansion was natural, inevitable, and good for the country was already prevalent among the American political elite by the 1830s.⁹¹ The prospect of commercial gain also contributed to American expansion. In its boundary disputes with Britain, the United States coveted the north east's valuable timber and Oregon's rich farmland and Pacific ports that might one day be used for trade with China. Early in the 19th century, groups of Americans, in search of better economic prospects, crossed into parts of Spanish Florida, established settlements, and eventually convinced the U.S. government to annex the land. Similarly, American settlers had flooded into Texas and, in 1836, declared

⁹⁰ This section shows that there were strong domestic forces for expansion. The United States also had at least some security motivations, which are not considered in detail here. For example, President Jackson believed that annexation of Texas would make it easier to defend the Mississippi River; President Jackson to Secretary of State, Martin Van Buren, August 12, 1829, and Jackson to Van Buren, "Notes on Poinsett's Instructions," August 13, 1829, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1929), 57–59; Schroeder, "Annexation or Independence."

⁹¹ Merk and Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*; Richard Warner Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1974). Anna Kasten Nelson, "Destiny and Diplomacy, 1840-1865," in *American Foreign Relations: A Historiographical Review*, ed. Gerald K Haines and J. Samuel Walker (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981). Not all American leaders advocated for expansion and there were disputes among expansionists about how far the United States should go. Thomas Jefferson worried about expanding too far west, beyond the young nation's ability to govern, while John Quincy Adams argued that the entire continent was the nation's "natural dominion." Adams cited in Weeks, p. 129; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 85; Walter LaFeber, "Foreign Policies of a New Nation: Franklin, Madison, and the 'Dream of a New Land to Fulfill with People in Self-Control,' 1750-1804," in *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. William Appleman Williams (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972), 9–37; Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire*; William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

independence from Mexico.⁹² Northern opposition to Texas entering the Union as a slave state thwarted their initial bid for annexation, but the possibility of eventual annexation remained.⁹³ States like the United States, with domestically-driven interests in expansion, should be most resistant to the incentives of the international system, making them particularly hard tests for insecurity theory. At the same time, greedy revisionists offer an easy test of opportunism theory. That theory expects that in the peaceful and prosperous decades following the War of 1812, a rising United State should have been very likely to adopt optimistic views about conditions in the international system in order to validate its ambitions.

Northern Border I: Material Competition

In the years before the outbreak of rebellion in Upper and Lower Canada, the United States and Britain did not have any serious conflicts of interest along the northern border. Both countries kept a minimal force along the quiet land border. And after the war of 1812, an exchange of diplomatic notes, known as the Rush-Bagot agreement, ended a naval arms race by restricting armaments on the Great Lakes.⁹⁴ When rebellions broke out in the Canadas, public sympathy for the Canadian rebels grew in the border region. The federal government asked state

⁹² During the 1820s, Mexico encouraged Americans to move to its Texan territory to aid in the area's commercial development. However, in 1830, Mexico reversed its policy as the American population grew and began to flout Mexican authority; Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Knopf, 1972), ix–x. On the motives for Americans moving to Texas in the 1820s, see, Ray Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 483–493.

⁹³ Jesse Siddall Reeves, *American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1967), 61–62; John H. Schroeder, “Annexation or Independence: The Texas Issue in American Politics, 1836–1845,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (October 1, 1985): 137–64; Major L Wilson, *The Presidency of Martin Van Buren*, American Presidency Series (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 147–149. Several domestic considerations kept interest in annexation alive in the United States: many looked to Texas's commercial prospects, some hoped Texas's admission to the Union as a slave state would strengthen the South's power within the Union, and others saw Texas as the ideal place to send freed slaves or Native Americans. Thomas R Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 10–11.

⁹⁴ John Watson Foster, *Limitation of Armament on the Great Lakes* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 1914).

authorities to prevent any violations of American neutrality, but these initial steps were not enough.⁹⁵ Canadian rebels crossed the border into the United States and joined forces with sympathetic Americans. The groups, generally known as Patriots, began stockpiling weapons and preparing to take armed action.

Baseline American Perceptions

When this series of cases begins at the end of 1837, American threat perceptions on the northern border were low. In an 1836 report to the president, Secretary of War Lewis Cass argued that war was possible, but not probable, along the Northern border.⁹⁶ Given the low likelihood of conflict, the United States had redeployed most of its forces from the northern border to fight the war against the Seminoles in Florida.⁹⁷ This assessment did not change dramatically with the outbreak of rebellion in November 1837. When the Governor of Vermont wrote that the public was becoming concerned about safety given the rebellion across the border, the federal government refused to send forces.⁹⁸ Secretary of State John Forsyth wrote that, under current conditions, federal troops were unnecessary “for the protection of citizens along the line, or for quieting reasonable apprehension.” But, he wrote, a “sufficient detachment”

⁹⁵ On December 7, Secretary of State John Forsyth wrote to the governors, district attorneys, and marshals of the border region. The Secretary of the Treasury also called on the collectors of the customs to aid in the effort; 25th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc.74, pp. 29-30, 42.

⁹⁶ Secretary of War Lewis Cass to President Andrew Jackson, April 7, 1836 in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent to the President by the Secretary of War*, 1971, 4:p 124–161.

⁹⁷ Secretary of War Joel Poinsett, December 2, 1837 in *Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, Session 2, Appendix p.3.

⁹⁸ Governor Jenison to Forsyth, December 16, 1837, in 25th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc.74, p. 415-416.

would be sent if circumstances changed.⁹⁹ Moreover, in early December 1837, the President's annual message to Congress made no mention of concerns along the northern border.¹⁰⁰

Though U.S. threat assessments had not dramatically increased, the federal government took steps that show it was monitoring the situation, aware that a threat could arise. It noted that small groups were gathering arms and that public sympathy was growing.¹⁰¹ Aware that provocations of any kind might invite an offensive British attack, the administration took steps to prevent a collision.¹⁰² Existing law, the Neutrality Act of 1818, limited the federal government's authority. The president could *punish* those who violated America's neutrality, but he did not have the authority or resources to *prevent* such actions. The administration asked federal officials – marshals, district attorneys, and customs officers – to do their utmost within those restrictions to deter or thwart would-be provocateurs. The Secretary of State also wrote to the governors in the border region, asking them to use their resources and authority to stop anyone who might think to violate American neutrality.¹⁰³ Such preventative behavior is consistent with the logic of insecurity theory, which suggests that rising states believe that any kind of confrontation with the dominant state can be dangerous. At the same time, these steps are inconsistent with opportunism theory, which contends that rising states downplay the risks of

⁹⁹ Forsyth to Governor Jenison, December 27, 1837, in 25th, H.Doc.74, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁰ Van Buren to the Senate and House of Representatives, December 5, 1837, in James Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896), 393.

¹⁰¹ There was one armed incident in November, where a small group from Vermont attempted to cross the Canadian border, but the group disbanded quickly; Orrin Edward Tiffany, *The Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838* (Buffalo Historical Society, 1905), 74.

¹⁰² Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, 41.

¹⁰³ 25th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc.74, pp. 29-30, 42.

such confrontations. If the United States really held this view, there would have been little reason to bother with such precautionary measures.¹⁰⁴

British Policy Change: Material Competition

As events developed along the border, local British authorities initiated a policy of material competition. In late-December 1837, a Patriot group seized Navy Island on the Niagara River. Canadian militiamen, led by British officers, crossed to the American side of the river to attack a private American ship, the *Caroline*, which had been transporting men and materiel to the island. One crew member was killed and the empty ship was set on fire.¹⁰⁵ Events unfolded too rapidly for London to authorize such an action in advance, but the British foreign ministry later argued that the attack had been a reasonable act of self-defense.¹⁰⁶

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory contends that rising states face serious consequences if they underestimate threats. Doing so could leave them unprepared for a conflict with a materially stronger adversary. As a result, rising states are always alert, monitoring the dominant state's

¹⁰⁴ U.S. assessments of British resolve on the northern border are unknown. The United States did not have any active interest in expansion into Canada in this period, so it was not a topic of discussion among American leaders.

¹⁰⁵ Howard Jones, "The Caroline Affair," *Historian* 38, no. 3 (1976): pp. 485–502.

¹⁰⁶ In May 1838, the United States issued a formal protest over the violation of its sovereignty during the *Caroline* incident, but the United States received no formal reply until 1841. However, the American minister in London reported unofficially that the British felt they had acted in reasonable self-defense and would not be providing compensation or admitting wrong. Unbeknownst to the United States, the British foreign minister, Lord Palmerston, had said that his minister could admit that the attack was a public act, meaning it was carried out by government forces for official purposes. For unknown reasons, the minister did not deliver this first message to American leaders; Stevenson to Forsyth, May 24, 1838 in William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Canadian Relations, 1784-1860*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1943), 466–467. Edgar McInnis, *The Unguarded Frontier: A History of American-Canadian Relations* (Garden City, N. Y: Doubleday, Doran, 1942), 156; Jones, "The Caroline Affair," 497; Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, 130–131. Lord Palmerston, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Andrew Stevenson, United States Minister to Great Britain, Foreign Office, August 27, 1841, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:643–660.

policies and a rising state's threat perceptions are sensitive to any kind of competition.

Insecurity theory expects the United States to look not just to the immediate costs of the *Caroline* raid, but for what it said about Britain's current intentions or future intentions. The theory predicts that the United States should have interpreted Britain's material competition in one of two ways. First, the U.S. might have seen the *Caroline* attack as evidence that Britain already had aggressive intentions, meaning it already planned to undertake an offensive campaign to attack the Patriots within the United States, rather than simply repelling attacks from its own side of the border. Alternatively, the United States might have worried that Britain would adopt such a strategy in the future if the United States did nothing to stop it. Either interpretation should have influenced American policy, leading it take steps to deter further attacks and to restrain Patriot groups to reduce the risk of further escalation.

Opportunism theory, on the other hand, does not expect the United States to be particularly threatened by Britain's material competition. This theory contends that revisionist states' leaders adopt a benign image of the dominant state in order to convince themselves that they can pursue expansion with very little risk. Moreover, they interpret the dominant state's policy changes in a way that protects that belief, unless they are forced to reassess due to an extreme policy change by the dominant state, such as a massive military mobilization. A small raid by local militia force should not have been enough to force the United States to reassess its beliefs. Instead, the United States should have interpreted the *Caroline* attack as isolated incident, simply an unplanned response to fast-moving events on the ground rather than an indication that Britain had more aggressive plans. Moreover, the theory does not expect the United States to see this type of confrontation with Britain as an urgent or significant problem. The rising state believes that the dominant has an enduring preference against fighting, so does

not expect sudden changes or large-scale attacks by the dominant state. At the worst, the British might conduct another small raid again if the Patriot problem continued. Therefore, the United States should have felt safe in waiting to see how events developed, knowing that it could always do more to deter Britain or restrain the Patriots later if it became necessary.

Actual Change in American Perceptions - Threatened

As insecurity theory expects, the United States was threatened by Britain's material competition. American leaders feared that attacks on American soil might become a settled matter of British policy and took action to prevent such an expansion of British aims (Table 3.1). First, the U.S. took steps to deter another British attack. The Van Buren administration asked Congress to grant funds for regular forces to be sent to the border area and asked the governors of New York and Vermont to call up the militia. The Secretary of War, Joel Poinsett, explained that such steps were necessary because of "apprehensions being entertained from the highly excited feelings of both parties that similar outrages may lead to an invasion of our soil."¹⁰⁷ Poinsett also alluded to uncertainty about the British policy going forward, writing that the size and disposition of American forces along the border would "depend on the character and duration of the contest now going on in Canada and the disposition manifested by the people and the public authorities of that colony."¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, Secretary of State Forsyth informed the British minister in Washington that the United States was placing "a sufficient force on the frontier to repel any attempt of a like character."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Poinsett to W.L. Marcy, Governor of New York, January 5, 1838, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:403-404. Van Buren to the Senate and House of Representatives, January 8, 1838, in *Ibid.*, 3:401.

¹⁰⁸ Poinsett to Brevet Major-General Winfield Scott January 5, 1838, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:403-404.

¹⁰⁹ Forsyth to Fox, January 5, 1838 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:32.

Table 3.1: Northern Border I: Predicted and Actual American Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. <i>Caroline</i> attack could indicate that more encroachments are likely.	No change. Benign view of the dominant state is entrenched. The raid is an isolated event.	Threatened. The United States feared further British attacks.	Insecurity theory.

Second, the United States took vigorous steps to prevent Patriot attacks, believing the risks of doing nothing or doing too little were high. First, President Van Buren publicly declared that Americans assisting the rebels would be in violation of the Neutrality Act of 1818, a politically difficult choice given the public's outrage over the *Caroline* incident.¹¹⁰ Second, Van Buren requested that Congress grant the federal government additional authority and funds to prevent violations of neutrality. Third, the administration shared intelligence about potential attacks with the British and instructed commanders on the border to do the same.¹¹¹ Finally, the

¹¹⁰ President Martin Van Buren, Proclamation, January 5, 1838, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:401. On the political difficulty, see Francis M Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure: The Search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783-1842* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 207–208.

¹¹¹ Henry S. Fox, British Minister to the United States, to Aaron Vail, Acting Secretary of State of the United States, Washington, November 3, 1838, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:470–473. Fox to Arthur, October 4, 1838, Confidential, in Charles Rupert Sanderson, ed., *The Arthur Papers; Being the Canadian Papers Mainly Confidential, Private, and Demi-Official of Sir George Arthur, K.C.H., Last Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, in the Manuscript Collection of the Toronto Public Libraries*, vol. 3 (Toronto: Toronto Public Libraries, 1959), 294. J. Mackay Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 135–137; John Niven, *Martin Van Buren: The Romantic Age of American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 437; James C. Curtis, *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1841* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 171; Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 42–43. Poinsett to Scott, January 5, 1838, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:403–404. J. Fred Rippy, *Joel R. Poinsett, Versatile American* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1935), 133–134; Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, 62–66, 106. Corey argues that the administration only took vigorous action against the Patriots after a tough diplomatic visit from the Canadian Governor's staff in June 1838. However, this argument is inconsistent with the evidence presented here that Van Buren took immediate steps; Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*.

administration took steps to ensure that the military would be effective in preventing such violations. The administration requested that the governors call up militiamen from outside the Niagara area, believing they would be less sympathetic to the rebels and more willing to restrain Patriot groups. The administration also stayed in constant communication with the army, sharing intelligence about possible plots and keeping up the pressure to thwart those who were “so utterly reckless of the honor and peace of the Country as to persist in this enterprize.”¹¹² The urgency with which the United States sought to suppress the Patriot attacks and the attention that leaders gave to the problem is consistent with the expectations of insecurity theory. It suggests that American leaders believed that any confrontation with Britain was dangerous. British aims could, at any time become more aggressive, and it was hard to say where that might lead. At the same time, such vigorous efforts would not have been necessary, if as opportunism theory contends, rising states downplay the possibility that the dominant state’s aims will expand or that confrontations could escalate into dangerous wars.

Northern Border II: Mixed Policy

As the Patriot threat grew during 1838, Britain adopted a more complex policy. They increased material competition and added diplomatic and material conciliation as well. That year, Patriot groups launched about a dozen unsuccessful attacks across the waterways that separated the United States from the Canadian provinces, each involving up to a few hundred

¹¹² Quote from February 15 letter to Scott; Poinsett to Scott, January 11, January 22, January 23, and February 7, February 15, 1838 and Poinsett to Macomb, January 3, 1838 in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Military Affairs, 1800-1889*, Microfilm (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Service, 1963), Reel 18, pp. 197, 220–221, 258, 266, 323, 350, 431. Elsewhere, the Secretary of War, described the Patriots as “deluded” men who endangered the peace of the country; Poinsett to Scott, March 11, 1838, in *Ibid.*, Reel 18, p. 431.

untrained civilians.¹¹³ In response, British leaders pursued a number of policies. First, Britain deployed additional forces to the region, a policy of material competition. The British had been caught militarily unprepared for the rebellions, so leaders in London reinforced regular army forces in the Canadas. When the events at Navy Island revealed the threat from across the border, British leaders added two additional regiments. The result was a substantial increase in British land forces in North America; the force went from about 4,300 regulars in 1837 to nearly 10,000 in July 1838.¹¹⁴ Britain also increased its naval presence on the Great Lakes and adjoining waterways. The British had no standing naval force on the lakes when the rebellions broke out. To repel the attack from Navy Island, the British colonial authorities had rented and armed commercial vessels. In the spring of 1838, Britain began assembling a standing force, renting commercial vessels and repurchasing old vessels the navy had previously sold. By the summer, Britain had five armed vessels and several small barges on lakes.¹¹⁵ The British

¹¹³ There is no authoritative list of the number of attempts. The estimate of about twelve comes from accounts of the Patriot activities from Tiffany and Corey; Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*; Tiffany, *The Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838*. Reports of some of these attacks can also be found in the diplomatic correspondence; British Minister to the United States Henry S. Fox to Secretary of State John Forsyth, January 4, 1838, Fox to Forsyth, January 24, 1838, Fox to Aaron Vail, Acting Secretary of State of the United States, November 3, 1838, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:406–408, 415, 470–473; Kenneth R Stevens, *Border Diplomacy: The Caroline and McLeod Affairs in Anglo-American-Canadian Relations, 1837-1842* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 40–41.

¹¹⁴ Canada and Nova Scotia monthly returns, The National Archives of the UK (TNA), WO 17/1542 and WO 17/2385; Duke of Wellington to Peel, January 7, 1838 in Robert Peel, George Peel, and Charles Stuart Parker, *Sir Robert Peel: From His Private Papers*, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1899). Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 79; Donald A. Rakestraw and Howard Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1997), 40; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 130–134; C Stacey, *The Military Problems of Canada: A Survey of Defence Policies and Strategic Conditions Past and Present* (Toronto: Issued for the Canadian Institute of International affairs by the Ryerson Press, 1940), 17–18.

¹¹⁵ Commander of British naval forces on the lakes, Captain Sandom, July 8, 1838 and May 1, 1839, TNA, ADM 1/2563. Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 136. A report from Parliament lists five British vessels in 1840 and none before that time, which is inconsistent with Sandom's reports and other admiralty records, possibly due to the temporary nature of the force prior to 1840; Great Britain, Select Committee on Navy, Army, and Ordnance Estimates, House of Commons, *Report on the Navy Estimates*, (London: Stationary Office, July 28, 1848), p. x–xi. The armaments on these vessels violated the Rush-Bagot agreement; Foster, *Limitation of Armament on the Great Lakes*, 15, 20, 24–25; K. R Macpherson, "List of Vessels Employed on British Naval Service on the Great Lakes, 1755-1875.," *Ontario History* 55, no. 3 (1963); United States. Department of State, *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949* (Washington, DC: Government Printing

ambassador acknowledged that the British naval force violated the 1817 Rush-Bagot agreement, but argued that such forces were needed because of the Patriot threat, writing that “the armament is equipped for the sole purpose...of guarding Her Majesty’s provinces against a manifest and acknowledged danger” and assured the United States that the force “will be discontinued at the earliest possible period after the causes which now create that danger shall have ceased to exist.”¹¹⁶

Second, Britain pursued diplomatic conciliation. Leaders in London understood that the United States was trying to suppress the Patriot movement and the Prime Minister acknowledged that in the past, Britain had struggled to prevent its citizens from violating neutrality. He felt that “anything therefore that we can do must be done amicably.” He argued that the British should “make great allowance for the situation of the American government and particularly that we shall if possible abstain from any violation of their territory.”¹¹⁷ Therefore, British leaders publicly expressed satisfaction with the American efforts against the Patriots.¹¹⁸ The British minister to the United States also shared intelligence about possible attacks, allowing the United States to suppress the threat within its own borders.¹¹⁹ Finally, colonial authorities promised

Office, 1968), 54. There was no increase in the naval force on the Atlantic coast. The total number of British ships on the North American and West Indian Station did increase in late 1838 and early 1839. However, this increase was not directed at the United States or deployed along its coasts. The vessels were sent to the coast of Mexico to protect British interests during a French blockade; Stevenson to Forsyth, January 24, 1839, in William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860*, vol. 7 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1936), 242–244. Stevenson to Forsyth, November 5, 1838 in *Ibid.*, 7:241–242; Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power, 1815-1853*, 118; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 87–90.

¹¹⁶ Fox to Forsyth, November 25, 1838 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:474–475.

¹¹⁷ Melbourne to Palmerston, December 15, 1838 as cited in Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 82–83. Shortly after making this argument, the Prime Minister caved to pressure from colonial officials to increase British deployments. The statement is used here to highlight the thinking prior to this change in policy; *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 134–135.

¹¹⁹ For examples of intelligence sharing at the diplomatic level, see, Fox to Forsyth, January 4, January 24, and February 6, 1838 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*.

leniency for Americans arrested for participating in the rebellion and hosted a U.S. mission investigating the prisoners' conditions.¹²⁰

Britain also pursued material conciliation by working with the U.S. military. In the face of attacks that threatened Canada's internal stability, Britain might have chosen to act more competitively, arraying a large number of regular forces along the border and acting on intelligence unilaterally. Instead, local commanders on both sides of the borders worked closely together, sharing intelligence and, in some cases, coordinating their operations against the Patriots.¹²¹ These were by no means harmonious relationships, but on the whole, during 1838, British forces worked cooperatively, rather than unilaterally as it had in the *Caroline* incident at the end of 1837.

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory expects American leaders to remain alert to the dangers of the situation and carefully monitor British policies for information about threat. However, the theory does not have a prediction about the net effect of this complex set of policies on U.S. perceptions. On the one hand, Britain's increased deployments to the region could increase the risks of escalation or be seen as a signal of malign intent. But on the other hand, military cooperation is a costly signal of benign intentions and reduces the risks of escalation caused by misperceptions or accidents.

¹²⁰ Vail to Forsyth, May 5, 1838, Ibid., 3:444–448.

¹²¹ It is not clear whether these efforts were initiated by local British forces, Canada's civil authorities, or orders from London. For examples of coordinated operations, including a sweep of the islands in the waters between the United States and the Canadas, see, Captain Sandom to Arthur, November 14, 1838 in TNA: ADM 1/4273; Arthur to Lord Fitzroy J.H. Somerset, October 30, 1838, in Sanderson, *Arthur Papers*, 1959, 3:334–336; Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, 65; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 136. For a detailed discussion of intelligence sharing at the local level, see Samuel Watson, "United States Army Officers Fight the 'Patriot War': Responses to Filibustering on the Canadian Border, 1837-1839," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 3 (October 1, 1998): 503–504.

As a result, the theory has no clear prediction on whether the United States would be threatened or reassured in this period.

Opportunism theory expects that the net effect of the policies would be to reassure.

Revisionist states are reluctant to assign the dominant state malign intent or to accept that there are significant risks in the international system. Doing either would be psychologically stressful since it would force the revisionist's leaders to confront tradeoffs associated with pursuing their ambitions. Instead, the revisionist state interprets the dominant state's policies in a way that protects its existing worldview. In this case, the United States should not have been threatened by British deployments, seeing them instead as a reasonable response to civil unrest and a cross-border threat. Instead, the United States should have seen the conciliatory aspects of British policy as validating its outlook and as an optimistic sign about British intentions.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions: Reassured

The documentary evidence shows that American threat perceptions did decline somewhat in 1838. American leaders no longer spoke about the need to defend against an immediate British attack.¹²² The War Department did not undertake any serious planning for a war with Britain during 1838. Moreover, the war department's communications with American

¹²² In addition to the works cited below, I reviewed the biographies and papers of President Van Buren and Secretary of the Navy J.K. Paulding. I also reviewed the biographies of Secretary of State John Forsyth and Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett and many of their official papers. *Martin Van Buren Papers*, Microfilm (Washington: Library of Congress, 1960); Alvin Laroy Duckett, *John Forsyth, Political Tactician* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1962); Grace E. Heilman and Bernard S. Levin, eds., *Calendar of Joel R. Poinsett Papers in the Henry D. Gilpin Collection* (Philadelphia: The Gilpin Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1941); Donald B Cole, *Martin Van Buren and the American Political System* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1984); Curtis, *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1841*; Niven, *Martin Van Buren*; Martin Van Buren, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920); Wilson, *The Presidency of Martin Van Buren*; Ralph M. Aderman, ed., *Letters of James Kirke Paulding* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962); Amos Lee Herold, *James Kirke Paulding: Versatile American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926).

commanders along the border did not discuss any preparations for a British assault.¹²³ This evidence that the United States was somewhat reassured could be consistent either theory.

However, other evidence is more consistent with the logic of insecurity theory. In particular, American leaders were alert to the possibility that British policy could once again become dangerously competitive. This resulted in a number of policies. First, Van Buren sent his son on a special mission to encourage the British to choose cooperation. He wrote, “I hope the British government will take a firm and liberal stand in regard to the points in collision between the two countries and that we will by our joint efforts be able to avert impending difficulties.”¹²⁴ Second, Forsyth continued to warn Britain against violating American sovereignty, warning that such a step might lead to the “entire disruption” of amicable relations.¹²⁵

Third, American leaders continued to try to reduce the risk of a confrontation by controlling the U.S. side of the border. Pointing to the Patriot’s attempts against Canada, the President argued, “offenses of this character, in addition to their criminality as violations of the laws of our country, have a direct tendency to draw down upon our own citizens at large the multiplied evils of a foreign war.”¹²⁶ Elsewhere, he argued that there was “feverishness in the public mind which it will be difficult to deal with and from a careless or unskillful treatment of

¹²³ On the lack of planning for war with Britain until a later crisis over the border between Maine and New Brunswick, see Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 96. The size of the U.S. army increased during 1838, but this was unrelated to events on the northern border. This increase had been requested earlier to help in the fight against the Seminoles in Florida; Report of the Secretary of War, J.R. Poinsett, December 2, 1837 in *Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, Session 2, Appendix, p. 6. Many in the public, however took a different view, calling for Van Buren to increase military preparedness in response to Britain’s build-up in Canada. Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, 102–103.

¹²⁴ Van Buren to Andrew Stevenson, May 16, 1838, in *Stevenson Family Papers: Papers of Andrew Stevenson and J.W. Stevenson*, Vol. 7, n.d., 26995–26996, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²⁵ Forsyth to Fox, November 15, 1838, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:59.

¹²⁶ Van Buren to the Senate and House of Representatives, December 3, 1838, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:483–505. The Secretary of War’s speech also pointed to the need to restrain reckless citizens; Report of the Secretary of War, J.R. Poinsett, November 28, 1838, in 25th Congress, 3rd Session, S.Doc.1, p. 98.

which infinite mischief might result.”¹²⁷ Because of these risks, the Secretary of War continued to write to military and civilian authorities along the border, reminding them of the importance of restraining the Patriots and cooperating with the British. That fall, after the army reported that the frontier was quiet, the administration continued to call for vigilance.¹²⁸ The Secretary of War also directed two of his engineers to shift their attention from the northwestern frontier to the northern border because of the still-heightened risk of war.¹²⁹ Overall, the administration did not take the situation along the border lightly as opportunism theory expects. Rather, as insecurity theory expects, the administration continued to be alert to the possibility that British intentions could change and believed at that even a minor provocation along the border could have serious consequences (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Northern Border II: Predicted and Actual American Response to Material Competition and Material Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Cannot predict net effect. United States should remain alert to the dangers along the border.	Reassured. Conciliatory aspects validate the benign image of the dominant state.	Somewhat reassured. Americans still worry a minor provocation could lead to war.	U.S. logic consistent with insecurity theory

¹²⁷ Van Buren believed that British competition would only exacerbate this problem; Van Buren to Andrew Stevenson, May 16, 1838, in *Stevenson Family Papers: Papers of Andrew Stevenson and J.W. Stevenson*, Vol. 7, 26995–26996.

¹²⁸ Poinsett to Macomb, June 19, June 23, and August 27, 1838, in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Military Affairs, 1800-1889*, Reel 19, p. 205, 214, 285, 345. Samuel Cooper, Acting Secretary of War, to Macomb and Poinsett to Macomb, October 11, 1838, in *Ibid.*, Reel 19, pp. 389, 412. Vail to the Governor of New York, November 5, 1838, in United States. Department of State, *Domestic Letters of the Department of State, 1784-1906*, National Archives Microfilm Publications M40 (Washington, DC: National Archives, 1943), Reel 27, p. 65.

¹²⁹ J. R. Poinsett to Colonels Totten and Thayer, October 18, 1838, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, 1814-1847*, Microfilm (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Service, 1971), Reel 2, p. 78.

Northeastern Boundary I: Material Competition and Diplomatic Conciliation

In early 1839, Britain adopted competitive policies toward the dispute over the Maine-New Brunswick border. The location of the boundary had been in dispute since U.S. independence, because the description in the Treaty of Paris (1783) was not consistent with the actual geography of the region. The dispute became more of a problem over time as people from both countries began harvesting the area's valuable timber. In 1830, the two sides submitted the dispute for arbitration to the King of the Netherlands. Rather than choosing between the conflicting claims as he had been asked to do, the king proposed a compromise line.¹³⁰ The British accepted the arbitrator's decision, glad to be done with the long-standing dispute. President Jackson wanted to accept the award but failed to gain the Senate's approval.¹³¹ The federal government continued to try to find other ways to settle the question, but the issue was not a high priority in Britain, and Maine became increasingly committed to its claims. The federal government felt constitutionally bound to gain Maine's consent to any compromise deal. In the absence of that consent, the federal government believed it had to defend Maine's claims, even in the British-controlled Madawaska settlements (Figure 3.3).¹³² British policy going into 1839 had largely been one of diplomatic conciliation. The British did ignore American

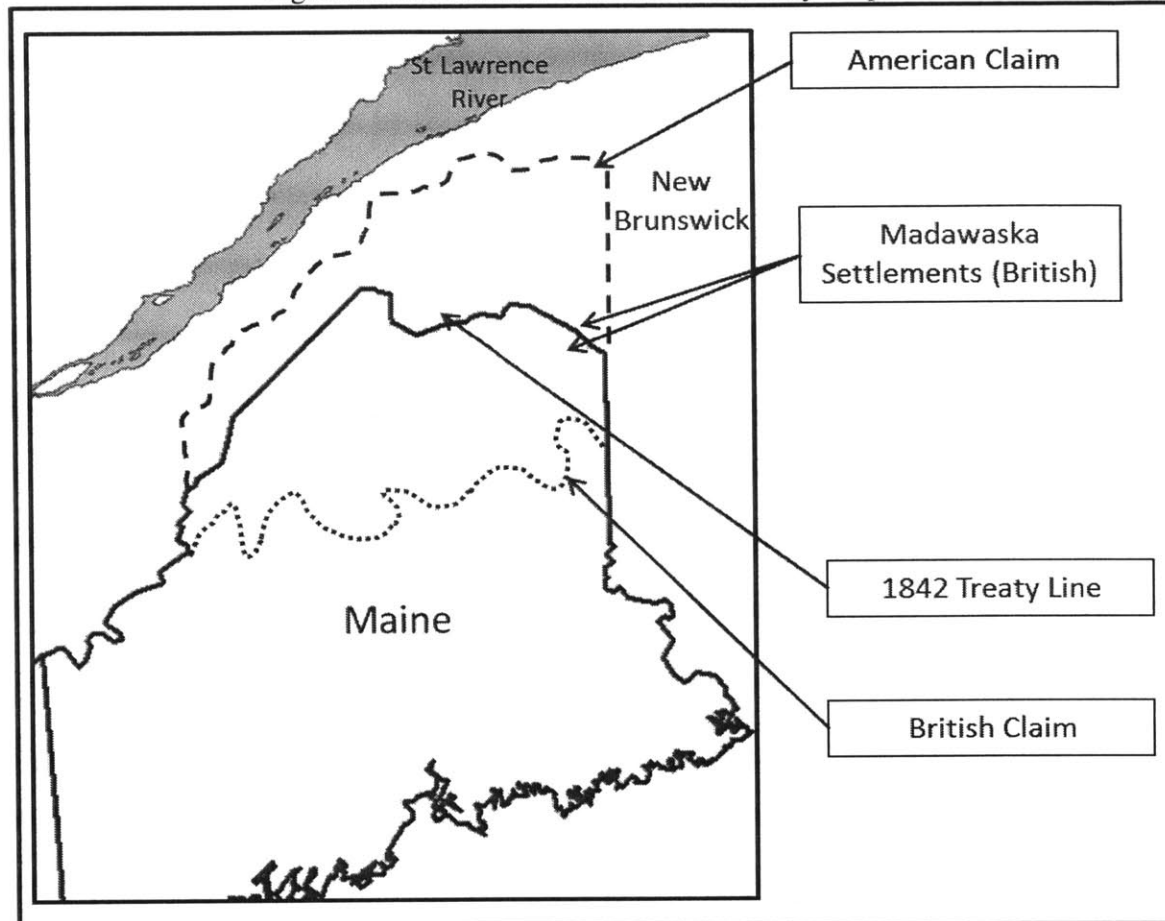
¹³⁰ The king may have chosen a compromise path to avoid the alternative, hostility of the state that lost the arbitration. There were also accusations that he was motivated by European politics. The king needed British goodwill as he sought to regain Belgium, which he lost in 1830.

¹³¹ President Andrew Jackson to U.S. Minister to Great Britain, Louis McLane, March 8, 1831 and Jackson to U.S. Minister to Britain, Martin Van Buren, August 10, 1831, in Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:247, 330. Jackson did gain a temporary agreement from Maine to accept the award, but later it backed out. It lobbied the Senate against accepting the award. Some might have voted against the award to deprive Jackson of a foreign policy victory; John M. Belohlavek, *Let the Eagle Soar!: The Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 62–68. For more detailed maps and a discussion of the competing claims, see, John Dunbabin, "'Red Lines on Maps' Revisited: The Role of Maps in Negotiating and Defending the 1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty," *Imago Mundi* 63, no. 1 (2011): 39–61.

¹³² Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 13–18, 33; Howard Jones, "Anglophobia and the Aroostook War," *New England Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1975): 519.

proposals for a new joint survey of the area, but they continued to work diplomatically to resolve local disputes over jurisdiction in the disputed territory.¹³³

Figure 3.3: Maine-New Brunswick Boundary Dispute



Sources: Maine's final boundaries from MassGIS, *New England (State Boundaries, 2003)*, Vector Digital Data (Boston: Massachusetts Office of Geographic and Environmental Information, 2003). St. Lawrence River location from ESRI, *World (Rivers, 2005)*, Vector Digital Data (Redlands, CA: ESRI, 2005). Approximate location of American and British claims based on "Maine Boundary Controversy, 1783-1842," in Dixon Ryan Fox, *Harper's Atlas of American History* (New York, London: Harper & brothers, 1920), 43, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000333162>. Approximate location of Madawaska settlements taken from Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

¹³³ Issues discussed in the correspondence from 1836-1838 include the 1836 arrest of a Canadian justice of the peace for operating in the disputed territory, the arrest of a census agent from Maine in the disputed territory, and disputes over access to the area's timber; Manning, *Canadian Relations*.

At the end of 1838 and the beginning of 1839, there were a series of incidents in the disputed territory, collectively known as the Aroostook War. The situation exploded in February 1839 when the governor of Maine sent a land agent and armed volunteers into the disputed area to clear it of loggers from New Brunswick. British subjects in the area took up arms and arrested some of Maine's posse.¹³⁴ Events on the ground moved rapidly, so the initial decision to pursue material competition was made by British officials in North America. Upon hearing of the activities in the disputed territory, the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, also commander in chief of the province's military forces, took immediate action. He explained that Britain claimed jurisdiction in the entire disputed territory and that his instructions "did not permit me to suffer any interference with that possession and jurisdiction."¹³⁵ Therefore, he ordered regular soldiers to the area and called up the militia. Though these forces did not enter the disputed territory, he threatened that they would do so if Maine did not withdraw. He explained that he had "directed a strong force of her Majesty's troops to be in readiness to support her Majesty's authority, and to protect her Majesty's subjects in the disputed territory, in the event of this request not being immediately complied with."¹³⁶

However, British officials quickly supplemented competition with diplomatic conciliation. When news of these events reached Washington, the British minister worked with the U.S. Secretary of State to negotiate an end to the dispute between Maine and New Brunswick. The provisional agreement did not address the underlying conflict. Both sides agreed that each would retain their pre-crisis holdings in the disputed territory. The British also

¹³⁴ Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 8.

¹³⁵ Sir John Harvey, Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, to John Fairfield, Governor of the State of Maine, February 13, 1839, in 25th Congress, 3rd Session, H.Doc.222, p. 14.

¹³⁶ These forces also stood ready to assist civil authorities in restraining British subjects who had taken up arms; Harvey to Fairfield, February 13, 1839, in 25th Congress, 3rd Session, H.Doc.222, p. 14.

agreed not to enter the disputed territory to forcibly remove Maine's forces as long as Maine voluntarily withdrew.¹³⁷ By late March, Maine and New Brunswick accepted the provisional agreement and the situation on the ground was calm.¹³⁸ Although the British minister took this step on his own initiative, it was later endorsed by British leaders.¹³⁹ And, though the British Foreign Minister, Lord Palmerston, blamed Maine for the crisis, he expressed "great pleasure" in the federal government's response.¹⁴⁰

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory predicts that the United States should have been threatened by British competition, in spite of the cooperative de-escalation of the crisis. Insecurity contends that rising states face serious consequences if they underestimate threats. They are therefore much more threatened by material competition than they are by diplomatic conciliation. Although the movement of British forces was a response to local events and not an unprovoked act of aggression,, the United States should still have been threatened. First, it should have assessed that British competition in this crisis made it more likely that their aims would expand in the future. Once its forces were in place, the British might be more likely to use force rather than diplomacy to respond to incidents in the disputed territory. They might even have decided that the time was right to settle the matter once and for all, so could simply use the next local incident

¹³⁷ Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 8.

¹³⁸ Scott to Harvey, March 25, 1839, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Received, 1832-1846*, S-30.

¹³⁹ Memorandum signed by John Forsyth, Secretary of State of the United States and by Henry S. Fox, British Minister to the United States, February 27, 1839, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:61-65, 484. Van Buren to the Senate and House of Representatives, February 26, 1839, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:516-520. Fox to Forsyth, February 23, 1839 and Stevenson to Forsyth, March 21, 1839 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:482-489.

¹⁴⁰ Palmerston to Stevenson, April 3, 1839, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:494. Palmerston to Fox, May 1, 1839 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence Relating to the Boundary Between the British Possessions in North America and the United States of America, Under the Treaty of 1783*, 1843, 80.

as a pretext to seize the whole area. Second, if force were used, the consequences could be substantial. Once Britain used force, the United States might feel it had to respond in kind. It might become difficult to keep the fighting limited and an action-reaction cycle could begin. Regardless of the specific logic, insecurity theory expects that rising states are very alert to the competition, even in local disputes, since any confrontation with the dominant state can quickly escalate into a major conflict. Therefore, the United States should have seen potentially serious consequences in this minor set of border incidents. At the same time, British competition should have increased American assessments of British resolve. Rising states know that challenging the dominant state where it is actually resolute could lead to a major confrontation. This reality introduces caution into their calculations and leads them to increase their assessments in the face of competition by the dominant state.

Opportunism theory expects the United States to see the Aroostook crisis in a very different way. First, it does not expect the United States to have been threatened, especially in light of the quick conclusion of a provisional agreement. In order to convince themselves that it is safe to pursue expansion, rising revisionists downplay the risks of escalation in international politics. They see the dominant state's strong preference against fighting as enduring. This means that the dominant state's aims are unlikely to expand and events do not quickly get out of control. In this case, Britain's troop movements along the border should have not been seen as cause for significant concern in the first place. Britain's subsequent diplomatic conciliation should have validated the rising state's sanguine outlook. Opportunism theory agrees with insecurity theory that Britain's material competition should have increased American assessments of British resolve. However, opportunism theory expects the United States to have drawn a different lesson from the episode. Rather than seeing new risks of escalation as

insecurity theory expects, the United States should have seen this episode as a confirmation of its beliefs about the low risks involved in making challenges. After all, the two sides had quickly deescalated the crisis and returned to the pre-crisis status quo.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions: Threatened

The crisis and the mobilization of British forces in 1839 dramatically increased the American assessment of the likelihood that war would result from the unresolved boundary question, as insecurity theory expects. Prior to the crisis, the United States had seen it as a delicate matter, but not one that posed an imminent risk of war. After the crisis, Van Buren believed that “the peace of the two nations is daily and imminently endangered.”¹⁴¹ The United States adopted four policies that show that American leaders feared escalation to wider war, not just a local skirmish.

First, even after the provisional agreement was signed, the U.S. made military preparations for a general war. The president requested additional authority and funds from Congress.¹⁴² The secretary of war requested that his subordinates draw up war plans and used all available funds to strengthen the fortifications on the seaboard. The navy alerted its ships and

¹⁴¹ Van Buren to the Senate and House of Representatives, February 26, 1839, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:516–520.

¹⁴² Congress gave him the authority and funds to defend the Aroostook Valley as well as funds for additional border fortifications and naval construction, including three steamers. Construction on the *Missouri* and *Mississippi* began in 1839. Construction on the third, the *Princeton*, did not start until 1841. Van Buren’s public speech did not outline specific requests, so it is unclear which elements of the funding package were at the request of the president; Van Buren to the Senate and House of Representatives, February 26, 1839, in Ibid. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 100–101; Stacey, “The Myth of the Unguarded Frontier 1815-1871,” 16. Poinsett to Governor Fairfield, February 21, 1839, in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Military Affairs, 1800-1889*, Reel 20, p. 247.

naval yards.¹⁴³ The administration also launched a series of studies on the state of the nation's defenses.¹⁴⁴

Second, the United States sought to settle the matter quickly and permanently, believing the risk in leaving the boundary dispute unresolved had become too great. The year before, the United States had proposed a new joint survey of the area, a lengthy process that would have taken a few years and may not have even produced a definitive answer.¹⁴⁵ However, after the 1839 crisis, the United States worried that such a process would be far too slow and uncertain.¹⁴⁶ Forsyth wrote, "in recent events on our northern border the danger of actual military collision...has been so imminent, that the President is again admonished of the necessity of the most anxious and strenuous exertion to arrange the difficulties existing between them in regard to the boundary. He is convinced in the view of what has lately happened that a mere commission of Survey and Exploration would be inadequate to the exigencies of the

¹⁴³ Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 100–101. Poinsett to Van Buren, April 12, 1839, in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent to the President by the Secretary of War, 1800-1863*, vol. 3, Microfilm (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Service, 1971), 342–348. In May, the Secretary of the Navy wrote to a close friend that Congress had not provided sufficient funds, leaving the nation unprepared for war; Paulding to Henry Brevoort, May 16, 1839, in Aderman, *Letters of James Kirke Paulding*, 255.

¹⁴⁴ A naval report was released in January 1840 and a Report on Military and Naval Defenses from the Secretary of War was released in May. The study of the border that was launched during this period contributed to a larger fortifications bill in September 1841; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 96–101; Jones, "Anglophobia and the Aroostook War," 538. In a draft diplomatic document, Van Buren expressed optimism that a cooperative solution would be found, but the extent of the military response shows that the United States continued to believe that war was a very real possibility; Van Buren, Draft document on the appointment of [Daniel Webster] as special minister to Great Britain, March (?) 1839 in *Van Buren Papers*, Reel 21.

¹⁴⁵ Maine was adamant that the features described in the Treaty of Paris could be found, even though previous surveys had failed to find it; Belohlavek, *Let the Eagle Soar!*, 62–68. Van Buren to the Senate and House of Representatives, December 5, 1837, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:393. Forsyth to Fox, April 27, 1838 and Forsyth to Stevenson, May 4, 1838, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:53–54.

¹⁴⁶ Palmerston accepted the 1838 American proposal for a joint boundary survey with some modifications. He cited Maine's history of intransigence as one reason negotiations were unlikely to work; Palmerston to Stevenson, April 3, 1839 and Stevenson to Van Buren, May 16, 1839 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:493–494, 507–508. Palmerston's boundary survey proposals can be found in Palmerston to Fox, April 6, 1839 and Fox to Forsyth, May 10, 1839 in *Ibid.*, 3:502–507.

occasion.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, the administration repeatedly called for immediate negotiations or any other process that would settle the matter permanently.¹⁴⁸

Third, the administration sought to moderate Maine’s behavior. Van Buren believed that Maine’s concerns about New Brunswick’s activities in the disputed territory were legitimate, but that Maine’s actions in the Aroostook crisis had been excessively provocative. To prevent escalation to war, he not only needed to convince Britain to moderate its behavior, he needed to restrain Maine. The president sent General Winfield Scott to the region to convince Maine to comply with the provisional agreement.¹⁴⁹ Writing to Maine’s governor, Forsyth explained that Maine’s actions had far-reaching consequences. He wrote that “the peace of the country, and the rest and best interests of the people” were being threatened by “disagreements between the local authorities, upon points of secondary importance.”¹⁵⁰ The president wrote that because Maine’s actions could lead to a general war, Maine was under a “moral obligation to her sister states” to avoid any provocations.¹⁵¹ Even after both Maine and New Brunswick accepted the agreement and the local crisis had passed, the administration kept up its efforts to moderate Maine’s behavior and to convince Maine that its interests would be better served through immediate negotiation or arbitration.¹⁵²

Fourth and finally, the crisis over the northeastern boundary led the administration to take preventative steps along the northern border. There had been no sizeable Patriot invasion

¹⁴⁷ Forsyth to Fox, July 29, 1839, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:106–107.

¹⁴⁸ Forsyth to Stevenson, March 6, 1839 and Stevenson to Palmerston, March 30, Forsyth to Fox, May 15 and July 29, 1839, in *Ibid.*, 3: p. 66–67, 77–78, 89–90, 491–493. Van Buren, On the appointment of [Daniel Webster] as special minister to Great Britain, March (?) 1839 and Stevenson to Van Buren, May 16, 1839, Private, in *Van Buren Papers*, Reel 21.

¹⁴⁹ Poinsett to Scott, February 28, 1839 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:108; Winfield Scott, *Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott*, vol. 2 (New York: Sheldon, 1864), 331–337.

¹⁵⁰ Forsyth to Governor Fairfield, February 26, 1839 S.Doc.27, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, p. 19.

¹⁵¹ Van Buren, Draft Document on the Northeastern Boundary Question, March (?) 1839, in *Van Buren Papers*, Reel 21.

¹⁵² Van Buren to Forsyth, June 6, 1839, in *Ibid.*

attempt since the end of 1838. But federal officials worried that Maine boundary dispute might create Anglophobic sentiment which, in turn, could lead to a resurgence of Patriot activity.¹⁵³ Therefore, the administration called on civil authorities in New York to be alert and gave the army additional funds to gain intelligence about any plots along the frontier.¹⁵⁴ Writing to his subordinates in April 1839, the commanding general cautioned against complacency, writing, “should you at any time doubt your means of prevention, under the neutrality laws, you will (as heretofore instructed) not for a moment hesitate to give immediate information...to the nearest British commander.”¹⁵⁵

On net, British competition along the boundary threatened American leaders as insecurity theory expects. Importantly, the four U.S. policies – preparation for a wider war, proposals for immediate negotiation, efforts to restrain Maine, and preventative steps on the northern border – show the concern about escalation that insecurity theory expects. The United States worried that the actions of local actors in this sparsely populated piece of wilderness could set off a chain of events that could end in a conflict. Preparations on the coast show that the United States saw an increased risk of a major war where British naval power might be brought to bear. By contrast, these types of concerns are entirely inconsistent with opportunism theory’s expectations that revisionist states downplay the risks of escalation.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence to assess whether U.S. assessments of British resolve increased due to British competition. Prior to the crisis, the U.S. assessment of British resolve was already high. Although the United States had expansive claims in the disputed

¹⁵³ Poinsett to Seward, March 9, 1839 and Poinsett to Scott, April 8, 1839, in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Military Affairs, 1800-1889*, Reel 20, pp. 318, 386–389.

¹⁵⁴ General Winfield Scott, April 15, 1839, Confidential Circular, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Received, 1832-1846*, S–38.

¹⁵⁵ Watson, “United States Army Officers Fight the ‘Patriot War.’”

territory prior to 1839, it never considered taking the area by force and had only promoted its claims through diplomacy. Because the U.S. already saw Britain as resolute, it is unclear whether Britain's competitive response further increased U.S. assessments. In spite of this limitation, this case still does provide some support for insecurity theory's predictions about American thinking. As the above narrative showed, the United States believed that even a perceived U.S. challenge would put the two states on a path toward general war. The quick conclusion of a provisional agreement did not, as opportunism theory expects, lead the United States to downplay the risks of a challenge (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Northeastern Border I: Predicted and Actual U.S. Response to Material Competition and Diplomatic Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. British deployment could make escalation more likely or indicate that British aims are already expanding.	No change. Benign view of the dominant state is entrenched. Moderate policy changes are not sufficient to provoke a reassessment.	Threatened. Worried Britain	Insecurity theory
Assessment of British Resolve	Deterred. Britain may be more resolute than previously believed. Since challenges are risky, better to err on the side of caution.	Deterred. Material competition indicates that the time is not right for a challenge.	Assessments of resolve were already high. Unclear if they increased more. U.S. did not downplay the risks of escalation.	U.S. logic consistent with insecurity theory.

Maritime Policy: Material Competition

In the summer of 1839, British policy on international maritime policy also became competitive. The United States and Britain had historically taken very different positions on issues of such policies during both times of war and peace. In wartime, the United States advocated for the maritime rights of neutral nations, while Britain, often a party to European conflicts, insisted on a broad interpretation of the rights of belligerents. During the Napoleonic Wars, Britain used the belligerent right of search to find men who were born as British subjects aboard neutral American vessels. Britain argued that these men owed life-long allegiance to the crown and forced some into service in the British navy. The United States saw this practice, known as impressment, as a gross violation of its sovereign and neutral rights. Though impressment had been a primary cause of the War of 1812, the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war, did not resolve the dispute.

In the peace that followed, the legacy of impressment colored American views about the question of how to suppress the slave trade out of Africa. The United States had outlawed the trade in 1807 and, in the Treaty of Ghent, both countries committed to “use their best endeavours” to abolish the trade.¹⁵⁶ Though the United States was a slave holding society, it no longer relied on the international trade to meet the demand for slaves and many considered the trade more barbaric than slavery itself. Beginning in the 1820s, the United States intermittently sent naval vessels to the coast of Africa to enforce the law against American flagged ships and made participation in the slave trade a capital offense.¹⁵⁷ The United States had a small navy

¹⁵⁶ Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931), 581.

¹⁵⁷ Donald L. Canney, *Africa Squadron: The U.S. Navy and the Slave Trade, 1842-1861* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), Chapter 2.

and suppression of the slave trade was not a high priority, so the United States had never committed a large force to the mission and the illegal use of the U.S. flag continued. To improve enforcement, Britain repeatedly proposed a mutual search treaty. Under such an agreement, the United States would have consented to British searches of U.S.-flagged vessels suspected of participating in the slave trade and vice versa. The United States rejected such an arrangement, fearing that Britain would abuse a peacetime right of search as it had in wartime.¹⁵⁸ Though there was no change in U.S. policy, other international developments made the U.S. flag the choice of many slave traders in the late-1830s.¹⁵⁹

Britain made suppression of the slave trade a foreign policy priority and had concluded bilateral search treaties with most European and Latin American states.¹⁶⁰ As a result, more slavers began illicitly flying the American flag. Prior to 1839, Britain had relied on diplomatic conciliation to convince the United States to take more vigorous action to suppress the slave trade. It had continued to call for a mutual search treaty and shared information about cases of slavers abusing the American flag in the hope that the United States would take its own steps to curb the abuses.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Hugh Graham Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations, 1814-1862* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1933), Chapter 1; Bernard H. Nelson, "The Slave Trade as a Factor in British Foreign Policy 1815-1862," *The Journal of Negro History* 27, no. 2 (April 1942): 206; Harral E. Landry, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in Atlantic Diplomacy, 1850-1861," *The Journal of Southern History* 27, no. 2 (May 1961): 186.

¹⁵⁹ Although the United States did not make suppression of the trade a priority, there is no evidence it encouraged slavers to use its flag. Moreover, there is evidence that the United States preferred to see trade suppressed. In 1839, for example, Van Buren publicly condemned the trade and pointed to foreigners who were "prostituting the flag of the United States to their nefarious purposes." Van Buren to the Senate and the House of Representatives, December 2, 1839, 26th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.1, p. 10. Later that year, when Britain brought slavers to New York, the President encouraged U.S. officials to prosecute them to the full extent of U.S. law. Not all of the cases were found to be under U.S. jurisdiction so they were sent to be prosecuted elsewhere; Vail to Fox, June 20, 1839, in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115, p. 99.

¹⁶⁰ On the coalition politics that made this a foreign policy priority, see, Chaim D. Kaufmann and Robert A. Pape, "Explaining Costly International Moral Action: Britain's Sixty-Year Campaign Against the Atlantic Slave Trade," *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (1999): 631-68.

¹⁶¹ Palmerston to Fox, May 31, 1838, October 12, 1838, November 9, 1838, and February 23, 1839 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1838-1839*, vol. 27, n.d.

However, as more slavers began using the American flag, Britain shifted to material competition. By 1839, the abuse was so rampant that British Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston wrote, “the number of vessels bearing the American flag, which have been found pursuing the abominable trade, has of late been so great, as to make it evident, that the slave traders now believe that to hoist the American colours gives them the fairest chance of escaping.”¹⁶² In order to more effectively suppress the trade, British naval forces began to stop and, in some cases, search American-flagged vessels suspected of being slavers. From June to October 1839, the British navy brought several slavers that had been illicitly flying the American flag to New York Harbor for prosecution.¹⁶³ In the course of pursuing suspected slavers, Britain also detained *bona fide* American vessels. When the United States protested, Palmerston stood by the navy’s actions, offering no apology or compensation.¹⁶⁴ Though Britain continued to call for cooperation, its unilateral use of naval power constituted a shift to material competition.¹⁶⁵

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory contends that rising states face serious consequences for underestimating threats. This makes them highly sensitive to competitive policies, even when they are motivated by humanitarian concerns. The United States should have looked at the problem in one of two ways. First, the United States might see Britain’s policy of stopping

¹⁶² Palmerston to Fox, August 3, 1839, in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1839-1840*, vol. 28, n.d., 915.

¹⁶³ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *Suppression of the Slave-Trade* (Longmans, Green, 1896), 293–294.

¹⁶⁴ The initial change in British practice may not have been due to an intentional policy change in London. Likely, it was the navy responding to new trends as slavers moved to the American flag. For examples of American protests and Britain’s refusal to apologize, see: Forsyth to Stevenson, July 17, 1839 and January 3, 1840 and Palmerston to Stevenson, April 23, 1840 and August 7, 1840 in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc.115, pp. 8, 11, 33, 61; Great Britain. Foreign Office, “Correspondence on the Subject of Vessels Sailing Under the Flag of the United States of America, Which Have Been Visited or Detained by British Cruizers, on Account of Being Suspected of Being Engaged in Slave Trade; Private and Confidential, Printed Solely for the Use of the Cabinet,” 1841.

¹⁶⁵ Fox to Forsyth, October 29, 1839, in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1839-1840*, 28:922–924.

American vessels as a pretext for pursuing other, more expansive aims. Second, even if the United States believed that British motives were genuine and its aims clearly circumscribed at the outset, it might still have believed that Britain's future intentions would be more expansive. In this case, the United State might have worried that once Britain established search procedures and had forces in place, it would be tempted to expand its searches beyond the original scope.

Opportunism theory, on the other hand, expects that the United States should have taken Britain's humanitarian justifications at face value. Opportunism theory contends that a revisionist state's leaders have a strong psychological need to maintain a relatively benign view of the dominant state. In this case, Britain's competition was moderate – a very limited adjustment to America's existing maritime right, used under very narrow circumstances with a clear justification – and thus should not have been strong enough to force the United States to reexamine these beliefs.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

Britain's material competition increased American threat perceptions as insecurity theory expects. As described above, the legacy of impressment had left the United States suspicious that Britain would abuse a peacetime right of search.¹⁶⁶ However, since British attention had been focused on the Portuguese and Spanish slavers that made up the bulk of the trade, these concerns had been in the background before 1839.¹⁶⁷ British competition revived American

¹⁶⁶ Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 9–10, 44. Hunter Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1934), 471.

¹⁶⁷ Van Buren's 1837 and 1838 annual messages made no mention of disagreements with Britain over maritime policy. Moreover, a review of American documents as well as British Foreign and State Papers for 1837-1839 show little diplomatic correspondence from the United States on the issue of the slave trade prior to mid-1839; Van Buren to the Senate and House of Representatives, December 5, 1837 and , January 8, 1838, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1896, 3:393, 401; Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British*

concerns about Britain's maritime policies. As insecurity theory expects, the United States feared that this was only the beginning of a slippery slope that would end with an expansion in British aims. As soon as the British policy affected a *bona fide* American vessel engaged in legitimate commerce, the United States objected.¹⁶⁸ The U.S. minister in London, Andrew Stevenson explained that the United States could not "acquiesce in the practice of having their vessels and citizens interrupted and detained whilst engaged in commercial pursuits," no matter how pure British motives.¹⁶⁹ For the United States, this was more than a minor inconvenience to American commerce. As insecurity theory expects, the United States worried that acquiescing to these British policies, "however qualified or restricted the right claimed may be, or under whatever pretence done," would invite further infringements on U.S. maritime rights.¹⁷⁰ As Stevenson explained, the U.S. flag "is to be the safeguard of all who sail under it, either in peace or war; and consequently, that no just exception can be allowed in favor of a right of search connected with the slave-trade."¹⁷¹ This same worry is found in diplomatic documents throughout Van Buren's term.¹⁷²

and Foreign State Papers, 1836-1837, vol. 25, n.d.; Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1837-1838*, vol. 26, n.d.; Great Britain. Foreign Office, *BFSP, 1838-1839*; Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1839-1840*. 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115.

¹⁶⁸ The official written protest against the initial case, the *Susan*, was very basic and did not outline American views on the subject. But Stevenson likely discussed American objections in person in that time period. The next official protest, the case of the *Edwin* in February 1840, outlined the full range of American objections and indicated that these had previously been shared with British officials; Stevenson to Palmerston, August 26, 1839 and February 5, 1840, in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115, pp. 10, 24.

¹⁶⁹ Stevenson to Palmerston, February 5, 1840, in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115, p. 25.

¹⁷⁰ Stevenson to Palmerston, February 17, 1840, in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115, p. 25.

¹⁷¹ Stevenson to Palmerston, February 5, 1840, in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115, p. 25. For other American statements refusing to allow mutual search or consent to British visits, see, Forsyth to Stevenson, July 8, 1840, in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115, pp. 39-41; Forsyth to Fox, March 1, 1841, in 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, pp. 10-11. Stevenson to Palmerston, November 13, 1840, in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1840-1841*, vol. 29, n.d., 645.

¹⁷² American correspondence on this issue up to March 1841 can be found in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115.

Concerns about Britain's future intentions drove three American policies. First, the United States sought to deter British searches of American vessels. The Van Buren administration sent two naval vessels to the coast of Africa in 1839.¹⁷³ Forsyth informed the British that the force was sent "to protect American vessels from improper molestation."¹⁷⁴ Orders to the American commander are consistent with Forsyth's diplomatic explanation. Though the commander was instructed to pursue "friendly co-operation" with the British navy to better suppress the trade under the American flag, his first responsibility was "the general protection of the lawful commerce of the United States."¹⁷⁵ Second, after sending the force, the United States tried to persuade the British that such a policy was no longer necessary. Having increased the U.S. force devoted to suppressing the trade, Forsyth explained, the President "expects that positive instructions will be given to all Her Majesty's officers to forbear from boarding or visiting vessels under the American flag."¹⁷⁶ In reality, however, this argument was unlikely to be successful – two American naval vessels would not be enough to stop the illicit use of the flag. Still, the United States tried, hoping that it might be convincing. Third, concerns about British aims limited further American cooperation with British naval forces, even in narrow situations. When the American naval commander went beyond his orders and concluded a local agreement for mutual search off the coast of Africa, he was reprimanded for entering an agreement so contrary to the "established and well-known principles" of the American

¹⁷³ The two vessels sent to West Africa were the brig *Dolphin* and the schooner *Grampus*; J.K. Paulding to Van Buren, November 30, 1839, 26th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.1, p. 534. The administration did not publicly point to concerns about British intentions as the reason for sending the force. However, the diplomatic documents and military orders suggest this was a large part of the motivation.

¹⁷⁴ Forsyth to Fox, February 12, 1840, in 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, p. 5.

¹⁷⁵ Paulding to Paine, December 30, 1839 as quoted in Earl E. McNeilly, "The United States Navy and the Suppression of the West African Slave Trade, 1819-1862" (Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 100–101.

¹⁷⁶ Forsyth to Fox, February 12, 1840, in Forsyth to Fox, February 12, 1840, in 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, p. 5; Similar statements are made in Forsyth to Stevenson, July 8, 1840, in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, H.Doc. 115, pp. 39-41.

government, and the agreement was rescinded.¹⁷⁷ On net, these policies show a persistent concern that British competition portended a broader expansion in British aims (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Maritime Policy: Predicted and Actual U.S. Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. British searches are likely to expand.	No change. This is a very narrow change in British policy. There is no reason to expect an expansion in the dominant state's aims.	Threatened. American fears that Britain will be tempted to pursue more aggressive searches.	Insecurity

Northern Border III: Further Material Competition

During 1839, Britain continued to increase its army forces and began to use its naval forces more actively along the northern border. Canadian officials had lobbied hard for more forces to address the Patriot attacks during 1838. They believed London failed to see the “futility of all attempts to conciliate the United States” and that war would only be avoided if “the American Government can be induced by strong remonstrances on the part of England, not only to profess amity but to enforce it.”¹⁷⁸ In the face of these types of arguments from both colonial authorities and the British minister in Washington, Henry Fox, Prime Minister Melbourne authorized the deployment of regular army forces. Therefore, although the Patriot threat had shrunk to small scale border provocations by 1839, the British land force increased by

¹⁷⁷ J.K. Paulding to Lieutenant John S. Paine, June 4, 1840 in Daniel Webster, ed., *The Diplomatic and Official Papers of Daniel Webster, While Secretary of State* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1848), 74–75.

¹⁷⁸ Arthur to Fox, Confidential, November 15, 1838 in Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 80.

around fifteen percent, bringing the total to about 12,000 regulars.¹⁷⁹ The size of the naval force on the lakes did not change, but material competition took a new form.¹⁸⁰ Britain's naval commander on the lakes began intercepting and searching commercial vessels entering Canadian waters. Previously, inspection of cargo aboard commercial vessels had been left to Canada's civil authorities. The result was at least one show of force: an American vessel was asked to show her flag and a shot was fired from the British vessel.¹⁸¹

British diplomacy also became more competitive when leaders in London issued a thinly veiled threat. Foreign Minister Palmerston said that Britain might consider unilateral action if the United States could not stop the Patriot attacks.¹⁸² As the U.S. minister in London wrote, this

¹⁷⁹ A U.S. commander initially assessed that the frontier was quiet by the fall of 1838. But then, there were failed attacks across the St. Lawrence River at Prescott and one near Windsor in late 1838. Stevens argues that these failures explain the drop in support for the movement in 1839; Acting Secretary of War Cooper to Acting Secretary of State Vail, September 28, 1838, in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Military Affairs, 1800-1889*, Reel 19, p. 389. Scott to Poinsett, March 23, 1840 in H.Exec.Doc. 163, 26th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 3-4. Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, 470-41. Oscar Arvle Kinchen, *The Rise and Fall of the Patriot Hunters* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1956), 95-101. On the British troop increase, see, Canada and Nova Scotia Returns for 1839, TNA: WO 17/1543 and 2386; Arthur to Lord Fitzroy J.H. Somerset, October 30, 1838 and Fox to Palmerston, June 24, 1838 in Charles Rupert Sanderson, ed., *The Arthur Papers; Being the Canadian Papers Mainly Confidential, Private, and Demi-Official of Sir George Arthur, K.C.H., Last Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, in the Manuscript Collection of the Toronto Public Libraries*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Toronto Public Libraries, 1957), 212, 334-336; Watson, "United States Army Officers Fight the 'Patriot War,'" 490. Colonial authorities also requested a large-scale fortifications program which London considered extensively. However, in the end, economy prevailed, and only smaller-scale improvements to existing works went forward; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 82-83.

¹⁸⁰ Britain did purchase the armed steamer the *Traveller*, in 1838, but it was not launched until 1839, according to Admiralty records. At that time, it replaced the rented schooner, *Brook*, resulting in no net change in the size of the force. Admiralty Digest, October 3, 1838, Sandom to ADM, May 1, 1839, and Returns of 1839, TNA: ADM 12/356, ADM 1/2565, ADM 8. Wilson Porter Shortridge, "The Canadian-American Frontier During the Rebellion of 1837-1838," *Canadian Historical Review Canadian Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (1926): 25-26; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 139; Macpherson, "List of Vessels Employed on British Naval Service on the Great Lakes, 1755-1875," 178-179; Foster, *Limitation of Armament on the Great Lakes*, 26-27.

¹⁸¹ Forsyth to Van Buren, August 15, 1839, in *Van Buren Papers*, Reel 21. Arthur to Fitzroy Somerset, July 2, 1839 and Upper Canada Executive Council to Arthur, August 20, 1839, in Charles Rupert Sanderson, ed., *The Arthur Papers; Being the Canadian Papers Mainly Confidential, Private, and Demi-Official of Sir George Arthur, K.C.H., Last Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, in the Manuscript Collection of the Toronto Public Libraries*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Toronto Public Libraries, 1958), 183, 213.

¹⁸² Palmerston to Stevenson, September 19, 1839 and Fox to Forsyth, October 21, 1839 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:522-525, 541-542. Fraiman calls this type of policy, which aims to get another state to take control of non-state actors within its borders, transitive compellence; Keren Fraiman, "Not In Your Backyard: Coercion, Base States, and Violent Non-State Actors" (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014).

was a marked change from the previously conciliatory diplomatic statements: the statement was “anything but pacific, and falls little short, of a menace of invasion.”¹⁸³

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Again, insecurity theory contends that additional British competition should continue to increase American threat perceptions, leading to increased concerns about British intentions or about the risk of war. Opportunism theory continues to predict no change in American perceptions. British policies remained moderate – certainly there had been no massive naval mobilization that would have been the expected prelude to an Anglo-American war. Rather, the British continued to act in ways that could be justified in terms of the situation they faced. The Patriot threat had diminished, but following the logic of the opportunism theory, the United States could still reason that the British were simply increasing their forces out of an abundance of caution, rather than because it planned to pursue wider aims.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions: Threatened

The United States was threatened by the incident on the lakes, but it is less clear how they saw the other changes in British policies. In 1838, the United States had not objected when Britain increased its lakes forces to deal with the Patriot threat.¹⁸⁴ However, the American position changed in 1839 when the United States received word that the British had fired a

¹⁸³ Stevenson to Forsyth, September 28, 1839 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:534. In 1838, the British minister in Washington and colonial leaders had privately and unofficially hinted that, if the United States could not prevent such incidents, Britain would have to use its military forces to do so unilaterally. But such threats had never come from London; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 134–135.

¹⁸⁴ A reference to the 1838 discussion of the lakes forces is found in Forsyth to Van Buren, March 13, 1840, in Reports of the Secretary of State to the President and Congress, 1790-1906; Entry A1 145; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; Fox to Forsyth, November 25, 1838 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:474–475.

musket in an attempt to make an American vessel show her flag in Canadian waters. Secretary of State Forsyth wrote that “this attempt to apply the doctrine of armed ships on high seas to the lakes...makes it absolutely necessary that the British Govt should be called upon promptly to reduce their naval armaments to the force established in the treaty.” As insecurity theory expects, this shift toward competition made Forsyth concerned about Britain’s future intentions on the lakes. He argued that the size of British force was no longer justified given the diminished Patriot threat by the fall of 1839. As the American commander on the northern border put it, the British maintained the force on the lakes, not in response to a growing threat, but “as security against an apprehended renewal of the troubles of the preceding year.”¹⁸⁵ The Secretary of State believed the United States needed to respond quickly, there would be dangerous consequences of “accumulating encroachments.”¹⁸⁶ In other words, the United States worried that British aims would continue to expand if the United States did nothing to stop it. Therefore, Forsyth informally told Fox that since the threat of cross-border raids had decreased, the United States expected Britain to draw down its naval forces on the lakes to levels within the Rush-Bagot agreement.¹⁸⁷

Beyond this particular incident, the impact of British competition on American threat perceptions is less clear. There are no specific statements indicating how American leaders perceived Palmerston’s threat or the further increase in British regulars. However, other American policies suggest that they still had a heightened level of concern. New rumors about possible Patriot activities led the president to cancel a plan to pull much needed forces from the

¹⁸⁵ Scott to Poinsett, March 23, 1840 in H.Exec.Doc. 163, 26th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 3-4.

¹⁸⁶ Forsyth to Van Buren, August 15, 1839, in *Van Buren Papers*, Reel 21.

¹⁸⁷ Forsyth to Van Buren, March 13, 1840, in H.Exec.Doc. 163, 26th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 1-2; Foster, *Limitation of Armament on the Great Lakes*, 25.

border for the fight against the Seminoles in Florida.¹⁸⁸ The Secretary of State also wrote to reassure Britain that the United States had even increased the number of forces on the border (Table 3.5).¹⁸⁹ This decision to maintain a force of regular soldiers along the border would have been particularly meaningful in the context of the times. In the 19th century, the United States eschewed a large standing army and used such forces sparingly both for reasons of economy and because of concerns that such forces could undermine the liberty of its citizens. However, the Secretary of War argued that this force, and permanent barracks to hold them, was necessary given “the disturbed state of the Canada frontier, and the absolute necessity which exists to keep upon that line as large a force as can be spared from other points.”¹⁹⁰ It is difficult to say whether, as insecurity theory expects, threat perceptions actually increased further, but they certainly had not been reduced (Table 3.6).

Table 3.5: U.S. Army Regulars along the Detroit-Niagara Frontier

Year	Regulars
1837	0
1838	1,530
1839	2,081
1840	1,222
1841	1,340

Sources: Adjutant General of the Army, “Position and Distribution of the Troops,” Contained in the documents accompanying the annual Message from the President of the United States, to the two Houses of Congress, 1837-1841.

¹⁸⁸ J.R. Poinsett to MG Winfield Scott, Eastern Department, October 26, 1839, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, 1814-1847*. Watson, “United States Army Officers Fight the ‘Patriot War,’” 490.

¹⁸⁹ Scott to Poinsett, October 18, 1839, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Received, 1832-1846*, S-31. Forsyth to Fox, October 31, 1839, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:91-93.

¹⁹⁰ Poinsett to Van Buren, November 30, 1839, in 26th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.1, p. 42.

Table 3.6: Northern Border III: Predicted and Actual American Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. Use of force on the lakes could indicate expanding aims. More regulars on the border make it more likely that force will be used.	No change. Britain's limited, pragmatic response to instability on the border is unlikely to result in a wider use of force.	Threatened. U.S. fears more encroachments on the lakes. Unclear how increased deployments affected American assessments	Insecurity Theory

Northeastern Boundary II: Diplomatic and Material Competition

British policy soon became more competitive on the Maine-New Brunswick boundary question as well. Palmerston definitively abandoned diplomatic conciliation, rejecting negotiations and a joint survey of the boundary. He also initiated a British survey of the boundary to build a stronger case for the British claim.¹⁹¹ Later in the year, there were new developments in the disputed territory. Some Mainers began building redoubts and roads in the disputed territory, an armed civil posse sought to expel New Brunswick's loggers, and some of Maine's politicians began calling for further action. Britain believed that these actions violated

¹⁹¹ This diplomatic competition coincided with the changes in maritime policy discussed in the last section, but, for readability, is discussed here. Palmerston rejected the American proposal for direct negotiations earlier in the year, citing Maine's historical intransigence and contending that relations would worsen if the two sides could not reach an agreement. However, the two countries continued to discuss the possibility of a joint survey. The United States learn that he had appointed a British survey July; Palmerston, "The Exact State of the North American Boundary Question is as Follows," May 4, 1840 in *Melbourne Papers, 1830-1841* (East Ardsley, England: Microform Academic Publishers, 1975), Reel 6, Box 12/9. Forsyth to Fox, July 29, 1839 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:87-88. TNA: FO 414/5, p. 9. At the Colonial Office, Lord John Russell objected that Palmerston's unilateral approach amounted to delay tactics that provoked American public opinion and risked war. But, Palmerston believed that the British surveyors would provide more support for British claims without excessive risk; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 85.

the agreement that had de-escalated the Aroostook crisis.¹⁹² Palmerston argued that British resolve was being tested in Maine, saying that Americans “always keep pushing on their encroachments as far as they are permitted to do so.”¹⁹³ In response, Britain moved a small number of additional forces into British controlled areas in the disputed territory and constructed barracks.¹⁹⁴ Britain’s minister in Washington also threatened further action, writing, “so long as people shall persist in the present system of aggression, Her Majesty’s Government will feel it their duty to make such military arrangements as may be required for the protection of Her Majesty’s Rights.”¹⁹⁵ At the end of 1840, Britain carried out these threats. In response to what British leaders conceded were “petty encroachments by parties of the State of Maine,” the British sent a larger military detachment into the disputed territory.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Commander in Chief of British Forces in North America, Sir John Colborne to Arthur, August 27, 1839, Commander-in-Chief of North America, Sir R.D. Jackson to Arthur, January 9, 1840, and Fox to Thomson, February 3, 1840, Confidential, in Sanderson, *Arthur Papers*, 1958, 2:223, 404–405. Palmerston to Fox, February 19, 1840, in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence Relating to the Boundary Between the British Possessions in North America and the United States of America, Under the Treaty of 1783, Part I*, C. 257, 1840, 108–109. The U.S. description of Maine’s motives and activities are found in Forsyth to Fox, March 25, 1840, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:111–112.

¹⁹³ As cited in Herbert Bell, *Lord Palmerston*, vol. 1 (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1966), 253.

¹⁹⁴ The British minister initially argued that there was no new construction and that forces in the territory had simply been relieved. He later corrected his claims about the size and nature of construction. Fox to Forsyth, November 2, 1839, January 12, 1840, January 26, 1840, March 7, 1840, and March 13 1840, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:545–555, 561–563. The Governor General of British North America, Charles Poulett Thompson actually had London’s approval for even more extensive plans to move British forces into the disputed territory; Russell to Thompson, Private, December 4, 1839, TNA: CO 43/95/164-167. He did not carry them out after Fox, who had originally encouraged this plan, noted how much the initial moves had frightened American leaders.; Fox to Arthur, January 29, 1840, Confidential, Fox to Thomson, February 3, 1840, Confidential, Fox to Thomson, January 29, 1840, Confidential in Sanderson, *Arthur Papers*, 1958, 2:398–400, 404–405.

¹⁹⁵ Fox to Forsyth, March 13, 1840 and Stevenson to Forsyth February 18, 1840 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:562, 557–558. Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 139. Palmerston’s instructions are Palmerston to Fox, February 19, 1840 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence Relating to the Boundary Between the British Possessions in North America and the United States of America, Under the Treaty of 1783*, 108–109.

¹⁹⁶ TNA: FO 414/5, p. 15; Lord Sydenham, Governor General of British North America, to Harvey, November 23, 1840, in *North American Boundary, FO 414/7*, p. 58. These were the forces that Lord Sydenham (then, Sir Thomson) wanted to send the previous winter. Sydenham, September 12, 1840, in Sanderson, *Arthur Papers*, 1959, 3:297–298. The Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick saw this deployment as unnecessarily provocative. In spite of his disagreement, he explained the motives for the British deployment to the Governor of Maine; Harvey to Fairfield, December 10, 1840, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:125–126.

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory expects that the United States would have been threatened by Britain's movement of forces. Although Maine's provocations were partly responsible for the British response, the United States might still feel threatened in two ways. First, the United States might worry that Britain already planned to use these incidents as a pretext for taking control of a broader area of territory. Second, the United States might believe that British aims are more likely to expand once it has forces in place. In either case, the United States should see the disputed boundary question as increasingly dangerous.

Opportunism theory does not expect the United States to anticipate further expansion of British aims or see the situation as particularly dangerous. Rather, this theory expects that the revisionist discounts such interpretations of the dominant state's policy and instead chooses a more optimistic interpretation that upholds its benign worldview. In this case, the United States would be expected to interpret the policy in the context of the situation and primarily as an indication of British resolve to defend its claims. Whatever the misdeeds of New Brunswick's loggers, the United States should have acknowledged that Maine had once again provoked the British. Britain's movement of forces, still within British controlled areas, could easily be explained as an indication of British resolve to maintain existing arrangements.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

Britain's diplomatic and material competition increased American threat perceptions, as insecurity theory expects. The secretary of state argued that Maine's use of small armed civil posses to deal with trespassers was allowed under the arrangements that had had de-escalated the Aroostook crisis. But he saw Britain's build-up, "military in its character," as escalatory and

outside of the terms of the agreement.¹⁹⁷ The United States repeatedly tried to convince Britain to change course.¹⁹⁸ Forsyth argued that war was likely “unless her Majesty’s government arrest all military interference in the question – unless it shall apply to the subject more determined efforts than have hitherto been made to bring the dispute to a certain and pacific adjustment.”¹⁹⁹

The belief that the situation was becoming increasingly dangerous can also be seen in the U.S. decision to send more regulars to the region, bringing the number of regulars from 150 in 1839 to over 400 by the end of 1840 (Table 3.7).²⁰⁰ This policy had two purposes: to deter British encroachments and to gain federal control over the situation by replacing Maine’s militia forces with well-trained regulars. First, the United States likely sought to deter Britain from taking military control of a broader area. Britain claimed to be acting only to defend its settlement at Madawaska, but the secretary worried that the British definition of security might lead it to expand its military control. He wrote that Britain’s interpretation of its rights under the agreement was so expansive that it was “difficult to conceive that there are any limitations to the pretension of Her Majesty’s Government under it.”²⁰¹ Second, the increase in regulars was intended to gain greater federal control over the situation. Forsyth continued to call on Maine to moderate its behavior, writing, “the President confidently trusts that there will be no movements

¹⁹⁷ Forsyth to Fox, March 25, 1840, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:111–112.

¹⁹⁸ Forsyth to Fox, December 24, 1839, January 16, 1840, January 28, 1840, February 26, 1840, March 6, 1840, March 15 1840, in *Ibid.*, 3:95–113.

¹⁹⁹ Forsyth to Fox, March 25, 1840, in *Ibid.*, 3:106–107.

²⁰⁰ The absolute number of regulars deployed to Maine might seem small given the stakes. However, this increase is very meaningful in this particular context. Though there was a larger force devoted to combatting the much diminished Patriot threat, that force was spread along a border extending from Michigan to Vermont. Second, as discussed earlier, this was a period when Americans preferred to rely on militia forces and eschewed a large standing army; J.R. Poinsett to MG Winfield Scott, Elizabethtown, NJ, March 15, 1840 and J.R. Poinsett, BG Abraham Eustice, South Carolina, March 15, 1840, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, 1814-1847*, Reel 2, pp. 87–88. The British noted the American troop movement; Arthur to Col. J.F. Love, April 6, 1840, in Sanderson, *Arthur Papers*, 1959, 3:4–5. R. Jones, Adjutant General of the Army, “Position and Distribution of the Troops of the Eastern Division under the Command of Brevet Major General Winfield Scott,” November 1839 in 26th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc. 1, pp. 68-70 and December 2, 1840 in 26th Congress, 2nd Session, S.Doc. 1, pp. 42-44.

²⁰¹ Forsyth to Fox, March 25, 1840 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:111–112.

on the part of Maine, which will afford just motives, or even plausible pretexts for complicating, in any manner, the already too long protracted controversy.”²⁰² However, with the situation becoming more dangerous, the federal government became uncomfortable with leaving Maine’s militias in charge of keeping order. By sending more well-disciplined regulars, the federal government could reduce the risk of escalation by better controlling its own people.²⁰³

The United States responded to Britain’s second increase in much the same way: it objected to Britain’s movements, increased the number of regulars in the area, and sought a new round of negotiations.²⁰⁴ These policies, and the logic behind them, show that the United States was threatened by British competition as insecurity theory expects. They did not, as opportunism theory expects, downplay the risks of the situation or interpret Britain’s moves as simply an indication of British resolve. Rather, the United States worried that Britain aims might soon expand.

²⁰² Forsyth to Fairfield, January 29, 1840, in United States. Department of State, *Domestic Letters of the Department of State, 1784-1906*, Reel 28, p. 464.

²⁰³ Unfortunately, there are no statements explaining the Van Buren administration’s logic for the troop increase in 1839 and 1840. The logic of using federal forces to restrain Maine was outlined by the next Secretary of State, Daniel Webster; Webster to Fox, September 4, 1841 and Unsigned Memorandum from Henry S. Fox, June 1, 1840 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:148–150, 636–637.

²⁰⁴ Forsyth to Fox, December 26, 1840 in *Ibid.*, 3:125. Edward Kent to John Tyler, May 25, 1841, in Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:81–85. R. Jones, Adjutant General of the Army, “Position and Distribution of the Troops of the Eastern Division under the Command of Brigadier General John E. Wool,” November 1839 in 27th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc. 1, pp. 88-90. Expressing some skepticism about the motives behind Britain’s moves, the President wrote that he hoped Britain would not use the American increase as a “pretext” for further increasing the number of British regular forces south of the St. Johns. Tyler to Webster, c. September 8, 1841 in *Ibid.*, 1:116. Webster asked at least one American businessman to extend his trip to London to informally sound out British leaders on their willingness to negotiate and possible terms. It is unclear whether this request was carried out or whether the British government knew about Webster’s overtures; Webster to Mr. F.C. Gray, Private and Confidential, May 11, 1841 in Fletcher Webster, ed., *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: Private Correspondence*, vol. 2 (Little, Brown, and Co., 1903), 102.

Table 3.7: U.S. Regular Army Soldiers in Maine

Year	Soldiers
1837	89
1838	0
1839	153
1840	427
1841	507
1842	69
1843	65

Sources: Adjutant General of the Army, "Position and Distribution of the Troops," Contained the in the documents accompanying the annual Message from the President of the United States, to the two Houses of Congress, 1837-1843

Again, there is insufficient evidence to assess whether U.S. assessments of British resolve increased above their already high level. As in the previous period, the United States continued to believe that even a perceived challenge could lead to a major war. This belief in the risks of challenges is consistent with the logic that insecurity theory expects from a rising state (Table 3.8).

Table 3.8: Northeastern Boundary II: Predicted and Actual American Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. Deployments make it more likely that force will be used to settle disputes.	No change. Britain's	Threatened. U.S. sends forces to deter British encroachments and restrain Maine.	Insecurity Theory
Assessment of British Resolve	Deterred. Britain may be more resolute than previously believed. Since challenges are risky, better to err on the side of caution.	Deterred. Material competition indicates that the time is not right for a challenge.	U.S. continued to see significant risks in a challenge. Insufficient evidence to assess change in U.S. assessment	U.S. logic consistent with insecurity theory.

McLeod Affair: Material Competition

Britain pursued diplomatic and material competition when one of its Canadian subjects, Alexander McLeod, was arrested by local authorities in New York State in connection with the *Caroline* incident. When news of McLeod's arrest reached Washington in December 1840, federal officials explained that they had no authority to interfere in New York's judicial processes.²⁰⁵ The British minister demanded McLeod's release and warned of "very grave and

²⁰⁵ Fox to Forsyth; December 13, 1840 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:604–605; Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, 72; David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 15–21; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 49.

serious consequences” if he were harmed.²⁰⁶ In March 1841, official instructions from London arrived, supporting the minister’s position.²⁰⁷ Unofficially, the message was more explicit: Palmerston warned Britain would declare war if McLeod were executed. And, Fox informed the President, if McLeod was harmed, the minister would leave the country, a traditional first step to war in the nineteenth century.²⁰⁸

The British also pursued material competition by taking concrete steps to prepare for war. In March, the U.S. minister in London and Paris reported on British naval preparations.²⁰⁹ When the government in London changed hands, the new Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, ordered additional steps to prepare for war.²¹⁰ He sent the new Governor General to North America in a ship of the line, one of the navy’s most important combat vessels. Another ship of the line was put on alert to be sent to Bermuda and four more were held at Gibraltar.²¹¹ Britain believed that these were prudent military preparations that need not be threatening. Peel wrote, “such measures need not partake the character of menace, or of any desire for war. But, if it be conceded that war may be inevitable; that the decision upon war or peace may be beyond our control; that such events as those that are occurring on the frontiers of Canada may precipitate a

²⁰⁶ Fox to Forsyth, December 29, 1840 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:605–606.

²⁰⁷ Fox to Webster March 12, 1841, in *Ibid.*, 3:616–618.

²⁰⁸ Palmerston to Fox, February 9, 1841, Henry Lytton Bulwer Dalling and Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston: With Selections from His Diaries and Correspondence*, vol. 3 (London: R. Bentley, 1871), 47–50. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 86. Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 48–53.

²⁰⁹ Stevenson to Webster, March 18, 1841 and April 7 (received April 26), in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:611–615, 618–620, 624–626. Lewis Cass, Minister to France, to Daniel Webster, Secretary of State, March 5, 1841; Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:37–38.

²¹⁰ Continuing Palmerston’s policy, the new foreign minister told the minister in Washington should leave if McLeod was executed. Alastair Watt, “The Case of Alexander McLeod,” *Canadian Historical Review* 12, no. 2 (1931): 156–157; Wilbur Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy, 1841-1861* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 11–12, 40, 63; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 93–95.

²¹¹ Peel also requested preparation of other combat and supporting vessels. Canadian authorities were given permission to hold regulars that had previously been ordered home. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 95–96. Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power, 1815-1853*, 148–149.

decision on the spot - surely we ought to take measures which, without diminishing the hopes of peace, may be suitable to the alternative of war.”²¹²

In the midst of the McLeod crisis, the United States learned that Britain was continuing to build up its forces on the lakes.²¹³ Canadian authorities acknowledged that the risk of rebellion or a resurgence of the Patriot movement had declined substantially, but argued that better defenses were still needed in case such another movement emerged in the future.²¹⁴ As the outgoing commander-in-chief of North America argued, “encouragement given by the American patriots to the disaffected in Upper Canada cannot fail to create alarms occasionally.”²¹⁵ Therefore, London agreed to fund improvements in the British force on the lakes.²¹⁶ Rumors that the British were building a purpose-built war vessel, the *Minos*, reached the United States by early 1840, and, in 1841, the ship replaced one of Britain’s older vessels.²¹⁷ Then, in 1841, the

²¹² Memorandum sent to the Earl of Aberdeen, Lord Haddington, and Lord Stanley, October 17, 1841, Peel, Peel, and Parker, *Sir Robert Peel*, 1899, 3:387–388. Similarly, in at least three letters, Palmerston indicated that he did not expect war to result. Donald Southgate, “*The Most English Minister...*”: *The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 173–174. Palmerston to Unknown Recipient, February 9, 1841 and Palmerston to Fox, February 9, 1841, Dalling and Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, 3:45–50.

²¹³ By December 1839, the lieutenant governor of Upper Canada explained, “on the American Frontier, the “Patriot” cause has apparently lost its exciting interest.” Arthur to Russell, December 6, 1839, Private and Arthur to Sir R. D. Jackson, March 28, 1840 in Sanderson, *Arthur Papers*, 1958, 2:333, 474.

²¹⁴ Fox to Arthur, January 31, 1839, Confidential, Colburn to Arthur, April 16, 1839, Arthur to Lord Fitzroy J.H. Somerset, October 18, 1839, Private, Arthur to Colonel J.F. Love, November 18, 1839, Arthur to Russell, December 6, 1839, Private, in *Ibid.*, 2:26–27, 120–122, 290–292, 318–319, 333.

²¹⁵ Lord Seaton to Russell, December 30, 1839, in *Papers Relative to the Fortifications and Defences of Canada* (Confidential Print, n.d.), pp. 1–3.

²¹⁶ Tiffany, *The Relations of the United States to the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838*, 16–21; Shortridge, “The Canadian-American Frontier During the Rebellion of 1837–1838,” 15; Stacey, *The Military Problems of Canada: A Survey of Defence Policies and Strategic Conditions Past and Present*, 19–21; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 137; James Morton Callahan, *The Neutrality of the American Lakes and Anglo-American Relations* (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1898), 119–1120.

²¹⁷ Major General Alexander Macomb, Headquarters, United States Army, to Poinsett, June 26, 1840, in 26th Congress, 1st Session, H.Doc. 245, pp. 2–4. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 89; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 141.

Admiralty ordered the construction of two more war vessels, with one being launched later that year.²¹⁸

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory expects that American leaders should have been threatened by Britain's competitive build up during the McLeod affair. In the Anglo-American context, preparation of naval forces was not just any form of material competition; it was the clearest display of Britain's superior capabilities. The United States should have adopted one of the following lines of reasoning. First, the United States could have assessed that once forces were on alert, Britain would be more likely to intentionally choose force in any one of the issues between them, and at the extreme, launch an attack even if the United States complied on the McLeod question. Second, the United States might have worried that putting naval forces on alert at a time when the two faced so many conflicts of interest, increased the risk of war by accident or miscalculation.

Opportunism theory expects the United States to see Britain's response in the context of a clear provocation by the United States. And although it might believe that Britain would be willing to carry out its threat, the United States should have assessed that the cost making of the concession, and of avoiding the fight, was low: all they had to do was to make sure McLeod was released. If they did so, there would be nothing more to worry about.

²¹⁸ These vessels were the *Cherokee* and *Mohawk* (launched 1841 and 1843 respectively); Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 87-90. ADM to CO, February 8, 1841, TNA: CO 42/482, p. 28. Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*, 134-136, 144. Macpherson, "List of Vessels Employed on British Naval Service on the Great Lakes, 1755-1875." *Report on the Navy Estimates from the Select Committee on Navy, Army, and Ordnance Estimates*, p. x-xi.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

Continued British competition on the lakes and its competitive response to the McLeod affair both threatened, as insecurity theory expects. In 1841, reports that Britain was building purpose-built vessels for the lakes made the new administration, led by President John Tyler, even more concerned about how Britain would use that force. Secretary of State Daniel Webster wrote that the United States could not accept the size of the British force when the vessels were made for “offensive as well as defensive use, upon the ground of a vague and indefinite apprehension of future danger.”²¹⁹ Because of concerns about British intentions, the administration decided to build its own powerful vessel for the lakes, the *Michigan*.²²⁰ Britain’s competition along the northern border had caused a marked increase in American fears. Whereas during 1836, war had been seen as a remote possibility on that border, in 1841, the Secretary of War called for more fortifications on the Northern frontier to defend against a “powerful enemy.”²²¹

The United States was even more threatened by Britain’s response to the McLeod affair. American leaders understood that Britain’s threats and military buildup were provoked and intended to compel the United States to release McLeod.²²² In spite of understanding Britain’s motivations, the United States worried that Britain might attack before it had an opportunity to

²¹⁹ Webster to Fox, November 29, 1841 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:158. Webster raised the issue immediately upon receiving the report. On Fox’s suggestion, Webster waited to issue a formal protest the violations until November 1841 when the McLeod crisis ended; Seward to Webster, September 17, 1841 and Webster to Fox, September 25, 1841 in *Ibid.*, 3:151–153. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 115–116; Callahan, *The Neutrality of the American Lakes and Anglo-American Relations*, 118; Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, 153–157.

²²⁰ Construction of the *Michigan* began in 1842 and was not delivered to Lake Erie until 1843; Callahan, *The Neutrality of the American Lakes and Anglo-American Relations*, 123–125.

²²¹ John C. Spencer to Tyler, December 1, 1841, in 27th Congress, 2nd Session, S.Doc.1, 62.

²²² Webster, for example, stated explicitly that war would result only if McLeod were harmed. Webster to Tyler, Around July 1841 in Daniel Webster, *The Letters of Daniel Webster from Documents Owned Principally by the New Hampshire Historical Society* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co, 1902), 232–233. Stevenson held the same view. Andrew Stevenson, United States Minister to Great Britain, to Daniel Webster, Secretary of State of the United States in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:640.

fully comply. The United States faced domestic legal hurdles to complying with Britain's demand, but both the Harrison and Tyler administrations did everything they could to find a workable solution.²²³ When Harrison assumed office, his Secretary of State, Daniel Webster, sent the Attorney General to New York to help McLeod find good legal representation and to appeal to the governor to abandon the prosecution. When that failed, the administration went to the Supreme Court of New York. They asked the court to rule that the state had no jurisdiction in the McLeod case, since the *Caroline* attack had been an official act carried out on behalf of the British government.²²⁴ After Harrison died, Webster remained as Secretary of State in the Tyler administration and continued these efforts.²²⁵ During this period, the administration had not yet exhausted options for meeting British demands, yet American leaders still feared that Britain would resort to force. During Harrison's short time in office, the Department of War used all of its available resources to secure the Atlantic coast given the "present unsettled and still threatening aspect of our relations with Great Britain."²²⁶ When President Tyler came into office, the Secretary of War encouraged him to take further steps to prepare for a sudden attack.²²⁷ The Secretary of the Navy believed that the issue of coastal defense was urgent and the nation needed to be "ever ready" for a naval attack, so he requested funds to establish a

²²³ Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, 74–86; Robert Remini, *Daniel Webster: The Man and His Time* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 519; Niven, *Martin Van Buren*, p 474; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 50.

²²⁴ Irving H. Bartlett, *Daniel Webster* (New York: Norton, 1978), 178; Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 54–55; Watt, "The Case of Alexander McLeod," 155; Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, 92; Maurice G Baxter, *One and Inseparable: Daniel Webster and the Union* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984). Palmerston formally declared the *Caroline* attack a public act in Lord Palmerston, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Andrew Stevenson, United States Minister to Great Britain, Foreign Office, August 27, 1841, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:643–660.

²²⁵ Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 53–57; Remini, *Daniel Webster*, 518–522; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 56–59; Norma Lois Peterson, *The Presidencies of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler*, American Presidency Series (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 145–146.

²²⁶ John Bell, Secretary of War, to Millard Fillmore, Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, June 31, 1841, in Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *The New American State Papers: Military Affairs* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1979), 165.

²²⁷ John Bell, Secretary of War to the President, May 31, 1841, in United States. War Department, *Letters Sent to the President by the Secretary of War*, 1971, 4:35.

permanent Home Squadron and for a larger standing supply of arms to be ready for a “sudden emergency.”²²⁸ The administration also took steps to purchase fortifications on Staten Island that defended New York. The Secretary of War explained that “at this juncture it is particularly important that all the great Atlantic cities should be placed in a secure situation as possible from a sudden attack by an enemy.”²²⁹ In September 1841, having failed to stop the trial, the administration looked for ways to have the verdict overturned if the jury found McLeod guilty. Tyler also worried, however, that the British minister might request his passport and leave the country immediately if McLeod was convicted, putting the two countries on a collision course. Therefore, in a very unorthodox move, Tyler told the British minister that the United States would not return his passport, explaining that he wanted to buy more time to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.²³⁰

Moreover, there is evidence that British competition led American leaders to believe that force was more likely to be used to settle future disputes, even if the United States did not make

²²⁸ The secretary’s statements about the immediate risk of war were somewhat confusing. In addition to what was quoted above, he noted that negotiations were ongoing with the British, suggesting that the threat of war was no longer as imminent as it had been earlier in the year. However, the overall tone of the message was one of urgency, so this qualification in the public statement was likely due to delicacy of the diplomatic situation; Secretary of the Navy George E. Badger, May 31, 1841, in 27th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc. 1, pp. 61-63; During the crisis, Congress also passed funding for fortifications along the northern border and steamers on the lakes; Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, 134; Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, 116–117.

²²⁹ John Bell, Secretary of War to William H. Seward, Governor of New York, May 14, 1841, in 27th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc. 1, p. 47.

²³⁰ Edward Crago, *John Tyler: The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 92–93; Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, 130–131, 162. The force along the northern border had been reduced in 1840, when Congress’s authorization expired. But, the U.S. also continued to respond swiftly to rumors of any provocations on the northern border, as it had done in the past. Scott to John Bell, Secretary of War, June 22, 1841 and September 15, 1841, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Received, 1832-1846*, S–39, S–40. Tyler to Webster July 9, 1841, in George Ticknor Curtis, *Life of Daniel Webster*, vol. 2 (D. Appleton and Company, 1870), 87. John Tyler, “Proclamation 46A - Warning Against Lawless Incursions Into Canada,” September 25, 1841; Spencer to Seward, October 2, 1841, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, 1814-1847*, Reel 2, p. 121–122. Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:173; Oliver Perry Chitwood, *John Tyler, Champion of the Old South*. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 307. Fox to Aberdeen, Confidential, December 5, 1841 (copy), TNA: CO 42/499/271-274. Webster continued to see escalation to a war over this issue as a concern, writing, “if we cannot repress those lawless acts, we shall ere long be involved in an inglorious border warfare of incursions and violations ending probably in general hostilities.” Webster to Seward, September 23, 1841, in United States. Department of State, *Domestic Letters of the Department of State, 1784-1906*, Reel 30, p. 52.

a challenge. Even after the immediate crisis was resolved with McLeod's acquittal on October 12, 1841, the administration took more steps to improve the nation's defenses. At the end of 1841, the new Secretary of the Navy, Abel Upshur, presented naval estimates for 1842 that were nearly 50% greater than the year before.²³¹ Upshur's writings reveal that at least part of the motivation for the increases was concern about future Anglo-American relations.²³² When Congress balked, Upshur expressed frustration, writing privately that "they know how delicate and precarious are our relations with England, yet they will not put the country in a posture of defense."²³³ Increased defenses were not the only indication of lasting concern about Britain's willingness to use force against the United States. Seeking to prevent such dangerous situations in the future, Tyler successfully lobbied Congress to pass the 1842 Remedial Justice Act, which gave the federal government authority in cases like McLeod's (Table 3.9).²³⁴

²³¹ 27th Congress, 2nd Session, S.Doc.1, p. 397-398; Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*, 118-119; John H. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829-1861* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 59-64; Crapol, *John Tyler*, 76-77; Peterson, *The Presidencies of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler*, 151.

²³² The administration and some in Congress also pointed to the development of steam powered vessels which made American coasts more vulnerable; Tyler Address to the Special session, June 1841 in H.Doc. 3, 27th Congress, 1st Session, p. 48; Some historians have attributed the increase in naval spending in this period to the particularly pro-navy views of Secretary Upshur. This argument does not undermine the case that threat perception drove the decision to increase the nation's defenses. Rather, it explains the particular form of defenses that the administration chose. There had been a debate over the best way for America to secure its long coast line. During the Jackson administration, Secretary of War Lewis Cass had argued the nation should rely on mobile naval forces that could concentrate to meet the enemy at any vulnerable point. During the Van Buren administration, Secretary of War Poinsett had argued that relying on the navy was risky and that fortifications were a much more cost effective way of securing the coast. Upshur was among those who believed that the navy was central to the nation's coastal defenses. Therefore, in the face of the same threat, a different administration might have placed greater emphasis on coastal fortifications rather than on the navy; Claude H. Hall, "Abel P. Upshur and the Navy as an Instrument of Foreign Policy," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 69, no. 3 (July 1961): 291; Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 39. Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *Makers of Naval Policy, 1798-1947* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1980); Sprout and Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power*. J.R. Poinsett, A Plan for the Protection of the North and Eastern Boundary of the United States, January 9, 1838, in 25th Congress, 2nd Session, S.Doc. 88, p. 2. "Message from the President of the United States, transmitting a report from the Secretary of War, in compliance with a resolution of the Senate, in relation to the military and naval defences of the country. April 27, 1840, Serial Set Vol. No. 360, Session Vol. No.7, 26th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc. 451.

²³³ Upshur to Tucker, undated 1842, in Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, vol. 2 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 158. Hall dates the letter in January; Upshur to Tucker, January 12, 1842, as cited in Hall, "Abel P. Upshur and the Navy as an Instrument of Foreign Policy," 294.

²³⁴ Crapol, *John Tyler*, 92-93; Stevens, *Border Diplomacy*, 130-131, 162.

Table 3.9: McLeod Affair: Predicted and Actual American Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. Deployments make it more likely that force will be used to settle disputes.	No change. Britain has been provoked and its aims are unlikely to expand as long as McLeod is not harmed.	Threatened. Preparations for war even though the administration was working to free McLeod	Insecurity Theory

Conclusion

This series of cases provides evidence against the predictions of opportunism theory and in support of insecurity theory. Opportunism theory claims that leaders of revisionist rising states adopt a relatively benign image of the dominant state in order to convince themselves that it is safe to pursue their ambitions. Since this view serves an important psychological purpose, it is not easily changed by moderate forms of competition. This chapter provides evidence against both of these predictions. First, the United States did not hold a benign view of Britain or of the dangers of the international system. Second, the United States was easily threatened by British competition. In the cases of the Patriot movement, the northeastern boundary dispute, and the McLeod affair, American leaders might have easily discounted the threatening aspects of British competition. After all, in these cases, Britain had clearly been provoked. However, this was not how the United States looked at British competition. Instead, as insecurity theory expects, the United States understood that Britain had been provoked and still worried about the possibility of British aggression, either intentional or through one of many escalatory mechanisms. Moreover, as insecurity theory expects, the United States took confrontations with Britain seriously. They believed that escalation of local disputes was possible and that there was always a risk that

Britain's superior material capabilities could be brought to bear. In other words, America's enduring ambition did not lead it to engage in wishful thinking about the international system or the threats it faced.

The way that the United States responded to its elevated threat perceptions had both good and bad impacts from the British perspective. Fear compelled the federal government to take action against Patriot groups and reign in Maine's policies in the disputed territory. And, in the aftermath of the McLeod affair, Tyler convinced Congress to extend federal jurisdiction in such cases. For Britain, any steps that consolidated federal control over U.S. foreign policy were a positive development: such policies made it less likely that a sub-state actor would once again have so much control over the risk of war between the two countries. One might also argue that keeping the United States busy with defending its northern borders limited the energy it could devote to expansion elsewhere.²³⁵ However, in other ways, fear led the United States to take steps contrary to British interests. On the Great Lakes, Britain's policies led the United States to begin construction on its own powerful vessels. And Britain's naval mobilization and threats during the 1841 McLeod affair contributed to a significant American naval build-up. Arguably, British policies also played some part in increasing the risk of war between 1837 and 1841.

On net, the United States did not believe it faced an existential threat in this period. The time had passed since the United States feared an army of invasion that would occupy the entire American homeland. However, the United States still knew that there were things it might lose – physical security of the seaboard and sovereignty along the northern border. And this chapter shows that the possibility of such losses still loomed large in American thinking.

²³⁵ Thank you to Barry Posen for bringing up this point.

In the years that followed, Britain supplemented competition with more conciliatory policies. These changes resulted, largely, from the change in government in Britain. The Peel government assessed that British policies had, in some cases, become excessively competitive. Chapter 4 considers the changes in British policy and how they affected U.S. threat perceptions and assessments of British resolve.

Chapter 4: United States and Britain II, 1841-1846

This chapter considers American perceptions of British policies from 1841 to 1846. This second set of Anglo-American cases offers several additional tests of insecurity and opportunism theories. First, in this period, Britain pursued a wider range of policies, including material conciliation. Second, in this period, Britain policy changes occurred in three areas where the United States had shown an interest in expansion and, therefore, might have been emboldened: the Mexican province of Texas, the disputed northeastern boundary, and the Oregon territory. This chapter therefore allows consideration of the second question upon which the two theories disagree: are rising revisionists easily emboldened by conciliation?

Insecurity theory contends that they are not. In anarchy, the risks associated with underestimating the dominant state's resolve can be substantial. The rising state might end up in a war with a materially stronger state. And, since the dominant state's aims can always expand beyond the immediate dispute, such a conflict could easily escalate to a large-scale war where the dominant state's superior capabilities are brought to bear. The rising state therefore has an incentive to be cautious when assessing resolve. It will not downgrade its assessment of the dominant state's resolve based on moderate conciliatory gestures. Instead, rising states only update their assessments of the dominant state's resolve based on stronger signals, such as shifts in the distribution of power or in trends – economic, demographic, or technological – that change the dominant state's interests in a particular holding.

Opportunism theory, on the other hand, expects that rising revisionists are easily emboldened. Such states not only have ambition, they have a very different view of the international system than insecurity theory expects. These states hold a particular set of beliefs: that the dominant state is reluctant to use force and its benign intentions are enduring. This

belief emerges and endures because it reduces the psychological stress associated with pursuing expansion: leaders do not have to confront tradeoffs to expansion if the dominant state is reluctant to fight and expand. With this set of beliefs, the rising state does not see challenges as particularly risky and sees little incentive to be careful about assessing resolve. Rising states, anxious to make gains, are emboldened by even moderately conciliatory policies.

To test these theories, I consider each British policy change, in turn. I code the policy change according to its level of competitiveness, state each theory's *ex ante* predictions about how these policy changes affected American perceptions, and assess the actual impact. This chapter provides stronger support for both of insecurity theory's predictions. The United States was usually cautious about reassessing British resolve. Moreover, this chapter provides additional support for the findings in Chapter 3: the United States was still easily threatened by British competition. This chapter does, however, provide one example – the Oregon crisis of 1845-1846 – where insecurity theory did not correctly predict American perceptions. This failure points to the need for further research on the conditions under which the theory applies. However, the fact that the theory only failed within a very hard test under the most challenging circumstances – a case where the rising state made an entirely unprovoked challenge for purely greedy reasons on an issue peripheral to the dominant state's interests - suggests that the theory has significant explanatory power.

Maritime Policy II: Mixed Approach

As discussed in Chapter 3, prior to 1841, Britain would stop and sometimes search contents of vessels suspected of participating in the trade, even if they were flying the American flag. In the fall of 1841, Britain made two adjustments to its policy off the coast of Africa. First,

in the face of American protests, Britain placed new limits on its use of naval forces, a policy of material conciliation.²³⁶ Under new instructions, British cruisers were allowed to continue stopping vessels flying the American flag, but those with valid American papers were released without further search.²³⁷ The result was a change in practice. At least two vessels were released after showing valid papers, in spite of clear evidence of involvement in the slave trade.²³⁸

Second, Britain chose a more competitive diplomatic stance. The British closed the door to negotiations about the British practice. The British foreign minister, Lord Palmerston, argued that Britain was acting entirely within its rights and would continue the practice, whatever the objections. He asserted the British navy had a right to stop and visit vessels in peacetime in order to verify a ship's true national origin. A visit, he argued, was limited to an examination of a ship's papers and was, therefore, distinct from an illegal search of a ship's contents in

²³⁶ The British foreign minister, Lord Palmerston, appears to have intended to change British practice earlier. In February 1840, he reported that strict instructions were given to the navy "not to interfere with vessels belonging to countries with which Great Britain has no Treaty conceding mutually a right of search." It is not clear how these instructions compared with those eventually sent in 1841. In any case, they were not implemented 1840. In March 1840, the British and American naval commanders off the coast of Africa, on their own initiative, entered into an agreement for mutual search of suspicious vessels. The British detained several vessels before the United States disavowed agreement. Given the U.S. government's repeated protests against British interference off the coast of Africa, Palmerston may have suspected that the agreement was unauthorized. When he sent the United States a copy of the agreement, along with praise for the commander, he might have hoped that the United States would accept a seemingly pragmatic solution to the abuse of the U.S. flag. Whatever Palmerston's motivations in 1840, it is clear that British practice did not change until 1841; Palmerston to Stevenson, February 15, 1840 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1839-1840*, 28:934. Palmerston to Stevenson, August 5, 1841 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1841-1842*, vol. 30, n.d., 1150. The agreement between the commanders can be found in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1840-1841*, 29:624.

²³⁷ Sir John Barrow to Lord Leveson, March 3, 1841 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence with Foreign Powers on the Slave Trade* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1842), 186-187. Palmerston to Fox, March 16, 1841 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1841-1842*, 30:1138.

²³⁸ These were the cases of the *Illinois* and *Shakespeare* in May and June of 1842; John Foote, Commander of the British West Africa Squadron to Commodore M.C. Perry, 28th Congress, 2nd Session, S.Doc.150, p. 72.

peacetime.²³⁹ In the fall of 1841, the new government, led by Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel, adopted the same policy, even though it privately questioned the legality of the practice.²⁴⁰

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory cannot predict the net effect of Britain's competitive and conciliatory policies. However, it does predict that the United States would remain highly alert to the possibility that British aims might expand. This theory contends that rising states worry about underestimating threats. These states know that the dominant state's intentions can change at any time, so they are sensitive to competition. They see even diplomatic competition as an early signal that the dominant state's aims are expanding or will soon. In this case, Britain's refusal to negotiate should have led the United States to worry about just how expansively Britain planned to use the right of visit, or how it might try to use that right in the future. At the same time, Britain's more judicious use of naval forces should have had a countervailing effect, making the net effect unclear. Although the net effect is unclear, insecurity theory does predict that the United States should have remained alert, closely monitoring British policy to assess threats.

²³⁹ Palmerston suggested Britain might adopt such a policy a few months earlier; Stevenson to Webster, May 18, 1841 in Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 58–59. The official policy was announced in August; Palmerston to Stevenson, August 5, 1841, August 27, 1841 (a), August 27, 1841 (b), in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1841-1842*, 30:1148–1156. Stevenson to Webster, August 31, 1841, in Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:107–108; Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 58.

²⁴⁰ On the continuation of British policy, see, Aberdeen to Stevenson, October 13, 1841, Viscount Canning to Sir John Barrow, November 27, 1841 and Sir John Barrow to Commanders in Chief and Senior Officers at the Cape of Good Hope, Coast of Africa, West Indies, and Brazils, December 7, 1841, and Aberdeen to Everett, December 20, 1841, in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence with Foreign Powers on the Slave Trade*, 267, 276, 279–282; Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 64–67. On private concerns about the legality of the right of visit, see, Aberdeen to Croker, October 7, 1841, Private, British Library, Croker Papers, Add. MS 73166, 28–28; Peel to Aberdeen, October 25 and November 1, 1841, in Peel, Peel, and Parker, *Sir Robert Peel*, 1899, 3:388. Aberdeen later told the American minister privately that he did not see a distinction between the right of search and the right of visit; Everett to Webster, April 27, 1843, Private in Curtis, *Life of Daniel Webster*, 2:165.

Opportunism theory, on the other hand, expects that the United States should have been reassured by the change in British practice. This theory contends that rising states interpret competition in a way that allows them to preserve their benign image of the dominant state. Of course, extreme forms of competition could force a rising state to reevaluate this image, but moderate forms of competition, such as Britain's refusal to negotiate, are not enough. In this case, the United States should have chosen the interpretation that protected their perception of a benign Britain. Britain's inflexible stance on the right of search would be viewed as simply a legal theory to justify this very narrow policy aimed only at preventing slavers from evading search off the coast of Africa. Since the dominant state should have been seen as having a strong, static preference against expansion, there should have been little reason to worry that British aims would expand beyond this limited policy, which had only affected a handful of American vessels since 1839. The conciliatory change in British practice, which sought to minimize the harm to American commerce, should have validated this general outlook and removed any minor concerns that might have existed about the situation.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

Although Britain chose material conciliation, using the naval forces more judiciously, its competitive diplomacy kept American threat perceptions elevated, contrary to the expectations of opportunism theory. The Van Buren administration had been threatened by Britain's competition beginning in 1839, as discussed in Chapter 3, and the new Tyler administration came into office sharing these concerns.²⁴¹ When Britain declared the right of visit in the fall of 1841, the United States continued to worry that British aims would expand beyond suppression

²⁴¹ Webster to Stevenson, April 12, 1841 and June 8, 1841 and Stevenson to Palmerston, April 16, 1841, in 29th Congress, 1st session, S.Doc.377, pp. 46, 47-48, 50.

of the slave trade. The American minister in London, Andrew Stevenson, explained that the United States could not submit to the right of visit “upon the grounds of *expediency* and *necessity*,” because doing so might lead to other forms of “national degradation.”²⁴² Tyler's new minister to London was sent with instructions to continue to stand up against the seizure of American vessels “under the pretence that such vessels were engaged or intended to engage, in the African Slave Trade.”²⁴³ Tyler took the same position publicly, arguing it was “the duty of this Government to protect [America’s commercial interests] against all improper and vexatious interruption.” Therefore, in his view, the United States could “not consent to interpolations into the maritime code at the mere will and pleasure of other governments.”²⁴⁴ The conciliatory aspects of British policy – the stricter rules surrounding the visits of American vessels – were not sufficient to allay American concerns.²⁴⁵ The U.S. minister in London, Andrew Stevenson,

²⁴² He placed these arguments in the wider context of American policy, writing that “the consistent and persevering policy of their government has been displayed in defence of the rights of neutrality and the liberty of the seas.” Stevenson to Aberdeen, September 10, 1841 in, 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, pp. 67-68.

²⁴³ Webster to Everett, November 20, 1841 and Everett to Webster, December 31, 1841 in Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:162–163, 173–176; Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 42.

²⁴⁴ John Tyler, Address to Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, December 7, 1841, Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:72. Later, Tyler explained that, in 1841, there had been a danger that “acquiescence in the capture of American vessels, notorious slave dealers, by British cruisers might give countenance to seizures and detentions of vessels lawfully employed on light or groundless suspicions.” Tyler to the Senate, January 9, 1843, in *Ibid.*, 4:217–218. Similarly, he argued that accepting Britain’s interpretation of the right of visit would have left the United States open to “an arbitrary and ever-varying system of maritime police, adopted at will by the great naval power for the time being, the trade of the world in any place or in any articles which such power might see fit to prohibit to its own subjects or citizens. A principle of this kind could scarcely be acknowledged, without subjecting commerce to the risk of constant and harassing vexations.” Tyler to the House of Representatives, 27th Congress, 3rd Session, February 27, 1843 in *Congressional Globe*, vol. 12, 1843, 361–362. Although the Secretary of the Navy Upshur argued it was “impossible to dispense with a squadron” off the coast of Africa, congress did not supply the funds, for reasons that are unknown. As a result, the navy did not send a patrol to the coast of Africa in 1842; Upshur to Tyler, December 4, 1841, in 27th Congress, 2nd Session, S.Doc.1, p. 371.

²⁴⁵ Certainly, the United States detected the shift in British practice. During both 1839 and 1840, the years before the policy change, the United States lodged five protests for cases of British visits or searches. Then, in 1841, the U.S. only made one protest against British interference along the African coast and none in 1842. Based on a review of the correspondence on the Slave Trade contained in British Foreign and State Papers, 1838-1846, vol. 27-34.

explained that U.S. objections were “wholly incapable of being overcome by the manner or discretion with which the power might be exercised.”²⁴⁶

Another incident that year shows that concerns about the expansion of British intentions persisted. In December 1841, Britain, France, Prussia, Russia, and Austria signed the Quintuple Treaty, which allowed for mutual searches to suppress the slave trade. Acting without instructions, the American minister in Paris, Lewis Cass, lobbied the French government against ratification of the treaty.²⁴⁷ Tyler later approved of Cass’s actions and even suggested reaching out to Russia on the issue of maintaining freedom of the seas.²⁴⁸ There is no evidence that the administration objected to the treaty because it hoped to somehow encourage the slave trade.²⁴⁹ Instead, the United States worried that Britain would use the new treaty as a pretext for further eroding America’s existing maritime rights. Tyler wrote, “certain it is that if the right to detain American ships on the high seas can be justified on the plea of a necessity for such detention arising out of the existence of treaties between other nations, the same plea may be extended and enlarged by the new stipulations of new treaties to which the United States may not be a party.”²⁵⁰ In officially sanctioning Cass’s actions, Secretary of State Webster explained that as a commercial power, the United States was “interested in whatever may in any degree endanger or threaten the common independence of nations upon the seas.”²⁵¹ On net, U.S. threat perceptions

²⁴⁶ Stevenson to Aberdeen, September 10, 1841 in, 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, pp. 67-68; See also Stevenson to Palmerston, April 16, 1841 letter, in 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, pp. 47-48.

²⁴⁷ Reeves, *American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk*, 31–36. Aberdeen to Everett, December 20, 1841 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence with Foreign Powers on the Slave Trade*, 280–282.

²⁴⁸ Tyler to Webster, n.d. (before April 5, 1842), Private, in Curtis, *Life of Daniel Webster*, 2:183.

²⁴⁹ See Chapter 3 on America’s reasons for turning against the trade in earlier decades. Tyler, like Van Buren before him, spoke out publicly against the international slave trade, promising better enforcement against those involved in “a traffic so revolting to the feelings of humanity.” Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:78.

²⁵⁰ Tyler to the Senate and the House of Representatives, December 7, 1841, in *Ibid.*, 4:77–78.

²⁵¹ Webster to Cass, April 5, 1842, in Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:531. Willard Klunder, *Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996), 106–109; Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure*, 283. Webster was upset that Cass had acted without authorization, leading to a dispute between the

remained elevated, contrary to the expectations of opportunism theory. Moreover, the reason for concern, the possibility that British aims might soon expand, is consistent with the logic of insecurity theory (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Maritime Policy II: Predicted and Actual American Response to Diplomatic Competition and Material Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	No prediction on net effect. United States will continue to monitor British policy for threats.	Reassured. Changes in British practice confirm that Britain's aims are limited and reduce the chance of even minor losses to commerce.	No change. Concerns about future expansion of British aims.	Logic consistent with Insecurity Theory

Maritime Policy III: Diplomatic Conciliation

In early 1842, Britain adopted two additional conciliatory policies in the hopes that the United States would accept the right of visit. Aberdeen wrote, "it is quite clear that the impressment question is at the bottom of all their apprehension upon this subject and I do not see why we should not be able to remove any real ground for alarm."²⁵² First, Aberdeen shared more information about the navy's instructions for suppressing the slave trade.²⁵³ Second, Aberdeen believed that "the United States had cause to complain" about the way Palmerston had

two men; Curtis, *Life of Daniel Webster*, 2:183; Kenneth E. Shewmaker, "The 'War of Words': The Cass-Webster Debate of 1842-43," *Diplomatic History* 5, no. 2 (1981): 151-63.

²⁵² Aberdeen to Ashburton, April 1, 1842, Private, British Library, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123, ff. 65; Similar views can be found in, Aberdeen to Croker, October 7, 1841, Private, British Library, Croker Papers, Add. MS 73166, ff. 28. Memorandum by the Duke of Wellington on Ashburton's instructions (Copy), February 8, 1842, British Library, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123, ff. 29.

²⁵³ Aberdeen to Fox, January 3, 1842, Private, British Library, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43123, ff. 214.

ignored American protests.²⁵⁴ Therefore, he promised to provide compensation in any cases – past or future – where British visited a *bona fide* American vessel.²⁵⁵ Britain even said that if the United States pressed its claim, Britain would grant compensation in the case of the *Douglas*, an American vessel that was detained while actually participating in the slave trade.²⁵⁶ Though these announcements were pledges of eventual material conciliation, Britain did not make any immediate payments, so these were simply diplomatic promises in 1842.²⁵⁷ Britain hoped that these two conciliatory policies would be sufficient, because they were not willing to make any further concessions on either maritime policy.²⁵⁸

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory does not expect this type of diplomatic conciliation to significantly reassure. In anarchy, rising states worry about underestimating threats. They see diplomatic conciliation as a low-cost policy that could be a bluff about current intentions and that does not actually reduce the risk that the dominant state's aims will expand in the future. In this case, the

²⁵⁴ This quote, of April 3, 1843 explains the logic of the policy that was initiated in December 1841; As quoted in Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 64–71. For the original announcement, see, Aberdeen to Everett, December 20, 1841 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1841-1842*, 30:1177–1182.

²⁵⁵ Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 64–71.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁵⁷ See, for example, the Secretary of State's complaints on the delay in payment, in Upshur to Everett, August 8, 1843, 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, p. 167.

²⁵⁸ For this reason, the topic was not a subject of negotiation later 1842, when the United States and Britain held discussions that were supposed to cover all outstanding issues between them. At that time, Aberdeen, did, however, informally tell American minister in London that Britain would not likely use impressment again; Everett to Webster, April 15, 1842 as quoted in Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 86. The British were very sensitive on this point. A heated diplomatic exchange in 1843 when Tyler made a speech that the British interpreted as suggesting that Britain had made further concessions on the right of visit; Webster to Everett, March 28, 1843, Forsyth to Fox, February 12, 1840, in 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, p. 4; Everett to Aberdeen, October 15, 1844 and Aberdeen to Everett, November 21, 1844, Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1844-1845*, vol. 33, n.d., 659, 669.

United States should have worried that these promises of compensation were meant to lull them into a false sense of security while Britain expanded the use of its naval power.

As discussed in the last section, opportunism theory does not expect that the United States would be particularly concerned about British policy on the slave trade in the first place. To the extent that the United States had any minor concerns about the policy, such as the costs associated with the occasional interruption of commerce, compensation should have been sufficient to reassure.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

As insecurity theory expects, British conciliation did not reassure. Webster explained that compensation did not address America's deeper concerns about the right of visit. This was not simply because of the many practical difficulties – finding an appropriate level of compensation and paying claims quickly – but due to the “ill effects on the amicable relations existing between the countries.” He explained, “we cannot but see that the detention and examination of American vessels by British cruisers has already led to consequences – and it fears that, if continued, it would lead to further consequences – highly injurious to the lawful commerce of the United States.”²⁵⁹ If the United States was thinking as opportunism theory expects, worried at most about the minor costs to American traders, then compensation might have been seen as a reasonable solution.

²⁵⁹ Webster to Everett, March 28, 1843, in 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, p. 139.

Instead, continued concerns about the risks that British aims would expand led the United States to send a larger naval force to the area.²⁶⁰ For the next several years, the United States force numbered four to six vessels compared to the two that Van Buren had sent in 1839.²⁶¹ The logic of such an increase was much the same as Van Buren had applied in 1839. First, a more capable American force off the coast would deter the use of the American flag and stop those who persisted in the practice, giving Britain less cause to interfere. As Tyler explained, the squadron's presence was there to remove "all pretext on the part of others for violating the immunities of the American flag."²⁶² Second, the force would be there to deter British interference. Secretary of State Abel Upshur once again warned Britain against visiting American vessels.²⁶³ And the orders to the new Africa squadron stressed the importance of protecting of American commerce. The orders read, "while the United States sincerely desire the suppression of the slave trade, and design to exert their power, in good faith, for the accomplishment of that object, they do not regard the success of their efforts as their paramount

²⁶⁰ The United States announced it would send this force during the Webster-Ashburton negotiations discussed in the next section. The United States proposed a provision in the treaty committing each side to keep an eighty gun force off the coast of Africa to suppress trade under its own flag. In practice, this meant that the United States committed to increasing its own force unilaterally. It is discussed here for clarity. Webster to Everett, April 26, 1842, Private, in Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 2:124. Tyler to the Senate, August 11, 1842 in Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, 1934, 4:397; Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 84–89.

²⁶¹ For the next several years, the United States kept its force at or near the level it had committed to in the Webster-Ashburton Treaty; Statement of the number of Vessels and the total number of Guns, of the United States' Squadron on the Coast of Africa on January 1, from 1843 to 1857 inclusive, enclosed in Lord Napier to General Cass, December 24, 1857 in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers, 1857-1858*, vol. 48, n.d., 1250. The American force had trouble patrolling the extent of the coastline and had vessels that were often not fast enough; Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 130–131.

²⁶² Tyler to the Senate, January 9, 1843, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:217–218. A similar statement is found in Upshur to Everett, August 8, 1843, 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, p. 169.

²⁶³ The threat was vague. It is not clear what the United States would have been prepared to do to defend its rights; Upshur to Everett, August 8, 1843, 29th Congress, 1st Session, S.Doc.377, p. 169.

interest.” Instead, the force’s primary mission was to protect the inviolability of the American flag, and to “see that these rights are not improperly abridged or invaded.”²⁶⁴

It was only after the deployment of a larger naval force that American concerns about maritime rights declined. As in previous decades, the United States continued to believe that the issue of impressment was “likely to bring on renewed contentions at the first breaking out of an European war.”²⁶⁵ But the issue of British violations of U.S. maritime rights in peacetime was no longer an active concern.²⁶⁶ Notably, the diplomatic correspondence on the topic turned from high level disputes about sovereign rights to minor disagreements about the speed and size of reparations owed to Americans inconvenienced prior to 1843.²⁶⁷

On net, the conciliatory shift in British policy in 1842 did not reassure the United States. Rather, the United States continued to see risks that British aims would expand, which motivated the establishment of a permanent Africa Squadron. It was only once the United States had its own force there to monitor British policy and deter interference in American commerce that American concerns declined. The United States had not thought about the right of visit as a

²⁶⁴ As cited in Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 129. The Africa trade was increasing in this period and presumably this order was also extended to potential, non-British threats to American trade.

²⁶⁵ Tyler to Senate, August 11, 1842, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:162–169.

²⁶⁶ Tyler’s annual address noted positive developments, where previous annual addresses pointed to active concerns about British policy; Tyler to the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States, December 1843, *Ibid.*, 4:258. Moreover, Tyler’s successor, President James K. Polk, who wrote extensively on relations with Britain, made no mention of the issue in his diaries. Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*; Milo Milton Quaife, ed., *The Diary of James K. Polk during His Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, vol. 1 (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910); Milo Milton Quaife, ed., *The Diary of James K. Polk during His Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, vol. 2 (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910).

²⁶⁷ British Foreign and State Papers 1838-1846, vol. 27-34; See also Calhoun’s complaint that the British still have not paid reparation in many cases in Calhoun to Everett, Dec 12, 1844, in Clyde N. Wilson, ed., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 20 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991). Similarly, at the end of 1844, Tyler’s only public mention of the issue was that reparations had not yet been paid in several earlier cases; Tyler to the Senate and House of Representatives, December 3, 1844, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:334–352. Britain abandoned its claim to the right of visit in 1857 after a new crisis over the question. The United States finally consented to an agreement on the right of mutual search in 1862, during the Civil War; Soulsby, *The Right of Search and the Slave Trade in Anglo-American Relations*, 87–88, 103–104; Nelson, “The Slave Trade as a Factor in British Foreign Policy 1815-1862,” 208.

narrow, pragmatic policy for suppressing the slave trade as opportunism theory expected.

Rather, as insecurity theory expects, once Britain asserted and sustained a new right, the United States feared that British aims would continue to expand (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Maritime Policy III: Predicted and Actual American Response to Diplomatic Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	No change. Diplomatic promises do not reduce the risk that British aims will continue to expand.	Reassured. Compensation reduces the minor costs sustained by American commerce.	No Change. Continued concerns about future expansion of British aims.	Insecurity Theory.

Webster-Ashburton Treaty: Diplomatic and Material Conciliation

Throughout the rest of 1842, Britain pursued diplomatic and material conciliation toward several of its other conflicts of interest with the United States. Chapter 3 described how the crises over Patriot activities, the disputed Maine-New Brunswick border, and the McLeod Affair increased American threat perceptions. By the end of 1841, British leaders were also worried about the possibility of war. Aberdeen pointed to “several questions of great difficulty and importance” between the United States and Britain, arguing that “any of them might, at any moment, lead to consequences of the most disastrous nature.”²⁶⁸ To settle these questions, Britain, announced it would send a special envoy, Alexander Baring (Lord Ashburton), to the

²⁶⁸ Aberdeen to Queen Victoria, December 24, 1841 in Arthur Christopher Benson and Reginald Baliol Brett Esher, *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence between the Years 1837 and 1861*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1908), 368. Aberdeen did not specify what consequences he expected. However, given the way that markets had been rattled in particular by Anglo-American tensions over the McLeod Affair, he certainly would have expected financial and commercial costs to conflict. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, British leaders knew that in wartime, the United States would be able to stage damaging ground attacks against Britain's North American colonies.

United States.²⁶⁹ During the spring and summer of 1842, Ashburton and Secretary of State Webster held negotiations, which focused primarily on the Maine-New Brunswick boundary dispute. On August 9, 1842, the two countries signed the Treaty of Washington, known as the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, which resolved the boundary dispute and several other minor issues. A settlement on the boundary meant that Britain could finally build a military road connecting Montreal to the coast, allowing supplies to reach the Canadas during the winter months when the rivers were impassible.²⁷⁰

The final agreement constituted material conciliation. In the disputed territory, Britain gave up land in along the St. John's River which it had physically controlled.²⁷¹ Britain also granted the United States the strategic position of Rouse's Point in New York, a location where the United States wanted to build fortifications to block Britain's most probable invasion route from the north.²⁷² Following ratification of the treaty, British material conciliation continued as it began to withdraw land forces from North America.²⁷³ During 1843, Britain also began reducing its armed vessels on the lakes, bringing the total from six to three in 1844.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹ From the outset, the British wanted to signal that it was serious: British leaders chose Lord Ashburton as a negotiator because of his close ties with the United States and announced that he had authority to discuss all outstanding areas of dispute between the two countries; Everett to Webster, December 31, 1841 and January 3, 1842, Confidential, in Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:173–177, 488; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 20–25.

²⁷⁰ The treaty also settled the boundary in the area between Lake Superior to the Lake of the Woods and contained an extradition agreement. Letters were exchanged over the various claims in the *Caroline* and McLeod affairs; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 20–25, 134–141; Bartlett, *Daniel Webster*, 178–180; Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure*, 245–246; Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 105–137.

²⁷¹ See Chapter 3 for a map of the disputed boundary and the final settlement line. The final deal put the American boundary 50 miles south of Quebec, further than the 30 mile distance that the 1831 arbitration had awarded. The United States received a lower percentage of the disputed land than they would have under the 1831 arbitration award. Jones argues that the United States gained more strategically by the acquisition of Rouse's point; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 136–137; Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure*, 275–277.

²⁷² Scott to Bell, September 15, 1841, in United States. War Department, *Confidential and Unofficial Letters Received, 1832-1846*, S–40. Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 20–25, 136–137; Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 105–137.

²⁷³ The British also abandoned other planned improvements to the border defenses. In spite of the withdrawals, as late as 1844, the ground forces remained above the pre-rebellion levels; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871*,

In the fall of 1842, shortly after the treaty was signed, Britain continued its conciliatory approach by proposing negotiations on the Oregon boundary dispute.²⁷⁵ The area was attractive to both countries for its farmland, timber, and harbors that might someday be used for trade with Asia.²⁷⁶ Although the United States maintained claim to the entire territory of Oregon up to 54 degrees, 40 minutes north latitude (54°40'), American leaders had repeatedly offered to settle the boundary at the 49th parallel. In previous negotiations, the British had agreed on a division at the 49th parallel for most of the territory, but maintained that the boundary should fall further south following the Columbia River near the coast. The primary dispute had, therefore, been over a smaller area between the 49th parallel and the Columbia River (Figure 4.1). Agreements in 1818 and 1827 left the United States and Britain with joint occupation of the area until a permanent boundary could be established. Before the 1840s, there had only been a small American community of about 500 people that largely lived in the area south of the Columbia River. During this period, the Britain's Hudson's Bay Company had dominated the area's fur trade and provided law and order from Fort Vancouver along the Columbia River (Figure 4.1). But then, in the early 1840s, thousands of Americans, motivated by economic hardship or missionary zeal,

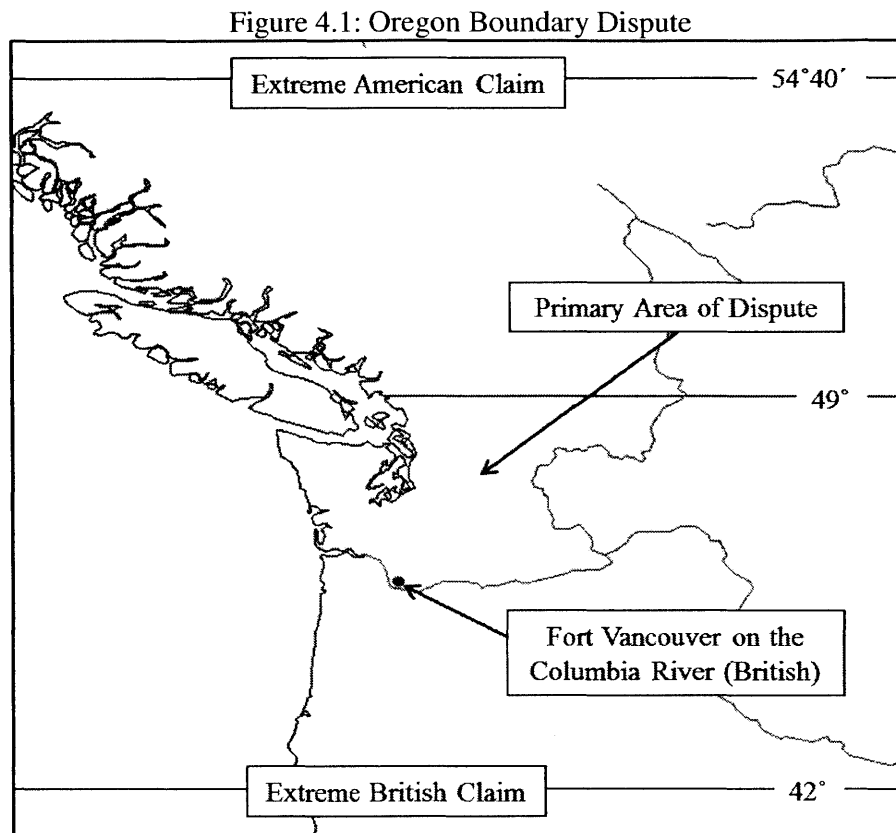
143; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 117–119. Everett to Webster, August (or September) 19, 1842 and Pakenham to Upshur, February 24, 1844, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:782, 850.

²⁷⁴ *Report on the Navy Estimates from the Select Committee on Navy, Army, and Ordnance Estimates*, p. x–xi. The *Mohawk*, a war vessel, was launched on the Great Lakes on February 21, 1843, but the British disbanded other vessels; Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, 182. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 115–116. Bradley A. Rodgers, *Guardian of the Great Lakes: The U.S. Paddle Frigate Michigan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 5, 15. On the British decision to draw down on the lakes, see Colonial Office (CO) to Foreign Office (FO), Feb 10, 1843, TNA: CO 43/102/189.

²⁷⁵ Aberdeen to Fox, October 18, 1842, Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:786. Aberdeen to Fox, August 18, 1843, in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence Relative to the Negotiation of the Question of the Disputed Right to the Oregon Territory, on the North-West Coast of America Subsequent to the Treaty of Washington of August 9, 1842*, 1846. Webster and Ashburton quickly abandoned the question during their 1842 negotiations, believing the two sides were far apart and the Maine-New Brunswick boundary question was more pressing; Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 144–145.

²⁷⁶ The most promising areas for ports were in Puget Sound; Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 156; Norman A. Graebner, "Maritime Factors in the Oregon Compromise," *Pacific Historical Review* 20, no. 4 (November 1951): 331, 341–342; McInnis, *The Unguarded Frontier*, 173.

began moving to the area.²⁷⁷ Britain's offer to negotiate in 1842 gave the two sides an opportunity to settle the issue before there was a collision.



Sources: Location of Fort Vancouver from Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*, 155. Geographic data from ESRI, *World (Rivers, 2005)*; ESRI, *World (Countries, 2006)*.

Although British conciliation in 1842 and 1843 was a notable break with the past, these were still moderate, rather than extreme, policy changes. As discussed in Chapter 2, extreme forms of conciliation include policies that change the overall distribution of capabilities between the two states. Britain's concessions did not rise to this level. Its concessions in Maine, while important to Maine and for American national pride, had no significant strategic value of their

²⁷⁷ John Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle: The Interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945), 132.

own. Similarly, although the United States might eventually gain some protection on land by gaining Rouse's Point or through the reduction of British ground forces, such gains did not fundamentally change American larger vulnerability, which was to British naval power.

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Opportunism theory expects that British conciliation would have lowered the U.S. assessment of British resolve and the threat Britain posed. Opportunism theory contends that rising states are easily emboldened by any kind of conciliation. These states believe that the dominant state has a strong and enduring preference against fighting. This means that challenges are not that risky: if the dominant state is actually resolute, the rising state can always back down without fearing that the dominant state will suddenly launch a wider war. At the same time, the rising state could satisfy domestic constituencies by pursuing expansion. Given these incentives, the rising state would be willing to update its assessments of the dominant state's resolve based on even moderate forms of conciliation. In this case, Britain made material concessions on a boundary dispute at a time when U.S. interest in Oregon was growing. Opportunism theory, therefore, makes a clear prediction: the United States should have downgraded its assessment of British resolve to defend its holdings in North America and been emboldened to make new demands in Oregon.²⁷⁸ At the same time, opportunism theory contends that rising states are

²⁷⁸ At the time, the British opposition party made this general prediction that concessions would embolden the United States. Later, they revived the argument, claiming that the Webster-Ashburton treaty – the so-called Ashburton capitulation – led the United States to underestimate British resolve on boundary disputes and adopt a belligerent stance on Oregon; Palmerston to Russell, September 1842 in G.P. Gooch, ed., *The Later Correspondence of Lord John Russell: 1840-1878*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans Green, 1925). Dalling and Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, 3:141. Ashburton to Webster, January 2, 1843, Private, in Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 2:162. Everett to Buchanan, April 16, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:949.

eager to accept any conciliatory gesture as a validation of their benign image of the dominant state.

Insecurity theory also expects that the United States would have been reassured by British conciliation, but does not expect the United States to be emboldened by Britain's policy changes. The theory expects that material conciliation should have reassured in one of two ways. First, resolution of the boundary question and the redeployment of British forces reduced the likelihood of unintended or accidental escalation. Second, the redeployment of British military forces might have been seen as costly signal of benign intent, since a state with expansive aims would be unlikely to adopt such a policy. At the same time, this theory contends that rising states see significant dangers to underestimating resolve. They are cautious, unwilling to update their assessments based on moderate forms of conciliation, such as those Britain chose in this period. Instead, it takes larger concessions that start to change the distribution of power to provoke a reassessment.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

As both theories expect, Britain's material conciliation in the Webster-Ashburton Treaty significantly reduced American threat perceptions. Most notably, the agreement put to rest fears about war over the northeastern boundary. Tyler explained that, before the agreement, "causes of complaint at that time existed between the United States and Great Britain which, attended by irritating circumstances, threatened most seriously the public peace." However, the treaty, by resolving the most important issue between the two states, was a "means of preserving for an

indefinite period the amicable relations happily existing between the two Governments.”²⁷⁹ The views of the secretary of the navy, Abel Upshur, had also changed markedly. In March 1842, he had written to a friend about Anglo-American relations, saying “how delicate are they, and how imminent is the danger of war!”²⁸⁰ After the conclusion of the agreement, he wrote that the treaty “removes every possible cause of dispute with England for years to come.”²⁸¹ With the boundary issue resolved, the United States redeployed most of the forces from Maine, bringing the force from over five hundred in 1841 to sixty-nine men at the end of 1842.²⁸² The reassuring effect of British conciliation should not be overstated. On the outstanding Oregon dispute, for example, the United States remained alert. Though Tyler was hopeful that the issue would be settled by negotiation, he noted that the outstanding dispute could eventually become a source of conflict between the two countries.²⁸³ The Pacific Squadron monitored British policies for any violations of existing agreements and had orders to take action if Britain tried to assert exclusive control of the Columbia River.²⁸⁴ Still, compared to 1841, U.S. threat perceptions had declined substantially as both theories expected.

Where the two theories disagreed – on the impact of British conciliation on U.S. assessment of British resolve – the evidence supports insecurity theory. The United States continued to see Britain as resolute to defend its claims in North America and did not cave to public pressure to challenge Britain in Oregon. With more Americans moving to the area, a

²⁷⁹ Tyler to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, December 1842, in *Congressional Globe*, 12:Appendix p. 29. For a similar sentiment, see, Tyler to L.W. Tazewell, August 26, 1842, in Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1970, 2:184.

²⁸⁰ Upshur to Tucker, March 6, 1842, in Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1970, 2:157.

²⁸¹ Upshur to Tucker, August 11, 1842, in *Ibid.*, 2:179.

²⁸² R. Jones, Adjutant General of the Army, “Position and Distribution of the Troops,” December 1, 1842 in S.Doc. 1, 27th Congress, 3rd Session. J.M. Porter to the House and Senate of the United States, December 1843 in *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, Session 1, Appendix p. 11.

²⁸³ Tyler to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, December 1842, in *Congressional Globe*, 12:Appendix p. 29.

²⁸⁴ Secretary of State to Secretary of the Navy, March 21, 1843, in United States. Department of State, *Domestic Letters of the Department of State, 1784-1906*, Reel 31, p. 118–120. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire*, 77.

movement to claim all of Oregon for the United States gained steam throughout 1843, fueled mostly by the expansionist press. The movement was later known for the slogan, “Fifty-four Forty or Fight,” which referred to the desire to defend America’s claim to all of Oregon west of the Rocky Mountains, from 42 degrees to 54 degrees, 40 minutes north latitude (54°40’).²⁸⁵ Tyler saw this movement to claim all of Oregon as a dangerous development. When some in Congress called for the occupation of Oregon south of the 49th parallel, Tyler wrote, “this is what I wish to avoid. I mean the adoption of any action on our part which might bring us in collision with England.”²⁸⁶ The administration believed that the only way the United States could safely extend its jurisdiction in Oregon was through negotiation.²⁸⁷ The administration bent over backwards trying to find a politically feasible way to satisfy public demands, without challenging a resolute Britain.²⁸⁸ Since the administration could not imagine gaining support from two-thirds of the Senate for compromise on Oregon alone, the administration looked for ways to build a large coalition.²⁸⁹ Their first idea was to negotiate a tripartite treaty, which would have purchased California from Mexico, reimbursed British claimants on Mexico, and settled the Oregon boundary. After Britain privately discouraged such a plan, the administration proposed pairing the Oregon with a commercial treaty.²⁹⁰ The administration also proposed holding the

²⁸⁵ There had been no federal campaign to increase the American presence in the territory, though a few members of Congress encouraged the migration and called for the extension of U.S. law to the area; Rakestraw and Jones, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny*, 168–169; Billington, *Westward Expansion*, 526. Variations on the “Fifty-four Forty or Fight” slogan did not actually emerge until 1845; Edwin A. Miles, “‘Fifty-Four Forty or Fight’: An American Political Legend,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 2 (September 1957): 292.

²⁸⁶ Tyler to Everett, April 27, 1843, Private, in Frederick Merk and Robert J Walker, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 18–19.

²⁸⁷ Webster to Everett, January 29, 1843, Private and Confidential, in Daniel Webster and Edward Everett, eds., *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, vol. 4 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1903), 396.

²⁸⁸ Webster to Everett, Private, November 18, 1842 in Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 2:153. Webster to Everett, January, 29, 1843, in Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:841.

²⁸⁹ Webster to Fox, November 25, 1842 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:191–192. Webster to Everett, November 28, 1842 in Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 2:153–156.

²⁹⁰ Congress caught wind of a plan to send a special mission to London to negotiate a compromise and refused to fund it; Webster to Everett, November 28, 1842 and January 29, 1843, Private and Confidential and Everett to

negotiations in Washington, believing it would allow them to keep a pulse on what was domestically feasible as negotiations were ongoing.²⁹¹ The administration's commitment to finding a path to a negotiated settlement shows that British conciliation had not reduced U.S. assessments of British resolve or emboldened to make new demands as insecurity theory expects.

On net, following Britain's diplomatic and material conciliation in 1842 and 1843, reduced American threat perceptions as both theories expect. Most notably, the United States no longer feared war over the northeastern boundary dispute. At the same time, as insecurity theory expects, there is no evidence that American leaders were emboldened by British conciliation. In spite of domestic pressure to expand in Oregon, the administration still saw Britain as resolute to defend its North American holdings (Table 4.3).

Webster, February 27, 1843 in Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:834–846; Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1970, 2:243. Tyler to Webster, January 29 and January 30, 1843 in *Ibid.*, 2:261; Letters dated by Charles M. Wiltse and Harold D. Moser, eds., *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, vol. 5 (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1982), 507. On the commercial treaty idea, see, Tyler to Everett, April 27, 1843, private in Merk and Walker, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration*, 18–19.

²⁹¹ Webster to Everett, March 20, 1843, in Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 2:171.

Table 4.3: Webster-Ashburton Treaty: Predicted and Actual American Response to Diplomatic and Material Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Reassured. Treaty removes a conflict of interest. Drawdown of forces reduces risk of escalation.	Reassured. Conciliation validates the already benign view of the dominant state and removes minor irritants in the relationship.	Reassured.	Both.
Assessment of British Resolve	No change. Concessions do not change the distribution of power so are not a strong enough signal to provoke a reassessment.	Emboldened. Concessions in Maine and eagerness to negotiate on Oregon suggest Britain's resolve to defend its North American holdings is declining.	No Change. Britain is still seen as resolute to defend its rights in Oregon.	Insecurity Theory.

Texas: Diplomatic Competition

Anglo-American relations soon turned to another question: the future of the Mexican province of Texas. Britain had long taken an interest in Mexico, hoping that it would remain an independent power that could resist American expansion on the continent. When American settlers in Mexico's Texan province declared independence in 1836, Britain was concerned, but decided to watch the situation to see how it developed. Britain preferred that Texas not join the Union, but correctly assessed that U.S. domestic politics would prevent immediate annexation.²⁹²

When it became clear that Texas could sustain her independence, several powers, including

²⁹² On the U.S. refusal in 1837, see Chapter 3. Palmerston refused Mexico's request for assistance, believing that Mexico would be unable to retake the province and would likely sap its energy attempting to do so. Nor did Palmerston take immediate steps to establish relations with Texas, believing it had not yet established its full independence; Palmerston to T. Spring Rice (chancellor of the Exchequer), Private, October 9, 1837 as cited in Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 77. For a detailed treatment of British policy in this period, see, Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*.

Britain, concluded commercial treaties with the new republic; however, it still resisted political involvement.²⁹³ The new British chargé d'affaires in Texas was instructed that, when it came to political matters, he was to “assume the attitude rather of an observer than of an actor.”²⁹⁴ From 1836 to 1842, therefore, Britain had maintained a relatively hands-off policy with respect to Texas.

Baseline U.S. Perceptions

During this early period, the United States had some concerns about Britain's abolitionist agenda in North America. After Britain abolished slavery in its West Indian colonies in 1833, many Americans began to worry that Britain would go on to seek abolition in the United States. They believed that without slave labor, British colonies would be less able to compete with the United States. They reasoned that Britain would promote abolition in the United States, not for moral reasons, but to undermine the commercial advantage the United States supposedly gained from slave labor. This outcome, it was believed, would hurt not only the American economy, but also America's domestic tranquility. These general concerns caused the United States to preemptively warn Britain against interference in Texas in 1836. Secretary of State Forsyth wrote that the United States would respond “in self-defense” if the British intervened in Texas's internal deliberations on slavery. He explained that, for the United States, “it is not a matter of indifference that [Texas's] domestic policy should be dictated to them, on that, to us, most

²⁹³ The original agreements were concluded in 1840, but the process stalled when Texas refused to ratify the accompanying treaty on mutual search for the suppression of the slave trade. In 1842, after Mexico launched some successful attacks on Texas, Texas agreed to the treaty on mutual search, possibly hoping Britain would put more pressure on Mexico to come to the negotiating table; Palmerston to Melbourne, September 9, 1840 and Melbourne to Palmerston, September 12, 1840 in *Melbourne Papers*, Box 12, 49–50. Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 54–60.

²⁹⁴ Aberdeen to Elliot, July 1, 1842 in Ephraim Douglass Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas, 1838-1846* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1918), 78–80.

delicate subject, by a foreign power.”²⁹⁵ Tyler and members of his administration came into office sharing these general concerns about how far Britain would go to see slavery abolished and the motives that lay behind its abolitionist agenda.²⁹⁶ There is no evidence that the United States feared that Britain planned to take Texas for itself, but it did worry about the implications if Britain chose to interfere in Texas’s decision about slavery. Therefore, United States continued to monitor British policy toward Texas.²⁹⁷

Though not conclusive, there are reasons to believe that the U.S. assessment of British resolve to prevent U.S. territorial expansion at Mexico’s expense was fairly low prior to 1843. The United States had hoped to expand into Texas since the 1820s. Since that time period, Britain was simply not central to discussions about annexation. Instead, the impediments had, since the beginning, been seen as a combination of Mexican resistance and domestic politics, northern resistance to another slave state joining the union.²⁹⁸ That Britain was not at the center

²⁹⁵ Forsyth to Stevenson, September 14, 1836, in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 7:4.

²⁹⁶ In the mid-1830s, Tyler publicly associated himself with these views, when he argued that Britain was behind some abolitionist agitation in the United States; Crapol, *John Tyler*, 35–37, 47, 74. Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 15; Sam W. Haynes, “Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest for National Security,” in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*, ed. Robert Walter Johannsen, Sam W. Haynes, and Christopher Morris (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 121; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 153; Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 11–35.

²⁹⁷ For example, at one point in 1842, when Mexico became increasingly belligerent in its tone with the United States, the administration asked its minister to see whether Britain was becoming more involved in the conflict; Webster to Thompson, July 9, 1842, Confidential, in Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 2:136. A related issue, not covered in detail in this project, may have contributed to American concerns about how abolition would affect British policies in the region. In the 1830s, several American vessels, operating within the legal domestic slave trade, were shipwrecked or otherwise brought under duress to British ports. In several cases, Britain provided compensation to the traders after local British authorities freed the slaves on board. However, it refused to continue doing so after slavery was abolished in the British colonies; H. Jones, “The Peculiar Institution and National Honor: The Case of the Creole Slave Revolt,” *Civil War History* 21 (1975): 28–50.

²⁹⁸ For example, though President Jackson sought annexation, he knew that the domestic politics were delicate. He expected northern resistance to another slave state entering the union and believed there would be even more objections if annexation meant war with Mexico. He opposed supporting the 1836 rebellion because he believed annexation was more likely to gain popular support in the United States if it came by way of a negotiated agreement with Mexico. In 1837, the Van Buren administration refused Texas’s initial request for annexation, because of objections about Texas entering as a slave state. Tyler had, on several occasions, pointed to domestic impediments; Jackson to the Senate and House of Representatives, December 21, 1836, in John Bassett Moore and Francis Wharton, *A Digest of International Law: As Embodied in Diplomatic Discussions, Treaties and Other International*

of American thinking about annexation is unsurprising. Texas was a restive and remote province of a friendly nation, not a part of Britain's own territorial holdings. And, although it held commercial promise, the sparsely populated area had not yet been developed to the extent that it would dramatically increase American power. The paucity of discussion about British resistance to annexation implies that the United States had a low, baseline assessment of British resolve on that question.

British Policy Change

At the end of 1842, British authorities took a series of uncoordinated steps that amounted to a competitive diplomatic policy. First, leaders in London rejected a Texan proposal, accepted by the United States and France, for joint mediation between Texas and Mexico.²⁹⁹ Rejection of this cooperative approach, on its own, would not have been competitive if Britain proceeded to maintain its policy of non-intervention. However, in this same period, acting contrary to his instructions, the British Chargé d'Affaires Charles Elliot took an active role in the dispute between Texas and Mexico. Shortly after his arrival, Elliot wrote to London, arguing that Britain was missing an opportunity in Texas. He believed that Texas might be persuaded to remain independent of the United States and even to abolish slavery if Britain adopted a more active policy. Although he received no response from London, Elliot took steps of his own. First, he

Agreements, International Awards, the Decisions of Municipal Courts, and the Writings of Jurists ..., vol. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1906), 98–101; Belohlavek, *Let the Eagle Soar!*, 223; Justin Harvey Smith, *The Policy of England and France in Reference to the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1911), 21–23. Lyon. Rathbun, “The Debate over Annexing Texas and the Emergence of Manifest Destiny,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4, no. 3 (2001): 459, 473, 485; Frederick Merk and Alfred D Chandler, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 9.

²⁹⁹ Foreign Minister Aberdeen reasoned that bad relations between the United States and Mexico made such a scheme unworkable, especially after Mexico had repeatedly refused British mediation. Texas reported Britain's rejection back to the United States; Isaac Van Zandt to Webster, January 24, 1843 in Shewmaker, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 1:467–468; Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 118.

joined forces with another abolitionist who set sail for London to meet with Aberdeen. Second, Elliot engaged in unofficial discussions about his ideas with prominent Texans. Though these were ostensibly private discussions, reports about them reached American newspapers several months later.³⁰⁰

During the summer of 1843, London officially adopted a more active stance as well. Aberdeen believed that Texas preferred to remain independent, but was driven to the United States by Mexico's campaign to retake Texas. If Mexico accepted Texan independence, he reasoned, Texas's bid for annexation would also end. He assessed that Britain might be able to diplomatically outmaneuver the United States, preventing Texas's annexation and securing abolition of slavery in Texas. Aberdeen therefore adopted two policies. First, he instructed his ministers in Texas and Mexico to encourage both sides to come to terms. Acting on these instructions, British representatives became directly involved in armistice talks between Texas and Mexico. Second, Aberdeen advised Mexico to make abolition a condition for recognizing Texan independence. Aberdeen wrote to Mexico arguing that reconquest was impossible and that the most Mexico could hope for was the moral victory of abolition of slavery in Texas.³⁰¹ When he explained the scheme to the Texan representative later that month, Aberdeen also held out the possibility that Britain might one day consider a plan to compensate Texas for emancipation. Reports about these discussions made their way to Washington, DC by way of the

³⁰⁰ Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 102–108; Wilbur Devereux Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1958), 16–23; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 378–385.

³⁰¹ Aberdeen's views were not fully formed his view about abolition when the first instruction were given, however, it is presented here for clarity. Texas actively cultivated this Aberdeen's thinking, possibly to encourage active British involvement, which would in turn, encourage American fears and make it more anxious for annexation. Aberdeen may also have been influenced by Elliot's associate and other abolitionist groups. The United States had not made any new moves toward annexation to motivate the British policy change; Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 96–138.

Texan representatives.³⁰² Then, in September 1843, news reached the United States that Aberdeen referred to Britain's abolitionist aims publicly, telling the House of Lords that "every effort would be made" to secure abolition in Texas.³⁰³

In early 1844, Britain abandoned its abolitionist agenda and focused entirely on preventing annexation. By this time, Britain learned that Texas was negotiating an annexation treaty with the United States. However, Aberdeen still believed that Texas preferred independence to annexation, if only it could reach a peace deal with Mexico. To encourage this outcome, Aberdeen made a new proposal: if Mexico accepted Texas's independence, Britain and France would guarantee Mexico's borders.³⁰⁴ The Prime Minister encouraged Aberdeen to continue to pursue the plan, known as the Diplomatic Act, even after President Tyler publicly announced that the United States and Texas had reached terms. Peel wrote that he hoped the foreign minister was "preparing the groundwork for the defiance of the United States in respect to the Texian Annexation."³⁰⁵ However, after the French and British ministers in Washington both warned that such a plan would only strengthen the hands of annexationists in the United States, Aberdeen adjusted the approach. He accepted that guaranteeing Mexico's borders would "inflame the wild and dangerous spirit...which has been roused and sustained by demagogues in

³⁰² Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 1:378–381, 396. For arguments that Texas intentionally manipulated American fears and British abolitionist aims, see, *Ibid.*, 1:368–369; Reeves, *American Diplomacy Under Tyler and Polk*; Smith, *The Policy of England and France in Reference to the Annexation of Texas*; Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*.

³⁰³ Quoted in Smith, *The Policy of England and France in Reference to the Annexation of Texas*, 123. Upshur to Everett, September 28, 1843 in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 7:7–11.

³⁰⁴ Smith, *The Policy of England and France in Reference to the Annexation of Texas*, 382–392; Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 174–177; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 134, 206; Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas*, 33–35. News of Aberdeen's diplomacy reached the United States that summer; A.M. Green, Acting United States Chargé d'Affaires in Texas, to John C. Calhoun, Secretary of State of the United States, July 20, 1844, in William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860*, vol. 12 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1936), 358. Calhoun to King, Minister to France, August 26, 1844, in 28th Congress, 2nd Session, S.Doc. 13, p. 3.

³⁰⁵ Peel to Aberdeen, May 26, 1844 quoted in Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas*, 35. Tyler's presentation of the treaty to Congress is in President John Tyler to the Senate, April 22, 1844, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:307–313.

the United States, in favour of the Annexation of Texas, and which wanted but the evidence of active interference on the part of Great Britain to be kindled at once into a flame.”³⁰⁶ So he abandoned the Diplomatic Act and simply pursued joint mediation instead: Britain and France would use their good offices to bring the parties together and, hopefully, prevent Texas from cjoining the United States. The British and French continued to mediate into early 1845, even after President Tyler, on his second try, gained congressional support for Texas’s annexation.³⁰⁷

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory expects that the United States would have been threatened by British competition, even though it was limited to diplomacy. Rising states know that in anarchy, intentions can change at any moment. Competition can be an early signal that the dominant state’s intentions are or will soon be expansive. At the same time, such policies can also indicate that a dominant sate is more resolute to defend the status quo than previously believed. Rising states are cautious, so would rather update their assessments rather than underestimating the threats they face or the dominant state’s resolve. In this case, the United States should have worried that Britain’s abolitionist aims might not stay limited to Texas. At the same time, since

³⁰⁶ Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 193. In July, Aberdeen put the plan on hold “until a more fitting season” then finally abandoned it entirely at the end of 1844; *Ibid.*, 180–189. Quote on p. 181

³⁰⁷ Congress rejected Tyler’s treaty in June 1844 and Tyler promptly announced that he would find another way. This time, instead of seeking congressional approval for a treaty with Texas, Tyler asked for a joint resolution on admitting Texas as a state. This strategy, which required fewer votes, combined with changes in party politics after the recent election, resulted in enough support for annexation in January 1845; Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 177; Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 52–53. Calhoun to Tilghman A. Howard, U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to Texas, June 18, 1844, in Clyde N. Wilson, ed., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. 19 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 117. Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 198–218. Aberdeen to Elliot, July 3, 1845 in Adams, *British Diplomatic Correspondence Concerning the Republic of Texas*, 508. For reports to the United States about Britain’s continued mediation efforts, see, Donelson to Buchanan, March 28, 1845 and April 3, 1845 in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 12:391–393, 399–400; Merk and Chandler, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism*, 39; Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas*, 63–68.

challenges are risky, United States should have increased their assessment of British resolve to defend the territorial status quo in North America following Britain's competitive turn.

Opportunism theory does not predict that the United States would be threatened or deterred. In this theory, rising states believe that the dominant state has a strong preference against expansion and aggression. To keep its worldview intact, the United States should have interpreted British competition in a very different way. Certainly Britain was pursuing a unilateral policy, but its efforts could easily have been explained by a commercial or humanitarian interest in ending the already protracted conflict, rather than something more nefarious. Britain's encouragement to Texas to choose abolition should not have been particularly threatening to the United States either. If Texas wished to take British advice on its own domestic decisions about abolition, that was Texas's decision. Since the theory contends that rising states do not see dominant states as particularly aggressive, there would have been no reason to jump to the conclusion that Britain planned to press her agenda in the United States where abolitionist messages were unwelcome.³⁰⁸ At the same time, opportunism theory does not predict that Britain's diplomatic competition should have increased U.S. assessments of British resolve. According to opportunism theory, the rising state dismisses diplomatic competition as a potential bluff, instead looking for material competition before increasing its assessment of the dominant state's resolve.

³⁰⁸ Aberdeen applied this logic himself, arguing that the limited nature of British aims was obvious, reportedly saying that rumors about more expansive British aims in Texas were "too absurd and unfounded to need serious contradiction." Everett to Upshur, November 16, 1843, Private and Confidential, received December 10, 1843, in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 7:251.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

Britain's competitive diplomacy threatened the United States, as insecurity theory expects. In particular, U.S. leaders assessed that Britain was actively taking steps to promote abolition in the United States. Over the course of the summer of 1843, as reports about British involvement in Texas arrived, Tyler and Upshur, now secretary of state, became increasingly concerned about the extent of British aims.³⁰⁹ Upshur wrote that "the present attempt upon Texas is the beginning of her operations upon us." He continued, "there can be no doubt, I think, that England is determined to abolish slavery throughout the American continent and islands if she can." As to the motives behind the abolitionist agenda, he wrote, "it is worse than childish to suppose that she meditates this great movement, simply from an impulse of philanthropy. We must look for a stronger motive for such an attempt on the part of a great and wise nation."³¹⁰ These were by no means minor concerns; Upshur argued that "few calamities could befall this country more to be deplored than the establishment of a predominant British influence and the abolition of domestic slavery in Texas."³¹¹ After hearing reports that Britain was encouraging Mexico to make abolition a condition for Texan independence, Tyler wrote confidentially to his minister in Mexico, asking him to gather as much intelligence as possible, because Britain was

³⁰⁹ Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 122. The Tyler administration took the first, vague reports of British activities seriously. Upon hearing rumors of Britain's abolitionist activities in March 1843, the secretary of the navy, Abel Upshur, immediately wrote a private letter to a close friend suggesting he consider removing his slaves from Texas. Several quotes from Upshur to Tucker, March 13, 1843 in Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 1:392–393. The first report came from Texan representatives. More reports about official and unofficial British activities came in from other sources as the summer went on. In July, for example, Tyler's private agent in London, Duff Green, wrote with new intelligence that the British planned to give a loan in return for abolition; Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 11, 16. Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest for National Security," 120–121. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 1:370.

³¹⁰ Upshur to Calhoun, August 14, 1843 in John A. Upshur, ed., "Letter of A. P. Upshur to J. C. Calhoun," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1936): 555–57.

³¹¹ Abel P. Upshur, Secretary of State to William S. Murphy, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in Texas, August 8, 1843 in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 12:49.

pursuing aims that were in the “highest degree detrimental to the U. States.”³¹² When Aberdeen’s public statements about abolition in Texas reached the United States, Upshur wrote that the President “attaches more importance to these declarations, because they are perfectly consistent with information received from other sources, all tending to the conclusion that the policy of England, in regard to the abolition of negro slavery, is not limited to Texas alone.”³¹³ He saw these broader abolitionist designs as a “leading object in the present policy of England” that demanded “a prompt and decided counteraction.”³¹⁴

That counteraction took the form of a vigorous effort to annex Texas before she could be drawn into the British orbit. Certainly, the enduring interest in Texas meant that some American leader may have eventually pursued the annexation in the absence of Britain’s competitive diplomacy. However, the Tyler administration’s fears explain the timing of the challenge in 1843. Though President Tyler was an ardent annexationist, he had not moved forward on annexation prior to 1843 because of domestic political resistance. In 1841, for example, he wrote that he believed he could convince Mexico to cede Texas by treaty, but worried about whether northerners could ever be made to see the value in annexation.³¹⁵ In March 1843, when the Texan representative initially shared rumors about Britain’s interest in abolition in Texas,

³¹² Tyler acknowledged that Texas might be providing the information to pressure the United States to move forward on annexation, but still described the information as “highly reliable”; Tyler to Thompson, August 28, 1843, Unofficial and Confidential, in Lyon Gardiner Tyler, ed., “Correspondence of President Tyler,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1904): 140–141.

³¹³ Upshur to Everett, September 28, 1843, Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 7:9.

³¹⁴ Upshur to Everett, September 28, 1843, in *Ibid.*, 7:6. Upshur to Waddy Thompson, U.S. Minister to Mexico, November 18, 1843 in William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1936), 142–144. Everett shared these views with British leaders; Everett to Aberdeen, November 3, 1843 in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 7:246.

³¹⁵ Tyler to Webster, October 11, 1841 in Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1970, 2:126. Both Upshur and Calhoun had also been interested in acquiring Texas at least since it declared independence. Irving H. Bartlett, *John C. Calhoun: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993), 308. Claude H. Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur, Conservative Virginian, 1790-1844* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1964), 195.

Tyler once again explained that he did not have the domestic support to move forward with annexation.³¹⁶ However, in August, as more reports about British activities came in, Upshur wrote privately that the U.S. had little choice but to pursue annexation. And, in September, finally Tyler authorized Upshur to begin secret negotiations on annexation.³¹⁷ The argument presented here, that the administration's fears were genuine and contributed to the move to annex Texas in 1843, has been made by others in recent years.³¹⁸ However, a competing view holds that the administration, which had an interest in annexation prior to 1843, only used the British threat to sell their preferred policy.³¹⁹ There is no doubt that annexationists exploited the public's Anglophobia and fears of encirclement to gain support for their cause. However, the use of propaganda on its own is not sufficient evidence against the claim that the underlying fears were genuine. Others point to evidence that Tyler's own appointees, Edward Everett and Waddy Thompson, American ministers to Great Britain and Mexico respectively, each wrote

³¹⁶ Van Zandt to Anson Jones, March 15, 1843, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, vol. 3 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 129; Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 1:369. Van Zandt to Jones, March 13 and April 19, 1843; George Pierce Garrison, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, vol. 2, Part 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1908), 132–138, 164–167. In another example, in early 1843, Tyler suggested trying build a coalition by settling Texas with Mexico and the Oregon boundary dispute with Britain simultaneously, noting that "Texas might not stand alone, nor would the line proposed for Oregon." The administration did not pursue this plan, but did pursue a different tri-partite scheme described earlier; Tyler to Webster, January 29 and January 30, 1843, in Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 1970, 2:261; Letters dated by Wiltse and Moser, *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 5:507.

³¹⁷ Upshur to Calhoun, August 14, 1843 in Upshur, "Letter of A. P. Upshur to J. C. Calhoun"; Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 24.

³¹⁸ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*; Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest for National Security"; Hietala, *Manifest Design*.

³¹⁹ For a description of contemporaries who viewed the British threat as a propaganda tool, see; Haynes, "Anglophobia and the Annexation of Texas: The Quest for National Security," 116. For retrospective arguments, see, Duncan Andrew Campbell, *Unlikely Allies: Britain, America and the Victorian Origins of the Special Relationship* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 128; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 125; Rathbun, "The Debate over Annexing Texas and the Emergence of Manifest Destiny," 476. Merk does not directly dispute that these fears were genuine, but discusses how the British threat was exaggerated and used as propaganda to sell annexation to the public; Merk and Walker, *Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration*, 21–23, 97.

home to refute the claims about a British emancipation conspiracy.³²⁰ However, these two reports were only a small part of the larger picture that developed as others, including Tyler's own trusted executive agent, Duff Green, reported on British activities. Given pre-existing concerns about Britain's abolitionist aims, it is not unreasonable to believe that they saw competition as the start of an active plan to act in Texas and then the United States. But the real strength of the argument that the Tyler administration's fears were genuine lies in both the timing of the decision to pursue annexation and the private views of the administration members, which showed mounting concern as reports of British activities arrived in Washington.

American concerns about British aims continued even after the decision to move forward with annexation. When Congress rejected the annexation treaty, the next secretary of state, John C. Calhoun, feared that Britain would take advantage. In one such letter, he wrote that Texas's disappointment "may be seized upon by an interested and wily diplomacy, and made the means of seducing them to seek and form other alliance with the Power, which, there is reason to fear, has been largely watching for the favorable opportunity."³²¹ Moreover, these concerns about British activities persisted in private correspondence even after the decision to move forward with annexation. After Upshur's death, Calhoun carried on the annexation negotiations and generally held the same views, writing that Britain's policy on Texas was part of a "grand scheme for commercial monopoly."³²² When President Polk came to office, he and his Secretary

³²⁰ Rathbun, "The Debate over Annexing Texas and the Emergence of Manifest Destiny," 476. Everett argued, for example, that the party in power was not focused on emancipation even though the British public supported abolition. Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 30.

³²¹ Calhoun to Tilghman A. Howard, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Texas, June 18, 1844, in Wilson, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, 1990, 19:119. Similar sentiments are found in Calhoun to Andrew Pickens Calhoun, June 26, 1844, Calhoun to Charles J. Ingersoll, July 2, 1844, and Calhoun to Donelson, Private and Confidential, August 23, 1844, in *Ibid.*, 19:174, 249, 633.

³²² Calhoun to William R. King, Strictly Confidential, December 13, 1844 in J. Franklin Jameson, *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun.*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), 632.; Before becoming Secretary

of States, James Buchanan, noted that the British were still working to thwart annexation.³²³

And, like Tyler, this led Polk to assess that the Britain was acting “with the ultimate object of making Texas in truth and in fact a dependency of her own.”³²⁴ In the summer of 1845, Polk pointed to “intermeddling” by the British as a reason to make “energetic” efforts for the defense of Texas.³²⁵

American assessments of British resolve increased somewhat, but it had little impact on American policy. As discussed above, prior to 1843, the British had not been seen as an impediment to annexation. After British competition, American leaders certainly believed that Britain was willing to expend diplomatic energy to stop annexation. That being said, Britain’s diplomatic competition had not increased the U.S. assessment of British resolve dramatically. At no point did American leaders discuss the possibility that Britain would intervene militarily to stop annexation.

On net, the U.S. reactions to Britain’s diplomatic competition are consistent with insecurity theory. Britain’s unilateral intervention in the conflict along the U.S. border and its promotion of abolition in Texas led the United States to fear that Britain was actively pursuing more expansive aims. The United States worried that after Britain established influence in Texas, she would seek to promote abolition in the United States, threatening U.S. domestic stability.³²⁶

of State, his correspondence with Upshur shows a similar concern about reports from England; Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 21.

³²³ Polk to Andrew J. Donelson, Private and Unofficial, May 26, 1845 in Wayne Cutler, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, vol. 9 (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), 408–409. Buchanan to Charles A. Wickliffe, Special Agent of the U.S. to Texas, March 27, 1845 in Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 12:88–90.

³²⁴ Polk to Donelson, May 6, 1845, Private and Unofficial, in Cutler, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, 1996, 9:352.

³²⁵ Polk to Andrew J. Donelson, Confidential, June 15, 1845, in *Ibid.*, 9:449–451.

³²⁶ The United States may still have been threatened – though to a lesser extent - even if the British had only pursued unilateral mediation without trying to persuade Texas to abolish slavery. Although U.S. fears focused on abolition, U.S. leaders occasionally expressed more general concerns about Britain establishing a predominant influence or a proxy state in Texas.

Although the United States assessment of British resolve had increased somewhat, given their increasing fear, the U.S. believed that it was worth pursuing annexation anyway (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Texas: Predicted and Actual American Response to Diplomatic Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. Britain's abolitionist aims might be expanding.	No change. No reason to assume Britain's aims expand beyond Texas.	Threatened. Fear that Britain would plan to pursue abolition in the United States.	Insecurity Theory.
Assessment of British Resolve	Increased. Britain may be more resolute than previously believed, better to err on the side of caution.	No change. Diplomatic competition is a cheap signal. It might be a bluff.	Small increase, but not enough to stop American annexation.	Insecurity Theory.

Oregon: Diplomatic Competition

In spite of its competitive stance on Texas, British continued to pursue diplomatic conciliation on Oregon until the spring of 1845.³²⁷ Although negotiations were ongoing, during this period, Britain had been reconsidering its conciliatory stance. The British acknowledged that the interests of both sides were changing: U.S. interests were growing with the flow of emigrants to Oregon while Britain's primary interest in the area, the fur trade, was in decline.

³²⁷ The negotiations that both sides had initially hoped for in 1842 had been delayed by the sudden emergence of the Texas question, the British decision to change venue to Washington instead of London, and by Secretary of State Upshur's unexpected death. In the fall of 1844, the two sides finally began negotiations in Washington. Abel P. Upshur, Secretary of State of the United States to Edward Everett, United States Minister to Great Britain, October 9, 1843, Everett to Upshur, November 2, 1843, and Calhoun to Pakenham, September 3, 1844 in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:210–230, 254–263, 826–827. Aberdeen to Pakenham, December 28, 1843 and Pakenham to Aberdeen, August 19, 1844 and September 12, 1844, in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence Relative to the Negotiation of the Question of the Disputed Right to the Oregon Territory*, 7, 11; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 221–222.

The foreign minister believed that the British would have to make larger concessions if negotiations were to succeed.³²⁸ However, Britain was reluctant to make such concessions as the U.S. public became increasingly fervent about expansionism. During the election of 1844, the Democrats, and their candidate for president, James K. Polk, associated themselves with the movement to claim all of Oregon, seeing expansionism as a cause that could improve the party's electoral prospects.³²⁹ The British prime minister feared the domestic political consequences of conceding on a long-standing British claim in the face of such a belligerent stance.³³⁰ Writing to his minister in Washington, Aberdeen explained that the actual importance of Oregon was "insignificant, but the Press of both Countries, and the publick clamour, have given it a fictitious interest which renders it difficult for either Government to act with moderation, or even common sense."³³¹ Similarly, Peel wrote that the U.S. stance "render compromise and concession (Difficult enough before, considering what stands on record of past negotiations) ten times more difficult now. The point of Honour is brought into the foreground."³³² By November 1844, negotiations seemed hopeless. However, in spite of increasing pressure for a competitive response, Britain had still continued diplomatic conciliation, proposing that the two governments submit the dispute to arbitration.³³³

³²⁸ Aberdeen to Peel, September 25, 1844 in Robert C. Clark, "Aberdeen and Peel on Oregon, 1844," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (September 1933): 237. Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas*, 57. Graebner, "Maritime Factors in the Oregon Compromise," 341–342. McInnis, *The Unguarded Frontier*, 173. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 105. Frederick Merk, "The Oregon Pioneers and the Boundary," *The American Historical Review* 29, no. 4 (1924): 696. Henry Commager, "England and Oregon Treaty of 1846," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (March 1927): 22.

³²⁹ Miles, "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight," 292. Merk and Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*, 57–59. Hietala, *Manifest Design*, 3–7.

³³⁰ Aberdeen to Pakenham, March 4, 1844, Private, in British Library, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MS 43131, ff. 233; Everett to Buchanan, April 16, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:949.

³³¹ Aberdeen to Peel, October 1844 quoted in Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas*, 56.

³³² Peel to Aberdeen, February 23, 1845 quoted in *Ibid.*, 57.

³³³ Aberdeen to Pakenham, November 1, 1844 and Pakenham to Calhoun, January 15, 1845, in Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence Relative to the Negotiation of the Question of the Disputed Right to the Oregon Territory*, 28–30.

In the spring of 1845, Britain added diplomatic competition to its mix of policies. In March, after President James K. Polk's inaugural address asserted that American claims in Oregon were "clear and unquestionable," both Aberdeen and Peel publicly warned the United States against asserting its extreme claims in Oregon.³³⁴ Speaking in the House of Lords, Aberdeen said, "we possess rights which, in our opinion, are clear and unquestionable, and by the blessing of God, and with your support, these rights we are fully prepared to maintain."³³⁵ Similarly, in the House of Commons, Peel noted that Britain hoped for an "amicable adjustment of our claim," but made clear that "if our rights shall be invaded, we are resolved – and we are prepared – to maintain them."³³⁶

Though the British made threats, they left the offer of arbitration on the table. When Polk rejected arbitration and instead proposed that Britain reconsider an earlier American offer, the British Minister, Richard Pakenham, dismissed the idea out of hand without awaiting instructions from London.³³⁷ Aberdeen disavowed his minister's actions and called on Polk to resubmit his offer. Since Polk would not do so and Aberdeen was unwilling to be the first to propose new

³³⁴ Polk, March 4, 1845, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:381.

³³⁵ As cited in Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London: Longman, 1983), 336.

³³⁶ Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 239. Aberdeen stood by these statements in a meeting with the U.S. minister; Everett to Buchanan, April 16, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:950. Britain also wanted the Pacific Squadron to make regular visits to Oregon, but naval requirements in the conflict with France over Tahiti meant that there was only one visit in the summer of 1845, as there had been the year before. Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 134; Gough, "H.M.S. America on the North Pacific Coast."

³³⁷ Pakenham to Buchanan, July 29, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:967–975; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 296–299. *Ibid.*, 247. The British minister's seemingly rash decision may have been due to Aberdeen's earlier pessimism about negotiating with the new administration. Aberdeen wrote, "the manner in which [Polk] has referred to the Oregon question, so different from the language of his predecessor, leaves us little reason to anticipate the possibility of any favorable results of the existing negotiation." Aberdeen to Pakenham, April 2, 1845, Private, British Library, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, Add. MSS, 43123, ff. 247.

terms, negotiations could not move forward. In light of the impasse, Britain continued to argue that the dispute should be submitted to an arbiter.³³⁸

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory expects that Britain's diplomatic competition – threats on the Oregon question – should have increased U.S. threat perceptions even though the British had been provoked by belligerent U.S. statements. However, insecurity theory contends that rising states worry about the possibility that the dominant state's intentions can change at any time. Although the United States knew that Britain did not initially have aggressive aims on Oregon, competition should still have been seen as a worrying sign that British aims might be expanding. Competition could, for example, be a sign that the British were becoming fed up with expansionist sentiment in the U.S. and were starting to consider taking preventive steps, such as attacking the United States to reduce some of its military power. Of course, diplomatic competition is less threatening than material competition, so the U.S. threat perception should not have increased dramatically. Still, the United States should have been alert to the possibility that British intentions might become more aggressive. At the same time, since challenges are risky, the rising state does not wish to underestimate the dominant state's resolve. Competition is an indication that it should rethink its assessments. In this case, diplomatic competition should have increased the U.S. assessment of British resolve on Oregon.

Opportunism theory does not expect the United States to change. Given its entrenched, benign image of the dominant state and its belief that intentions do not often expand, rising states

³³⁸ McLane to Buchanan, September 18, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:980. Aberdeen to Pakenham, November 28, 1845 and Pakenham to Aberdeen, December 29, 1845. Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Correspondence Relative to the Negotiation of the Question of the Disputed Right to the Oregon Territory*, 59, 65.

tend not to be easily threatened by competition. Rather, they interpret competition in a way that allows them to preserve their benign worldview. In this case, the United States should have understood that it was pushing on the Oregon question and that British competition might be a response to that challenge. Since the rising state believes that the dominant state has an enduring reluctance against escalating disputes, the rising state does not worry that competition indicates that Britain's aims are becoming more aggressive. At the same time, the United States should not have increased its assessment of British resolve, reasoning that diplomatic threats might simply be a way to bluff and maintain its rights in Oregon on the cheap.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

There is no evidence that British competition increased U.S. threat perceptions in the way insecurity theory expects. Prior to British competition, the U.S. had a low threat assessment, as discussed earlier. In fact, Calhoun, the outgoing secretary of state, had written that Britain "is desirous of settling the question, and does not want war with us."³³⁹ Polk's assessment did not increase when the Britain chose competition. Polk did not worry that British threats indicated that British aims were expanding, that U.S. expansionist sentiment might bring about some kind of British attack to put the U.S. in its place. He wrote to former President Jackson that Britain was just trying to "test our nerves" on the Oregon question, and said that "I myself have no serious apprehensions of War."³⁴⁰ Similarly, the new Secretary of War, Marcy, wrote cavalierly to a friend, "don't be alarmed of the prospect of war. It will not come yet...This Bluster was made by Johnny Bull before he could have known who was at the head of the war

³³⁹ Calhoun to R.M.T. Hunter, February 14, 1845 in Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter, *Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918), 75–76.

³⁴⁰ Polk to Andrew Jackson, Confidential, May 12, 1845, Cutler, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, 1996, 9:367–368.

[department].”³⁴¹ Polk’s willingness to leave the question unresolved is further evidence that he did not have any concerns about British aims expanding. When Polk made the initial compromise proposal to the British minister, he anticipated that Britain would make a counteroffer and that negotiations would continue.³⁴² When the British minister summarily rejected the compromise offer, Polk assessed that Britain overestimated its own bargaining leverage.³⁴³ To change that view, he adopted a number of tactics that seem to have been aimed at eliciting a better counteroffer from Britain.³⁴⁴ Polk insisted that the United States needed to withdraw the offer quickly, as waiting would communicate “hesitancy and indecision.”³⁴⁵ When Aberdeen disavowed his minister’s actions and asked that the U.S. resubmit its offer, Polk refused and insisted that any new proposals would have to come from Britain.³⁴⁶ These tactics,

³⁴¹ Marcy to General P.M. Wetmore, Private, April 30, 1845, in *Papers of William Learned Marcy*, Vol. 10, n.d., 34426, p. 3, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³⁴² Buchanan told his minister in London, that the United States would be willing concede the whole of Vancouver Island as the negotiations went forward; Buchanan to McLane, July 12, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:282–288.

³⁴³ Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 369.

³⁴⁴ I take the view that Polk actually hoped for a compromise deal. Polk’s actual thinking is a bit opaque. In some places, Polk contended that negotiations were unlikely to succeed, but never outlined the exact reason why. One might contend that such statement indicate that Polk did not intend to get a compromise deal, but rather sought to get all of Oregon. However, there are two reasons to question this interpretation. First, he made other statements suggesting that negotiations might succeed if the Senate approved a deal in advance or depending on what Britain offered. Second, Polk was very concerned with exactly how messages to Britain were framed. This concern with diplomatic details makes little sense if he planned to just take the whole territory. He certainly was not making any preparations for war or for occupying Oregon, so it is unlikely he was just crafting these messages to buy time while he prepared for war; For skepticism on negotiations, Polk to William H. Polk, October 13, 1845 and October 29, 1845, in Wayne Cutler, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, vol. 10 (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 301, 332. For more conditional statements about the possibility of a negotiated outcome, see, Polk to Aaron V. Brown, August 30, 1845 and Polk to McLane, October 29, 1845, in *Ibid.*, 10:197, 329–331.

³⁴⁵ Polk, Diary Entry, August 26, 1845, in Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:5. A similar sense of urgency can be seen in Polk to James Buchanan, August 7, 1845 in John Bassett Moore, ed., *The Works of James Buchanan, Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence.*, vol. 6 (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), 223–224.

³⁴⁶ Polk, Diary Entry, August 26, 1845, in Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:1–6. Buchanan to Pakenham, November 5, 1845 and McLane to Buchanan, October 3, 1845 and December 1, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:308, 981, 985. Stuart Anderson, “British Threats and the Settlement of Oregon,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 66 (October 1975): 156; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 249.

which delayed settlement of the issue, suggest that Polk did not see any new urgency in resolving the question even though Britain had shifted to diplomatic competition.

Nor is there evidence that British competition changed U.S. assessments of British resolve. By this time, the United States assessed that demographic changes – the growing number of Americans in the territory – meant that the balance of power and interests in Oregon was changing in the favor of the U.S. He expected that Britain would make substantial concessions on the issue to avoid war. But he still believed that there was a limit to how much Britain would concede if the United States made a challenge. He explained, “with England, a mere point of honor is involved which she will go to war upon if urged to that extremity.”³⁴⁷ Similarly, Secretary of State Calhoun argued against challenging Britain on Oregon. He saw policy proposals, such as withdrawing from the joint occupation convention, as “unsafe” because “Britain would encounter [war] boldly; if we should by rescinding the Convention, make it a question of force, who should occupy it.” The result of a challenge, in his view, would be “the loss of the Territory and hostilities with England.”³⁴⁸ Therefore, upon leaving office, Calhoun lobbied the new administration against making a challenge in Oregon.³⁴⁹

After British threats were made, the Polk administration held a similar view. They too saw that British interests were declining in Oregon and thought that Britain would cede some of her claims. Secretary of the Navy Bancroft explained, “if all Oregon were ceded to England today, she could not keep it. Her interest for an arrangement is greater than ours. She deceives herself by the consciousness of her naval superiority; but her ships would be powerless. They

³⁴⁷ Tyler to Calhoun, October 7, 1845 in Jameson, *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun.*, 2:1058–1060.

³⁴⁸ Calhoun to R.M.T. Hunter, February 14, 1845 in Hunter, *Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876*, 75–76. In another letter, he put it even more forcefully, writing that if Polk “is not overruled War would be [the] consequence”; *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁴⁹ Charles Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, vol. 3 (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944), 252, 278; Charles Sellers, *James K. Polk, Continentalist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 243.

could enter a harbour, but how could they occupy it?”³⁵⁰ In spite of Polk’s bellicose public statements, the administration took steps that suggest they understood that there were limits to what Britain would concede peacefully. Secretary of State James Buchanan explained, “it is not to be supposed that the British Government will consent by negotiation to yield to us the whole territory up to 54°40’.” Since the administration was not prepared to fight for land north of 49°, they proposed a compromise that was broadly similar to previous American offers. The plan called for dividing Oregon at 49° and giving Britain access to ports on Vancouver Island south of that line.³⁵¹ Polk later wrote that he actually thought the United States could get more than Tyler did – he claimed he only offered the July deal out of respect for precedent – though the details of his differences with Tyler are unclear.³⁵² Polk, therefore, may have come into office with a lower assessment of British resolve than Tyler. Whatever the exact differences between them, there is no evidence that Polk reassessed following British threats, contrary to the expectations of insecurity theory. In this case, neither U.S. threat perceptions nor assessments of British resolve were as sensitive to competition as insecurity theory expects. Instead, as opportunism theory expects, Polk was dismissive of British threats (Table 4.5).

³⁵⁰ This quote came a few months after the administration took office, but it is the clearest explanation of their logic; Bancroft to William Sturgis, August 25, 1845, in Mark Antony De Wolfe Howe and Henry C. Strippel, eds., *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 279–280.

³⁵¹ This offer differed slightly from the previous administration’s – it offered free access to the ports on Vancouver Island south of 49° rather than free navigation of the Columbia River; Buchanan to Pakenham and Buchanan to McLane, July 12, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:273–281, 284. Some have argued that Polk’s offer was not a genuine attempt at compromise because it did not offer Britain free navigation of the Columbia River as the previous administration had. However, the administration’s had a clear logic for the change: they reasoned that allowing navigation of the Columbia would keep the countries in a constant state of friction, rather than settling the issue permanently. Moreover, Buchanan, explicitly noted this change and offered free access to the Vancouver ports south of 49° as compensation. Finally, as discussed below, there is evidence that they expected further negotiations; For a view that Polk’s offer was not genuine, see, R Schuyler, “Polk and the Oregon Compromise of 1846,” *Political Science Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1911): 448.

³⁵² Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:62–67. Similarly, he wrote to a friend that he was “greatly embarrassed by the action of my predecessors.” Polk to Aaron V. Brown, August 30, 1845, in Cutler, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, 2004, 10:197.

Table 4.5: Oregon: Predicted and Actual American Response to Diplomatic Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Increased. Britain may be considering wider aims.	No change. Britain's competition is a response to provocation.	No change. It is safe to leave the dispute unresolved.	Opportunism Theory.
Assessment of British Resolve	Increased. Competition suggests Britain may be more resolute than previously believed, better to err on the side of caution.	No change. Diplomatic competition might be a bluff.	No change. Polk still expected significant British concessions.	Opportunism Theory.

1845: Material Conciliation

In the summer of 1845, Britain ceased its diplomatic efforts to prevent the annexation of Texas to the United States. That summer, Texas's leaders had put the options to a vote: annexation to the United States or independence and peace with Mexico. For some time, British leaders had mistakenly believed that Texans preferred independence. But by the summer of 1845, it was clear that public opinion was overwhelmingly in favor of annexation. In July, Aberdeen told the U.S. minister that he accepted that Texas's annexation was imminent. Moreover, Aberdeen made clear that Britain would not support Mexico if it continued to fight for Texas.³⁵³ Weeks later, Britain would learn that Texas formally voted in favor of annexation.³⁵⁴

After previously working diplomatically to prevent annexation, Britain ultimately accepted annexation without a fight. Diplomacy was as far as Britain had ever been willing to go

³⁵³ Everett to Buchanan, July 4, 1845 (Received July 23), Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, IAA, 1936, 7:269–270.

³⁵⁴ Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 222.

to prevent the annexation of Texas to the United States. As described above, in 1843, Aberdeen became interested in preventing Texas's annexation, in what seemed to be a very low-cost venture. He committed more diplomatic energy later as the United States began actively pursue annexation. However, even in this period, he wrote that he would only go so far and would not be "justified in exposing Great Britain to the serious risks of a war" to secure Texas's independence. Rather, Britain would only "exert all of the weight of their moral influence."³⁵⁵ In 1845, with Texans in favor of and the United States committed to annexation, Britain was not willing to pay the high cost needed to keep Texas out of the Union.³⁵⁶

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Both theories expect that Britain's decision to accept annexation should have reassured the United States. Where they disagree is over how this policy should have affected U.S. assessments of British resolve. Opportunism theory expects that the United States should have been emboldened. This theory contends that rising states do not see challenges as all that risky, so they are eager to downgrade their assessments of the dominant state's resolve and embark on expansion. Insecurity theory, on the other hand, does not expect that rising states are so easily emboldened. Instead, these states believe that challenges are risky, so are more cautious about downgrading their assessments of resolve. These states look at the dominant state's interests and its power to defend them, rather than relying on the dominant state's moderate policy changes to make assessments of resolve.

³⁵⁵ Quoted in Ephraim Douglass Adams, "Correspondence from the British Archives Concerning Texas, 1837-1846, VIII," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (October 1, 1913): 204-205.

³⁵⁶ Though the Diplomatic Act involved a French and British commitment to defend Mexico's borders, there is no evidence that he really believed that doing so would require Britain to fight the United States; Adams, *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846*, 230-232.

Actual Change in Perceptions: Reassured

Consistent with both theories, the United States was reassured by Britain's acceptance of annexation. Though American suspicions about British aims in North America did not entirely disappear, American leaders were substantially reassured by Britain's acceptance of the annexation of Texas in 1845. Statements about expansive British abolitionist aims in North America or destabilizing influence in Texas disappeared.

Furthermore, consistent with insecurity theory, there is no evidence that Britain's material conciliation led to a downgrading in U.S. assessments of British resolve on other questions relating to Mexican sovereignty. When Polk sent a mission to Mexico to try to buy California in the fall of 1845, after Britain's conciliation on Texas, he kept the mission secret because he thought it was possible Britain might care enough on this issue to stop it.³⁵⁷ Similarly, in the spring of 1846, the Cabinet considered the possibility that the Britain might intervene if the United States tried to forcibly take California during its impending war with Mexico. Secretary of State James Buchanan had worried that Britain and France would intervene in the war if U.S. war aims expanded to include California. Polk agreed that this was a possibility, but said that he was willing to fight anyway.³⁵⁸ In the summer of 1846, in a private letter to his minister in London, Polk admitted that he was "not without some apprehension" that Britain or another European power would intervene on behalf of Mexico, but again stated that he would fight anyway.³⁵⁹ By no means did Polk have an extremely high assessment of British resolve: he did not expect that Britain would bring the full weight of its power to bear to defend

³⁵⁷ Polk, Diary Entries, September 16, 1845, October 24, 1845, and November 7, 1845, in Quaipe, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:33–34, 70, 91.

³⁵⁸ Polk, Diary Entry, May 13, 1846, in *Ibid.*, 1:395–399. It is widely believed that Polk provoked the war with Mexico when he assessed it was the only way to get California; Nelson, "Destiny and Diplomacy," 14.

³⁵⁹ Polk to McLane, June 22, 1846, in Wayne Cutler, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, vol. 11 (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009), 216.

Mexico's territory. Rather, Polk's statements indicate that he believed that Britain might provide Mexico with arms or other limited forms of support if the United States sought California. As insecurity theory expects, American leaders considered British resolve to defend Mexican sovereignty in California on its own merits. They did not, as opportunism theory expects, reflexively dismiss the possibility of British intervention or assume that Britain would accept limitless American expansion.

Nor did British conciliation on Texas affect perceptions of British resolve more generally, such as on the unrelated question of British claims in Oregon. There is no evidence that American leaders ever connected the two issues together prior to Britain's conciliation. Texas was a distant holding of a friendly nation, Mexico, where the United States felt Britain had no legitimate right to interfere. Oregon, on the other hand, was an area where Britain its own claims and had exercised authority. The United States did not draw a connection between the two issues following British conciliation in the summer of 1845. During the fall and winter of 1845, when Polk was actively formulating his policy on Oregon, he never pointed to British conciliation on Texas as providing a relevant lesson about British resolve on Oregon (Table 4.7).³⁶⁰

³⁶⁰ Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910.

Table 4.7: Texas II: Predicted and Actual American Response to Material Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Reassured. Costly signal of benign intentions.	Reassured. Conciliation validates the benign image of the dominant state.	Reassured.	Both.
Assessment of British Resolve	No change. Concessions do not change the distribution of power so are not strong enough signals to provoke a reassessment.	Emboldened. British resolve might be weakening in general or on Mexican sovereignty in particular.	No change. The United States did not assume Texas conciliation meant Britain would consent to further expansion at Mexico's expense.	Insecurity Theory.

Oregon II: Material Competition

In late 1845, Britain launched a policy of material competition on Oregon. In September 1845, the U.S. minister reported that the British were “fitting for immediate service almost the whole of their present force.”³⁶¹ Though these preparations were correlated in time with increasing tensions with the United States and naval forces could easily be deployed across the Atlantic, they were most likely motivated by relations with France. However, by winter, Peel told the Queen that relations with the United States were one reason to pursue additional spending increases.³⁶² After Polk's December message to Congress, in which he claimed all of Oregon, Peel wrote that Britain would not “reciprocate blustering with Polk, but shall quietly

³⁶¹ McLane to Buchanan, September 18, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:980. The actual increase was six additional ships of the line over that year's initial estimate; Peel to Wellington, August 13, 1845, in Peel, Peel, and Parker, *Sir Robert Peel*, 1899, 3:217.

³⁶² In 1844, Britain and France had disputes over Tahiti and Morocco. Relations with France were the listed as the primary consideration for naval spending in the winter; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 151-152; J. W. Pratt, “James K. Polk and John Bull,” *Canadian Historical Review* 24, no. 4 (1943): 341-49.

make an increase in the Naval and Military and Ordnance Estimates.”³⁶³ And Aberdeen warned the U.S. minister that recent preparations, though not initially motivated by the crisis over Oregon, would be useful if war occurred.³⁶⁴ Then, in February 1846, after receiving word that the United States rejected arbitration again, the U.S. minister in London, Louis McLane, reported that Britain was planning to increase Canada’s defenses and preparing a huge naval force, thirty of its most capable combat vessels, for conflict with the United States.³⁶⁵

Predicted Change in U.S. Perceptions

Insecurity theory expects that the United States would be both threatened and deterred by Britain’s mobilization. As discussed earlier, competition can threaten, even when it is provoked. That is because the rising state knows that the dominant state’s intentions can change at any time. Britain may have increased its forces simply to deter the United States, but it could easily decide that deterring the United States had become too costly and that the time was right to attack the United States to reduce some of its military capabilities or to teach it a lesson. Even if Britain harbored no such intent, once it had forces mobilized, unintended or accidental escalation of any dispute would become more likely. At the same time, Britain’s military preparations should have been seen as a strong signal of British resolve to defend its existing rights in Oregon.

Opportunism theory also expects that a military buildup should have deterred the United States. In this theory, rising states do not worry that much about underestimating resolve. Therefore, as discussed earlier, diplomatic competition is often dismissed as a bluff and is not

³⁶³ Peel to Lord Francis Edgerton, January 6, 1846, Secret, in Peel, Peel, and Parker, *Sir Robert Peel*, 1899, 3:323–324.

³⁶⁴ McLane to Buchanan, January 3, 1846, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:989.

³⁶⁵ McLane to Buchanan, February 3, 1846, in *Ibid.*, 3:1002–1003; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908*, 156–159.

sufficient to deter. However, in this theory, material competition is a costly signal of resolve, so it should increase a rising state's assessments. Opportunism theory does not, however, expect the United States to be threatened by Britain's deployment. One of the rising state's entrenched beliefs is that the dominant state has a strong preference against expansion. The United States, should have, in this view, seen British competition as an indication of British willingness to continue to defend its existing rights in Oregon, not as an indication that its aims were expanding.

Actual Change in U.S. Perceptions

As discussed earlier, Polk believed that Britain had yet to fully grasp the way that power and interests in Oregon had changed. Britain's continued refusal to put new terms forward during the fall of 1845 convinced Polk that the only way to get a reasonable British compromise proposal was to create a crisis. He wrote that until "the American Government boldly faced the British power and asserted their rights, that the latter would yield nothing of her pretensions; that if the American Government faltered or hesitated England would become the more arrogant, and that until the question reached a crisis there would be no prospect of our obtaining justice."³⁶⁶ Similarly, Bancroft wrote that the previous American minister's "too great willingness to accommodate matters with England, may have increased the expectation of terms on our part, that this country would reject with unanimity." He believed that the President's strong stand would "bring England to a modest and sensible view of the subject."³⁶⁷ Therefore, in December, Polk called on Congress to give notice of the U.S. intent to abrogate the joint

³⁶⁶ Polk, Diary Entry, January 10, 1846, in Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:159.

³⁶⁷ Bancroft to McLane, December 12, 1845, in Howe and Strippel, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, 1:280–282.

occupation convention. Under the 1827 agreement, the joint occupation would end one year from the date of one state announcing its intent to withdraw.³⁶⁸ Polk disagreed when Buchanan raised concerns about the risks of such a strategy, writing that Buchanan was “too timid and too fearful of War on the Oregon question, and has been most anxious to settle the question by yielding and making greater concessions than I am willing to make.”³⁶⁹

When Britain pursued material competition, Polk reassessed British resolve, as both theories expect. Beginning in the fall, newspaper reports and McLane’s dispatches had information about Britain’s military increases. In December, as these “extensive warlike preparations” continued, Buchanan asked McLane to gather more information. Buchanan wrote that with Europe at peace, he was beginning to think these preparations might be made in anticipation of a “rupture with the United States on the Oregon question.”³⁷⁰ McLane’s report on British preparations immediately changed the administration’s assessments about the risks associated with making a challenge. Polk had previously said that he knew his position risked war, but he had never taken any steps to actually prepare for that possibility.³⁷¹ In late December, Polk described a “grave discussion” among the members of the cabinet “in view of the contingency of War with Great Britain, growing out of the present critical state of the Oregon question.” These concerns led the cabinet to ask Congress for funds to prepare for the possibility of war.³⁷²

³⁶⁸ Polk to the Senate and House of Representatives, Annual Message, December 2, 1845, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:395.

³⁶⁹ Polk, Diary Entry, November 29, 1845, in Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:106–108. For another example of Polk dismissing Buchanan’s concerns, see, Polk, Diary Entry, October 21, 1845, *Ibid.*, 1:62.

³⁷⁰ Buchanan to McLane, December 13, 1845, in Manning, *Canadian Relations*, 3:312–313.

³⁷¹ See for example, Polk, Diary Entry, August 26, 1845, in Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:1–6.

³⁷² December 23, 1845, in *Ibid.*, 1:133; Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:412–413. In January 1846, Polk wrote that he was still “slow to believe” that war over Oregon would come, but acknowledged that it was prudent to increase U.S. defenses given Britain’s build up. Polk to McLane, January 28, 1846 in Cutler, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, 2009, 11:53–56. The cabinet also agreed

Then, in February, new reports from McLane about Britain's plans for additional military preparations increased Polk's assessment of British resolve further. Polk explained that "the information communicated by Mr. McLane was not altogether of so pacific a character as the accounts given in the English newspapers had led me to believe."³⁷³ McLane's report led the cabinet to once again discuss additional measures for the nation's defenses. When Congressional committee members seemed resistant, Polk went to the public. He explained that since his December request, "reasons exist which, in my judgment, render it proper not only that they should be carried into effect, but that additional provision should be made for the public defense." Britain, he wrote, while at peace in Europe but in conflict with the United States over Oregon, was making "unusual and extraordinary armaments and warlike preparations, naval and military, both at home and in her North American possessions."³⁷⁴ Polk was still committed to his position. However, these preparations for war show that he believed that embarking on this challenge was riskier than he previously believed, a change that is consistent with both theories.

There is no evidence that British policy increased American threat perceptions – in other words, its assessment of the risk that war might come even if the United States backed down. Before news of the British buildup, the Polk administration still had low threat perceptions. As discussed above, they had not, as insecurity theory expects, worried that British intentions might expand. Rather, they had, for some time, operated according to a logic more consistent with

that if Britain made an offer of something equivalent to a division at 49 degrees, they would submit it to the Senate for its advice and consent. McLane was also informed about the cabinet decision, but was told he could not share the plan with the British; December 27, 1845, in Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:147. The cabinet's decision shifted the domestic political fallout of a compromise away from Polk. Previously, he had expressed concerns about the public's likely reaction to compromise, arguing, for example, that if the British had accepted the July proposal, it would have "gone far to overthrow the administration." Ibid., 1:107–108.

³⁷³ Polk, Diary Entry, February 21, 1846, in Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:241.

³⁷⁴ Polk to the Senate, March 26, 1846, in Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 1897, 4:426–427. Polk reported Congressional resistance to his quiet request for increases in Feb 23, 1846 and February 28 entries, Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:242, 257. A few days later, when he once again wrote that war would likely be avoided, he most likely meant that he expected the two sides to find terms. Polk to William H. Polk, March 29, 1846, in Cutler, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, 2009, 11:114–115.

opportunism theory, treating Britain's aims as static and benign. For example, Bancroft dismissed concerns from the President's opponents who were "busy in raising apprehensions of sudden war, as though England would strike in the moment of excitement."³⁷⁵ There is no evidence that British competition substantially changed the administration's view. Polk's response to a British offer is illustrative. During the summer of 1846, Britain offered to cede the entire piece of territory that had been in dispute, the area between the 49th parallel and the Columbia River, and let go of territory that Britain's Hudson's Bay Company had historically controlled. In addition to the area north of 49°, Britain gained exclusive control of Vancouver Island and the navigation rights on the Columbia River to the Hudson's Bay Company.³⁷⁶ When Polk received Britain's terms, he still understood that he could make a claim which included substantial concessions on Oregon. He wrote, "if I reject it absolutely and make no other proposition the probable result will be war."³⁷⁷ This offer gave almost everything the United States had offered in 1845 some minor modifications. Yet Polk's diary shows that he hesitated; he was unsure whether he should submit the proposal to the Senate for its advice and consent.³⁷⁸ Presumably, the alternative would have been to offer some further counteroffer. In the end, he sent the treaty terms to the Senate and it was ultimately ratified in July 1846. Though not

³⁷⁵ Bancroft to McLane, December 12, 1845, in Howe and Strippel, *The Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, 1:280–282.

³⁷⁶ Two factors contributed to the change in British policy. First, when the U.S. Senate gave notice that the United States would withdraw from the joint occupation convention on Oregon, it struck a conciliatory tone by expressing hope that the two sides would settle the question permanently. Second, there were domestic political changes in Britain. The failure to form a government in December 1844 convinced the Whigs that their association with Palmerston's hardline foreign policy was causing divisions within the party. Therefore, the opposition privately agreed to support Aberdeen's more conciliatory approach on Oregon, and made it politically viable; Aberdeen to Pakenham, May 18, 1846, Private, British Library, Add. MSS, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, ff. 288. Frederick Merk, "British Party Politics and the Oregon Treaty," *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 4 (1932): 658. The draft treaty arrived in Washington on June 6 when the war with Mexico was already underway. The Senate advised acceptance in July, but already in June, the minister in Washington wrote, "the Oregon question is settled at last," Pakenham to Aberdeen, Private, June 12, 1846, British Library, Add. MSS, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. LXXXV, 43123, ff.304.

³⁷⁷ June 3, 1846, Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, 1910, 1:444–445.

³⁷⁸ June 3, 1846, *Ibid.*

definitive, Polk's hesitancy suggests that Polk continued to have a low threat assessment. He did not appear to fear that leaving the matter unsettled for a longer period, while he continued to press for a few more minor gains, would be a particularly risky choice (Table 4.8).

On net, between 1845 and 1846, U.S. perceptions of British competition – both diplomatic and material – were more consistent with opportunism theory. There is no positive evidence that U.S. threat perceptions increased in response to either policy. Moreover, U.S. assessments of British resolve only increased when Britain chose material competition.

Table 4.8: Oregon II: Predicted and Actual American Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Increased. British naval deployments increase the risk of wider war over any dispute.	No change. Britain's competition is a response to provocation.	No change. Polk considered delaying a decision.	Opportunism Theory.
Assessment of British Resolve	Increased. Competition suggests Britain may be more resolute than previously believed, better to err on the side of caution.	Increased. Material competition is a costly signal of resolve.	Increased. Polk saw greater risks in a challenge.	Both.

Conclusion

The United States was by no means a status quo rising power. It had a long-term interest in making territorial gains, and, by the mid-1840s, expansion was back in the forefront of American domestic politics. Opportunism theory contends that such states hold a particular set of beliefs, including that the dominant's state has an enduring and strong preference against

expansion or aggression. This belief allows the rising state's leaders to avoid confronting the tradeoffs associated with pursuing expansion, which reduces their psychological stress. This set of ideas also affects how revisionists interpret the dominant state's policies. Since the dominant state is reluctant to fight, revisionists are not easily threatened – they do not see competition as an indication of expanding aims or worry that competition makes escalation and war more likely. Insecurity theory, on the other hand, contends that the international system creates strong incentives for rising states, even those with hope for expansion, to be alert to threats. These states see competition as a signal that the dominant state has aggressive intent, or might soon.

Chapter 3 showed that the United States was easily threatened by British competition, as insecurity theory expects. This chapter provides additional evidence in support of that prediction. When the British used its naval forces in vigorous efforts to suppress the slave trade, the United States feared that British aims would continue to expand if left unchecked. When Britain chose competition in Texas, American leaders thought it indicated that Britain already had expansive aims to promote abolition in the United States. Between 1837 and 1846, there is only one example where British competition did not threaten: when Britain made threats over Oregon during the early part of the Polk administration.

This chapter also provided evidence to support another one of insecurity theory's predictions: rising states are hard to reassure. Even after Britain chose diplomatic conciliation on the slave trade, the United States remained alert, still concerned about the possibility that Britain's aims might expand. In that case, American concerns persisted until it had its own force off the coast of Africa to monitor British policy and deter searches of American vessels. The only time when the United States was reassured by British policy was when Britain chose

material conciliation, as it did in the Webster-Ashburton Treaty and with its acceptance of the annexation of Texas.

Opportunism theory did correctly predict that Polk would not be deterred by Britain's diplomatic competition on Oregon in 1844. However, under highly favorable conditions, this chapter found no support for opportunism theory's central claim about the dangers of conciliation. Most importantly, Britain's concessions on the disputed territory in Maine did not cause the United States to reassess British resolve on Oregon, the other outstanding territorial dispute. Similarly, Britain's acceptance of American annexation of Texas did not cause the United States to assume that Britain would accept American expansion into California. Rather, the United States deliberated on the question before deciding that the risks were low. When the United States did reduce its assessment of British resolve, as happened when Polk came to office, it was based on an assessment of changing British interests given new demographic trends, not based on recent British conciliation.

On net, this series of Anglo-American cases provides stronger support insecurity theory. Opportunism theory's success in the Oregon case does point to the need for further research on the narrow conditions under which its logic might apply. However, insecurity theory's success in a number of interactions between the United States and Britain, a hard test of the theory, suggests it has substantial explanatory power. Chapter 5, which considers a series of cases between Britain and Germany near the end of the 19th century, provides further evidence to support its predictions.

Chapter 5: Anglo-German relations, 1894-1898

From the late-1860s to 1870, the German states fought and won wars against two of Europe's well-established powers, the Austrian Empire and France. The formal declaration of a united German Empire in 1871 simply confirmed what those wars had already proven: Germany was a rising European power. During the 1890s, German growth and concerns about its intentions contributed to France and Russia's growing friendship and ultimately the 1894 Dual Alliance. Germany, however, had a less adversarial relationship with Britain, which remained the strongest of the European powers. Germany's economic growth and the expansion of Anglo-German trade benefited many financial institutions and complementary industries in both nations. Moreover, both states saw the Dual Alliance as their greatest security concern. In the 1890s, Germany saw its Triple Alliance with Italy and Austria-Hungary as the cornerstone of its security against France and Russia. With German encouragement, Britain had concluded the 1887 Mediterranean Agreements with Italy and Austria. The exchange of diplomatic notes involved vague commitments to defend against Russian expansion in the Balkans and French expansion in North Africa.³⁷⁹ During the early 1890s, Germany hoped that Britain would one day go beyond these diplomatic assurances and make a formal commitment to the Triple Alliance.

Though Britain and Germany had many shared interests, the two had competing ones as well. Fierce commercial rivalries developed in some sectors as German firms began competing against once-dominant British firms. Moreover, the two countries had conflicting interests on

³⁷⁹ W. N. Medlicott, "The Mediterranean Agreements of 1887," *The Slavonic Review* 5, no. 13 (June 1, 1926): 66–88.

colonial questions.³⁸⁰ In Samoa, a pacific island group that the two countries administered under a tripartite agreement with the United States, London and Berlin disagreed on how to respond to civil unrest.³⁸¹ In southern Africa, British imperialists hoped to expand British political control in areas where Germany had existing economic relationships. Therefore, at the beginning of 1894, in general terms, British and German interests largely aligned in Europe, but conflicted in other regions.

This chapter asks how British policies toward these issues affected German perceptions in the period 1894-1898. This time period was chosen for two reasons. First, Germany is widely regarded as a rising revisionist state in this period, as detailed below. As discussed in Chapter 2, rising revisionist states are a particularly easy case for opportunism theory. Second, during the mid-1890s, Britain pursued a mix of conciliatory and competitive policies, the kind of approach that is of most interest in the present study. In later years, Britain policy became almost purely competitive, making it impossible to test hypotheses about the impact of conciliatory policies.

This case provides an important additional test of insecurity and opportunism theories. Some might contend that the findings from the Anglo-American case were unique, as both states were democracies. Others might note that, during the mid-19th century, the United States was still at an early point in its rise and therefore wonder whether insecurity theory still applies to a rising state that is relatively stronger. The Germany case addresses both of these concerns. In this period, Germany was controlled by a powerful, decidedly undemocratic leader, Kaiser

³⁸⁰ Britain and Germany both had interests in China, but in this period, their conflicts were primarily with Russia rather than each other. Therefore, these issues are not covered in detail in this chapter. Historically, the two countries had conflicting claims in eastern Africa, but these were settled in an 1890 treaty. William L Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902* (New York: Knopf, 1951), 119; C. J. Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem, 1865-1925* (London: Routledge, 1994), 102.

³⁸¹ Marschall to Hatzfeldt, April 18, 1894, Confidential, in E. T. S Dugdale, ed., *German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914*, vol. 2 (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1929), 286-287.

Wilhelm II. Moreover, Wilhelmine Germany was stronger in relation to Britain than the United States was in the mid-19th century.³⁸² If the logic of the insecurity theory still holds up under these conditions, it has passed another important test.

The remainder of this introduction shows that Wilhelmine Germany falls within the scope of the theories: Germany was on the rise, but still weaker than Britain. Then, it shows that Germany had an enduring interest in expansion, making it an easy test of opportunism theory. After a brief methodological note, the rest of the chapter tests insecurity and opportunism theory by identifying each British policy change and assessing the impact those changes had on German threat perceptions and assessments of British resolve.

I conclude by weighing the evidence. The results provide strong support for insecurity theory. In this period, Germany was easily threatened by British competition. Moreover, although Germany was certainly ambitious - hoping to expand its colonial holdings and find “a place in the sun” - it was not easily emboldened by British conciliation.³⁸³ German leaders understood that their material weakness made a challenge risky. Frustration at being unable to make colonial gains due to a high level of British resolve played a role in Germany’s naval expansion. These contributions should not be overstated: domestic politics and the Kaiser’s love of the navy were significant forces behind Germany’s naval expansion. However, the evidence of fear and frustration, even in revisionist Germany, provides important support for insecurity theory.

³⁸² This can be seen by comparing Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) scores in the two cases. In the late 1830s, the United States had a score of around 0.05 to Britain’s 0.3. In the 1890s, Germany had a score of around 0.125 to Britain’s 0.175. These CINC scores likely overestimate Germany’s relative power given the weakness of its navy, as discussed below. But these rough numbers highlight that Germany was relatively stronger in this period than the United States was in the earlier period; Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey, “Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965,” 19-48.

³⁸³ Quote from Kaiser Wilhelm II, Speech to the North German Regatta Association, 1901, in, Christian Gauss, *The German Emperor as Shown in His Public Utterances* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915), 181.

Asymmetric Distribution of Power

Beginning around 1885, British government and press reports took note of Germany's economic growth and predicted that Germany would become a major industrial power.³⁸⁴ Germany used its growing wealth to increase its military capabilities at sea and on land. Historically, Germany had prioritized investment in the army. However, in the early 1890s, German leaders assessed that they needed a stronger naval force for coastal defense. The German economy relied on the import of food and other materials by sea, leaving them open to a blockade. They invested in torpedo boats and armed cruisers, as well as battleships, the most capable naval combat vessels. Whereas in 1888 Germany had no battleships under construction, by 1893 the Germans had launched one and had eight more underway.³⁸⁵ Moreover, the Kaiser was committed to further increases and the navy was planning for long-term expansion.³⁸⁶ Figure 5.1 shows these aggregate economic and military trends. It shows the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC), a rough measure of a state's power that is computed using a state's total population, urban population, military personnel, military expenditure, as well as energy, iron and steel consumption.³⁸⁷

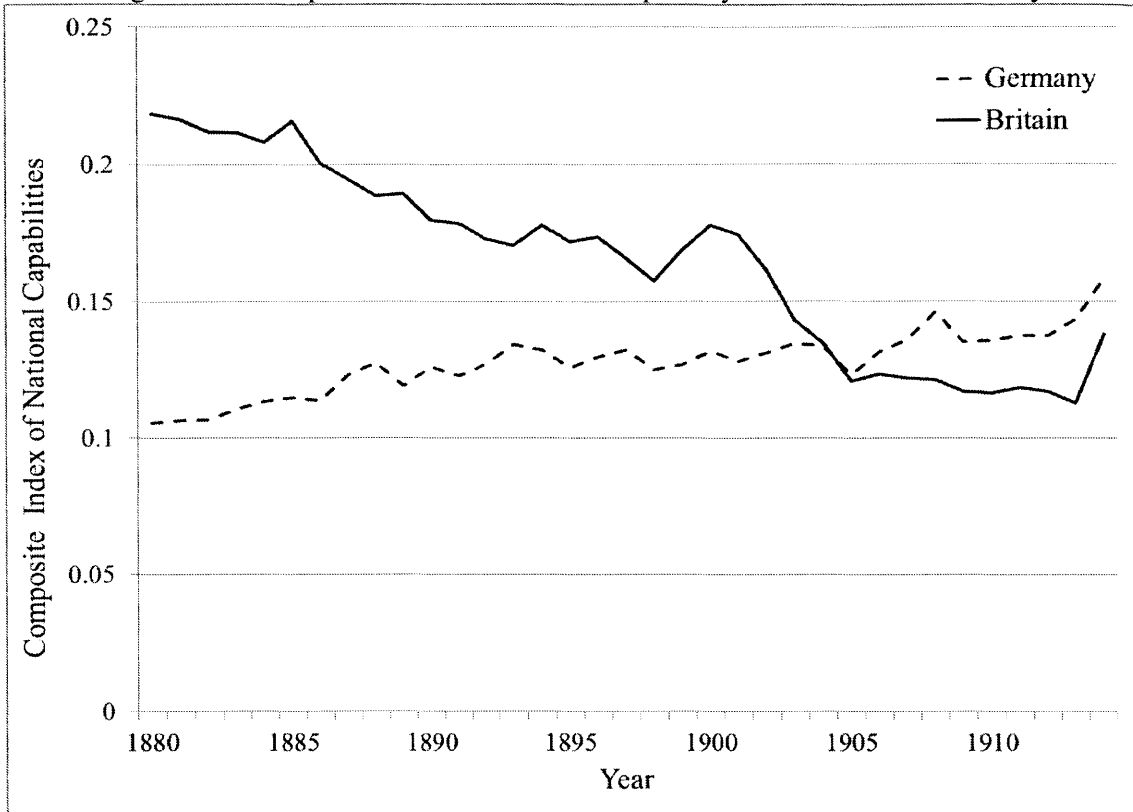
³⁸⁴ Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 69; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 305–307; E. L. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), 41–45; Ross John Swartz Hoffman, *Great Britain and the German Trade Rivalry, 1875-1914* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 74.

³⁸⁵ Great Britain, Admiralty, Return showing the fleets of England, France, Russia, Germany, and Italy, House of Commons, 1888, 218, London: Stationary Office; Great Britain, Admiralty, Return showing the battle ships and cruisers built, building, and preparing to build, for England, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, and Austria, House of Commons, 1893-1894, 465, London: Stationary Office; Holger H Herwig, *"Luxury Fleet": The Imperial German Navy, 1888-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 24–25. On German thinking about coastal defense see, Ivo Nikolai Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics, 1862-1914* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 57–62.

³⁸⁶ In 1892, the German navy launched a study on the right composition of the fleet. In 1894, the resulting memo convinced the Kaiser that Germany should pursue a battleship program, rather than cruisers that would harass enemy commerce; Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*, 19–23.

³⁸⁷ Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey, "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820-1965," 19–48. As noted in Chapter 3, the CINC is an imperfect indicator of power, but one that is useful for highlighting long-term changes in the distribution of power, especially during the 19th century.

Figure 5.1: Composite Index of National Capability for Britain and Germany



Source: Correlates of War, National Material Capabilities (v3.02)

Although Germany was on the rise, Britain had substantially more military strength. Germany had a strong army, but it still had a second-rate navy and so could not realistically project that power abroad against British holdings.³⁸⁸ Britain, on the other hand, had a large number of highly- capable naval vessels and a world-wide system of naval bases that allowed it to project power globally.³⁸⁹ At the end of 1893, Germany had fourteen battleships to Britain's thirty-eight (Table 5.1). Moreover, Germany's battleships were also less capable. Germany had

³⁸⁸ The British army was focused on homeland defense, and had no plans to become involved in a European conflict; Arthur Jacob Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1940), 75.

³⁸⁹ Paul M. Kennedy, "Strategic Aspects of the Anglo-German Naval Race," in *Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870-1945* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 129.

only one first-class battleship, with the rest being less capable second and third-class. Britain also had an advantage in the smaller, less heavily armed cruiser class of naval vessels. These vessels, supported by Britain's network of naval bases, could be used to disrupt German trade. Germany only had twenty-eight cruisers to Britain's 115. More importantly, Germany was dependent on British coaling stations to fuel these vessels, making it difficult for Germany to attack British shipping or even defend its own.³⁹⁰ Germany was on the rise, but it had not yet caught up to Britain.

Table 5.1: British and German Battleships, 1893

	Britain	Germany
First-class	15	1
Second-class	12	7
Third-class	11	6
Total	38	14

Source: United Kingdom, Admiralty, Return showing the battle ships and cruisers built, building, and preparing to build, for England, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, and Austria, House of Commons, 1893-1894, 465, London: Stationary Office.

German Revisionism

During the 1880s, Germany acquired colonies or protectorates in the Cameroons, Togoland, South-West Africa, East Africa, New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago.³⁹¹ Yet, Berlin still showed continued interest in further colonial gains. In 1890, for example, the Kaiser considered further expansion in East Africa.³⁹² As early as 1894, the Kaiser argued that Germany needed to acquire a port on the Chinese coast to use as a coaling station and naval

³⁹⁰ United Kingdom, Admiralty, Return showing the battle ships and cruisers built, building, and preparing to build, for England, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, and Austria, House of Commons, 1893-1894, 465, London: Stationary Office. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 278-279.

³⁹¹ Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem*, 95; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974), 25-30.

³⁹² John C. G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy, 1888-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 351-354.

base.³⁹³ The government was also actively considering ways it might end the joint administration of Samoa and gain exclusive German control.³⁹⁴ The Germans also hoped to gain colonies from a declining Portugal. In particular, there is circumstantial evidence that the Germans may have hoped that it would eventually gain a foothold in southern Africa by acquiring part of Portuguese East Africa.³⁹⁵

Germany's interest in colonial expansion was driven largely by greedy motives. During the 1880s, large industrialists, as well as smaller German businesses, successfully pressured the government to acquire its first colonies. Their organization, the German Colonial Society, and the ultra-nationalist Pan German League, continued to rally public support for expansion throughout the 1890s.³⁹⁶

As mentioned above, the mid-1890s are an attractive time to test insecurity and opportunism theory because both contemporary observers and later historians have labeled Germany as highly revisionist in this period. This argument is based primarily on the change in German leadership. In 1890, the Kaiser dismissed Germany's famous Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, who had been the primary architect of German policy for decades. Bismarck presided over a period of colonial and European expansion, which means, by the definitions used in this project, he led a greedy revisionist state. But the Kaiser, who consolidated his power during the

³⁹³ Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 448-449.

³⁹⁴ Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle*.

³⁹⁵ Seligman provides no direct evidence that Germany saw this as a realistic near-term possibility or that Germany took any further steps to achieve that goal beyond the diplomatic program described here in later sections; Matthew S. Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa, 1893-99: The Transformation of German Colonial Policy* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1998).

³⁹⁶ Davis notes the strong domestic political forces behind colonialism. But he contends that Germany may also have been motivated by strategic considerations. Germany may have feared significant loss of economic power compared to the other European states if it did not pursue colonies; James W Davis, *Threats and Promises: The Pursuit of International Influence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 97.

mid-1890s, is widely seen as particularly greedy: he was much more concerned with personal glory and ideas of German greatness than Bismarck.³⁹⁷

By covering this later time period, I set up a particularly easy test of opportunism theory.

Germany, under Kaiser Wilhelm, should be particularly likely to adopt optimistic views about conditions in the international system that validate its pursuit of expansion. At the same time, such states are hard tests for insecurity theory. They have a strong, domestically-driven interest in expansion that might lead them to disregard the incentives of the international system.

Methodological Note

As discussed in Chapter 2, I focus on the perceptions of the highest ranking officials involved in foreign affairs. In the German case, this includes the Kaiser, the Chancellor, and the State Secretary of the German Foreign Ministry. It also includes Friedrich von Holstein, whose title, Senior Counsellor in the Political Division of the Foreign Ministry, understates his importance in the making of foreign policy in Wilhelmine Germany. Holstein grew in importance after Bismarck's dismissal. The new chancellor, Leo von Caprivi and Adolf Freiherr Marschall von Bieberstein, the Foreign Minister, both lacked experience in foreign policy and so relied heavily on Holstein's experience.³⁹⁸ His influence on foreign policy continued even after the consolidation of the Kaiser's personal power in 1896.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ See, for example, Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 54; Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 121–125. Schweller also notes that Bismarck qualifies as a revisionist; Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias."

³⁹⁸ A. J. Ryder, *Twentieth-Century Germany: From Bismarck to Brandt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 33–34; Gordon Alexander Craig, *From Bismarck to Adenauer: Aspects of German Statecraft*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), 27; Norman Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein: Politics and Diplomacy in the Era of Bismarck and Wilhelm II*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 1965).

³⁹⁹ His influence in domestic affairs, was, however, diminished; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:547.

There are two methodological issues that arise from the very unique personality of Kaiser Wilhelm. First, the Kaiser was notorious for making impulsive outbursts.⁴⁰⁰ Any study of the perceptions of national leaders must be cautious not to put too much weight on any one statement. Leaders can have initial impressions that change upon further reflection. Alternatively, a leader may say different things about his assessments to different audiences. As discussed in Chapter 2, to the extent possible, I look at the views of multiple foreign policy decision-makers rather than relying on a single one. The need for caution in coding perceptions is particularly strong in this case. As one of his close friends and advisors explained, one could not take any one of the Kaiser's utterances to be a "lasting principle."⁴⁰¹ His immediate reaction was often tempered by consultations with his advisors. At the same time, the Kaiser's views are important: he was the ultimate decision-maker on foreign policy. As a British leader put it, any one of the Kaiser's statements had to be taken with a grain of salt, but at the same time, "the words of the master of many legions are not to be lightly regarded."⁴⁰² This admonition is particularly relevant beginning in the summer of 1896, when historians agree that the Kaiser fully consolidated his personal power.⁴⁰³ In order to best capture "actual" German perceptions, I consider the views of all of the top leaders, but focus on those views which, after consultation, ultimately affected policy decisions.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ At times, his advisors and foreign leaders even questioned his mental state. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 1056, 1064.

⁴⁰¹ Prince Eulenburg as cited in Paul M. Kennedy, "The Kaiser and German Weltpolitik: Reflexions on Wilhelm II's Place in the Making of German Foreign Policy," in *Kaiser Wilhelm II: New Interpretations: The Corfu Papers*, ed. John C. G. Röhl and Nicolaus Sombart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁴⁰² Kimberley to Harcourt, November 21, 1894, as quoted in A. G. Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt*, vol. 2 (London: Constable & Co., 1923), 325.

⁴⁰³ John C. G. Röhl, *Germany without Bismarck: The Crisis of Government in the Second Reich, 1890-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

⁴⁰⁴ The Kaiser was the center of all German decision-making. He chose the chancellor and made military appointments, so could dismiss those who did not share his views; Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa*, 16; Kennedy, "The Kaiser and German Weltpolitik: Reflexions on Wilhelm II's Place in the Making of German Foreign Policy." On the consolidation of the Kaiser's personal rule, see, Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 924; Röhl, *Germany without Bismarck*.

Second, the Kaiser had a deep personal interest in building a large German navy. The Kaiser had advocated for naval expansion since at least 1884 and, since an early age, shown an interest in the navy that many of his contemporaries found excessive.⁴⁰⁵ As a result, there are reasons to question whether his statements, which frequently pointed to British policies to justify fleet increases, can be taken at face value. I address this problem in two ways. First, I do not use such statements when assessing German threat perceptions.⁴⁰⁶ By doing so, I may underestimate the effect of British competition on German threat perceptions and make it somewhat harder for insecurity theory. Second, I ask whether those who disagreed with the Kaiser's fleet plans - Holstein and Chancellor Prince von Hohenlohe - were threatened by British policy. If such fleet skeptics raised concerns, it is much more likely that the fears were genuine.⁴⁰⁷ By doing so, With these methodological considerations in mind, the sections that follow present how Germany's top foreign policy leaders perceived each British policy change.

Southern Africa: Diplomatic Conciliation

Britain had historically dominated southern Africa from its most important holding, the Cape Colony (Figure 5.2). During the 1890s, the growth of the independent Southern African Republic began to change regional dynamics. The republic, widely known as the Transvaal, had gained its independence in an 1881 peace treaty. However, under the agreement Transvaal still

⁴⁰⁵ Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 153; Michael Epkenhans, "Wilhelm II and 'His' Navy, 1888-1918," in *The Kaiser New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany*, ed. Annika Mombauer and Wilhelm Deist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14.

⁴⁰⁶ In one instance, Kaiser wrote, "there is again further evidence of our folly in starting a colonial policy ten years ago without possessing a fleet." In the same letter, he pointed to Germany's vulnerable trade, arguing, "our flag is quite helpless before the 130 British cruisers, to which we proudly oppose four." Wilhelm to Hohenlohe, October 25, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:471. For other examples, see, Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 940-941, 1017. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 231.

⁴⁰⁷ Their discussions focused on the need to reign in the Kaiser's excessive naval plans; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:527.

had to gain British approval for treaties with other powers. The landlocked republic also relied on British ports in the Cape Colony and Natal.⁴⁰⁸ In the 1880s, gold was discovered in the Transvaal, giving it the wealth needed to achieve greater autonomy. Economic opportunities naturally attracted immigrants and investors from other states, including Germany.⁴⁰⁹ The Transvaal also intentionally cultivated such ties by, for example, granting preferential treatment to German firms.⁴¹⁰ The result was that, by the mid-1890s, German investments reportedly accounted for one-fifth of foreign investment in the Transvaal and a few thousand Germans lived in the republic.⁴¹¹ The Transvaal's president, Paul Kruger, also took steps to end his country's dependence on British ports by building a railway to the Portuguese port of Lourenço Marques at Delagoa Bay, the only non-British port in the region.

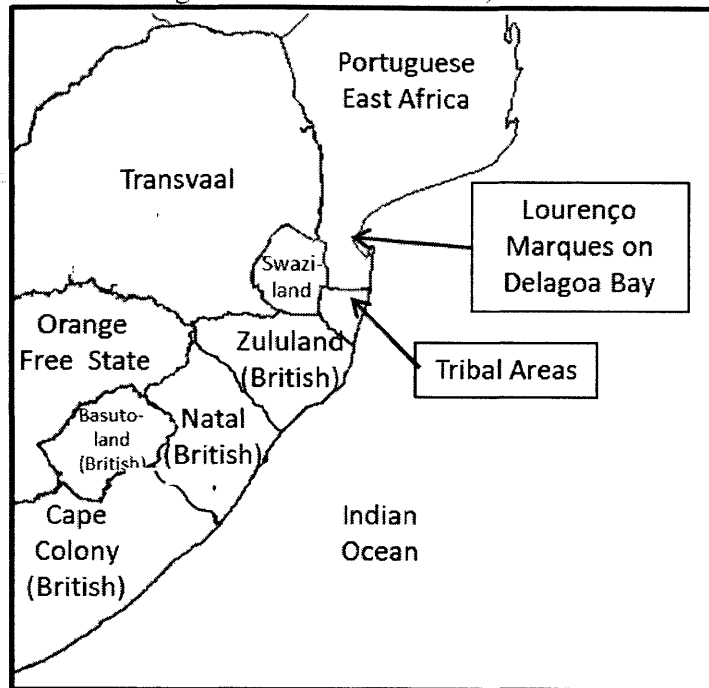
⁴⁰⁸ Ronald Edward Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism in the Dark Continent* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 428.

⁴⁰⁹ Under an 1884 treaty, Germans had the right to live and conduct business in the republic; *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa*, 38–41; Raymond Walter Bixler, *Anglo-German Imperialism in South Africa, 1880-1900* (Baltimore: Warwick and York, Inc., 1932), 66.

⁴¹¹ In 1896, Germany claimed to have 15,000 immigrants and 500 million marks invested in Transvaal, though Penner has a somewhat lower estimate; Hatzfeldt to German Foreign Office, Private for Baron von Holstein., January 4, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:388–389; C. D. Penner, "Germany and the Transvaal before 1896," *The Journal of Modern History* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 1940): 41.

Figure 5.2: Southern Africa, 1895



Sources: Approximate colonial and national boundaries based on Scottish Geographical Society, "Sketch Map of South Africa Showing British Possessions, July 1885," *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 1 (1885), http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/south_africa_1885.jpg; Statistics South Africa, *Provinces South Africa 2001*, Vector Digital Data (Pretoria: Statistics South Africa, 2001); ESRI, *World (Countries, 1992)*, Vector Digital Data (Redlands, CA: ESRI, 2000).

Transvaal's pursuit of autonomy was a troubling development for British imperialists. They worried about loss of revenue and other economic activity as trade was diverted away from the Cape Colony and Natal.⁴¹² These trends also endangered their long-term plan to draw Transvaal into a British-dominated trade, customs, and railway union.⁴¹³ Even more troubling for leaders in London was the possibility that Transvaal's growing regional power might weaken Britain's political control of the Cape Colony. Britain's position at the Cape allowed it to control

⁴¹² Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 410, 438–439, 468; Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem*, 103; J.H. Hofmeyr, "The Problem of Co-Operation, 1886-1895," in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, ed. Eric A. Walker, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 564.

⁴¹³ See, for example, the views of Lord Ripon, the British colonial secretary; Lucien Wolf, *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon*, vol. 2 (London: Murray, 1921), 222.

the longer, but most secure, route to India, so any changes there had potentially large strategic consequences.⁴¹⁴

Baseline British Policies

In the period before this series of cases begins, British policies had been competitive.⁴¹⁵ During a period of civil unrest in Transvaal in June 1894, for example, the British mobilized an armed police force along its border.⁴¹⁶ Though the British government had no active plans to expand in the region, it had looked the other way as British imperialists sought to buy the land around Delagoa Bay from Portugal.⁴¹⁷ As recently as May 1894, Britain had adopted a competitive policy toward Germany in order to satisfy these imperialists. As part of a larger treaty with Belgium's King Leopold, Britain negotiated a lease on a strip of land in central Africa.⁴¹⁸ Germany had previously objected to such a scheme, believing it might affect

⁴¹⁴ In wartime, the French and Russian navies might threaten the shorter Mediterranean route, forcing British trade to follow the longer route around the Cape of Good Hope; C. J. Lowe, *The Reluctant Imperialists: British Foreign Policy, 1878-1902* (London: Routledge, 1967), 214–215; Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem*, 79; Peter Henshaw, "The 'Key to South Africa' in the 1890s: Delagoa Bay and the Origins of the South African War," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 3 (1998): 529; Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 155; Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 226.

⁴¹⁵ In this section, I focus on policies as they relate to Germany's interest in the Transvaal's economic and political independence. I do not discuss, for example, negotiations between Britain and Transvaal on the inland area of Swaziland, which had little to do with Germany's interests; Sir Edward Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1896), 903; Cecil Headlam, "The Race for the Interior, 1881-1895," in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, ed. Eric A. Walker, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 540.

⁴¹⁶ This policy was initiated by an official representative of the crown, the British High Commissioner for South Africa; Eric A. Walker, *A History of Southern Africa* (London: Longmans, 1957), 440.

⁴¹⁷ Headlam, "The Race for the Interior, 1881-1895," 535; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 218, 520.

⁴¹⁸ Leopold was the sovereign of the Independent Congo State. The land lease that so irritated Germany had little to do with the main purpose of the treaty: checking French advances toward British-occupied Egypt; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 101–112. The British were also irritated with the Germans for a concession they made to France earlier in the year. It is not clear to what extent this motivated Britain's policy on the Congo treaty; *Ibid.*, 128–131; George Neville Sanderson, *England, Europe & the Upper Nile, 1882-1899: A Study in the Partition of Africa* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1965), 167; Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918*, 349–350.

Germany's existing commercial and transit rights in the area. However, Britain acted on imperialist demands that it acquire the land needed for telegraph lines and a railway connecting Britain's southern African colonies to British-occupied Egypt in the north.⁴¹⁹ When Germany had joined France in protesting against the treaty, Britain threatened to withdraw from the 1887 Mediterranean Agreements.⁴²⁰ Going into the summer of 1894, therefore, British had been pursuing a mix of diplomatic and material competition in Africa.

Baseline German Perceptions

In 1894, Germany was already carefully monitoring British policy in southern Africa, which suggests that they already had suspicions about British aims. When the Germans detected efforts by British imperialists to buy the bay, its diplomats warned Portugal against making the sale. It is not clear if Germany believed the British government was involved. However, the incident shows that Germany was concerned that any extension of British control in the region would jeopardize its existing economic relationship with the Transvaal.⁴²¹ Similarly, in June, the Germans had protested against British interference in Transvaal's domestic politics, suggesting they also had some concerns about British plans in Transvaal itself.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ German rights in the Congo basin came from an 1884 treaty; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 102, 118–119, 132–136; Sanderson, *England, Europe & the Upper Nile, 1882-1899: A Study in the Partition of Africa*, 167.

⁴²⁰ This threat was made in June by way of the Austrians; Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem*, 102–103, 138.

⁴²¹ Seligmann disputes the claim that Germany worried about a British threat to its economic interests in Transvaal. He points out that German firms only gained preferential treatment in some sectors. German firms in other sectors, such as mining, were frustrated with business conditions in the Transvaal, so lobbied the German government pressure Kruger to make domestic reforms. Seligmann argues, therefore, that these firms would have been happy to have British control of Transvaal. He does not show, however, that the German government adopted this view; Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa*, 38–41; Bixler, *Anglo-German Imperialism in South Africa*, 66; Penner, "Germany and the Transvaal before 1896."

⁴²² Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:365.

At the same time, German policies in early 1894 suggest that they already had a high assessment of British resolve in southern Africa. Whatever Germany's long-term ambition in the region, Germany had not made any immediate plans to expand into Portuguese territory, let alone into British territory. Nor had they encouraged Transvaal to expand against British territory. The extent of German efforts had been to lobby Portugal to sell the land around Delagoa Bay to Transvaal instead of Britain.⁴²³ Unfortunately, there is no speech evidence explaining the logic of German restraint. Germany likely assessed that a more active policy, such as deploying forces to seize the bay for itself, would be met with a British response.

British Policy Change: Diplomatic Conciliation

At the end of June 1894, Britain shifted to diplomatic conciliation. British leaders had faced criticism at home over the treaty with King Leopold, which had created tension with both France and Germany.⁴²⁴ To settle matters with Germany, Britain removed the offending land lease from the treaty.⁴²⁵ Moreover, the British withdrew their threat, admitting that a minor colonial issue should not determine its position on European politics.⁴²⁶ The very public controversy surrounding this treaty also led the British to change other policies. Britain abandoned a plan to pressure Transvaal to change its voting laws. Moreover, London stopped

⁴²³ Transvaal chose a private German organization as its agent in the purchase, precisely in order to gain this type of political support from Germany; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 218–220, 228–229; Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa*, 68; G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1927), 323.

⁴²⁴ Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem*, 102–103, 138.

⁴²⁵ Marschall Memorandum, June 18, 1894, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:319–320; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 138–139. Dugdale's compilation, quoted throughout this chapter, includes an English language translations of some of the documents released by the German government as *Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914*. The government's release of documents was highly selective and often omitted the Kaiser's inflammatory marginalia. Fortunately, many of scholars cited in this chapter have studied a wider range of official and unofficial correspondence from this period. They have also examined the original documents, bringing many of the Kaiser's the missing notations to light.

⁴²⁶ Eulenburg to German Foreign Office, June 17, 1894, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:317.

imperialist efforts to buy the Portuguese port at Delagoa Bay.⁴²⁷ These less public policy changes were likely detected by attentive German representatives who had already reported on earlier British policies.

Predicted Change in German Perceptions

Opportunism theory expects that British conciliation should have decreased German assessments of British resolve. This theory contends that revisionist states adopt a relatively benign image of the dominant power and downplay the risks of challenges in the international system in order to convince themselves that it is safe to pursue their ambitions. These states do not see challenges as particularly risky and so do not worry about underestimating resolve. Diplomatic conciliation, as Britain pursued in this case, should be enough to provoke a reassessment. At the same time, diplomatic conciliation reassures. Such policies reinforce the rising state's beliefs that there is little reason to worry about expansion by the dominant state.

Insecurity theory does not expect that British conciliation caused any changes in German perceptions. It instead contends that the risks of underestimating the dominant state's resolve are great, as events could escalate to war if the rising state challenges a resolute dominant state. Therefore, the rising state will only downgrade its assessment in response to extreme conciliatory policies, such as a decrease in the dominant state's military capability. As this did not happen, insecurity theory does not expect that Germany would have reassessed British resolve. At the same time, insecurity theory contends that underestimating threats is dangerous, especially for states on the rise. Rising states are, therefore, unwilling to rely on diplomatic conciliation, a

⁴²⁷ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 416–417. Given these other policy changes, it is likely that the British also demobilized the police forces along the border with Transvaal at this time, but the details are unclear. If they did demobilize these forces, this would constitute material conciliation.

cheap policy that the dominant state might use to lull the rising state into a fall sense of security. In this case, insecurity theory does not expect that Britain's shift toward diplomatic conciliation would reassure the Germans. A similar logic explains why the theory expects no changes in German assessments of British resolve.

Actual Change in German Perceptions: None

Consistency in German policy suggests that German perceptions remained unchanged, as insecurity theory expects. First, Germany continued to warn Portugal against selling Delagoa Bay to a British investor, which suggests that the Germans remained suspicious about British designs on the bay.⁴²⁸ Second, the Germans maintained their diplomatic support of the Transvaal's efforts to buy Delagoa Bay. If British conciliation had emboldened Germany as opportunism theory expects, the Germans might have adopted a more ambitious strategy, such as deploying forces or even seizing the bay.⁴²⁹

Nor is there evidence that British conciliation changed German assessments of British resolve more broadly. If German assessments had changed, they would most likely have affected German policy on Samoa where Germany was under significant domestic pressure to take action. In early 1894, a German firm, which held the largest share of agricultural land in Samoa, suffered substantial losses during an episode of domestic unrest. There were public calls for Germany to end the ineffective joint administration by seizing the islands and presenting United States and Britain with a *fait accompli*.⁴³⁰ The issue was substantial enough that the

⁴²⁸ Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa*, 68–69.

⁴²⁹ This policy continued until November; *Ibid.*

⁴³⁰ Germany dominated the commercial trade out of Samoa, especially through the production of coconut oil. The British had fewer interests there, but refused to abandon Samoa because of concerns about how colonists in Australia and New Zealand would respond to such a move. Hatzfeldt to German Foreign Office, April 27, 1894 and

foreign minister wrote in his diary, “the Samoan Question worries me. The reputation of the new course depends on it,” referring to the new direction in foreign and domestic policy following Bismarck’s departure.⁴³¹ In spite of this pressure, in the spring of 1894, the Chancellor rejected calls for a *fait accompli* due to his high assessment of British resolve on the Samoan question.⁴³² He explained that Germany would limit itself to a diplomatic course, writing, “I think that until further notice we must apply ourselves to negotiating with England, although this method is round-about and uncertain.” He continued to advise caution and the need to avoid any unnecessary provocation, writing, “even if we send ships to Samoa, we should inform England.”⁴³³ After Britain’s conciliatory policies in Africa that summer, the German government still had very strong domestic incentives to act, as well as information that the United States, the other interested power, was ready to abandon Samoa. Moreover, the Germans had continued contingency planning since the unrest earlier in the year and therefore had available military plans. Yet the Germans made no new moves.⁴³⁴ It is of course possible that German assessments of British resolve were lowered, but that other factors explain German restraint.⁴³⁵ However, given the domestic pressure for action in Samoa, Germany’s inaction could be seen as additional evidence against opportunism theory’s prediction of emboldenment. On net, the evidence from this period provides stronger support for insecurity theory. The Germans

Hatzfeldt to Caprivi, May 10, 1894, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:289–290; Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle*, 111–118.

⁴³¹ As quoted in Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 215. In another letter, Marschall stressed the same point, saying the issue “has for us a political importance far beyond its own intrinsic one.” Marschall to Hatzfeldt, April 18, 1894, Confidential, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:286–287.

⁴³² Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle*, 116–118.

⁴³³ Caprivi to Hatzfeldt, May 28, 1894, Private, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:291.

⁴³⁴ On assessments of U.S. Samoan policy, see, Marschall to Hatzfeldt, April 18, 1894, Confidential, in *Ibid.*, 2:286–287. Though the Germans had been deterred from immediate action, that spring, the navy continued to make contingency plans for seizing the islands and disarming the Samoans; Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle*, 116–118.

⁴³⁵ German allies had been distressed by Anglo-German discord over the Congo treaty. So, it is, for example, plausible that German assessments of British resolve were lower, but that alliance considerations demanded restraint.

remained concerned about British aims in south Africa even after British conciliation.

Moreover, there is no evidence that the Germans were emboldened in Africa or, more broadly, on the pressing question of Samoa (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Southern Africa I: Predicted and Actual German Response to Diplomatic Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	No change. Diplomatic conciliation is a cheap signal, so it might be a bluff.	Reassured. Validates benign view of the dominant state.	No Change. Still concerned about British aims in south Africa.	Insecurity Theory.
Assessment of British Resolve	No change. Challenges are risky so states are not willing to reassess resolve based on moderate policy change.	Emboldened. Challenges are not that risky, so it is worth reassessing based on any conciliatory policy.	No Change. Support to Transvaal's expansion remains limited to diplomacy.	Insecurity Theory.

Southern Africa II: Material Competition

Developments in southern Africa caused Britain to return to a more competitive stance in the fall of 1894. In September, an insurrection against Portuguese rule broke out near Delagoa Bay. The British consul sent twenty armed men into Portuguese territory to protect British citizens.⁴³⁶ Though the British government chastised him for violating Portuguese sovereignty, Britain continued material competition by ordering a warship to the area.⁴³⁷

When Germany responded by sending two vessels of its own, British competition continued. Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Ripon, wrote, “the German inclination to

⁴³⁶ Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 220.

⁴³⁷ Wolf, *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon*, 2:231; Philip R. Warhurst, *Anglo-Portuguese Relations in South-Central Africa, 1890-1900* (London: Longmans, 1962), 131.

take the Transvaal under their protection is a very serious thing. To have them meddling at Pretoria and Johannesburg would be fatal to our position and our influence in Southern Africa.”⁴³⁸ The Foreign Minister agreed, contending that “the maintenance of the Cape Colony was perhaps the most vital interest of Great Britain because by the possession of it communication with India was assured.”⁴³⁹ The British government’s aims had not substantially changed – they still had no immediate plans to take Delagoa Bay or the Transvaal itself. But British leaders believed they had to take competitive steps to deter German intervention and, therefore, they sent another warship.⁴⁴⁰ The British Foreign Minister also threatened a strong response if Germany interfered at Delagoa Bay. He warned that “in matters concerning the Portuguese Colonies we were a great sea power, and could speak the strongest word, if need be.”⁴⁴¹ Moreover, he told the Austrian ambassador that Britain would not “recoil from the spectre of war” over southern Africa.⁴⁴²

In early 1895, both diplomatic and material competition continued. Britain issued a formal protest against German activities in the Transvaal. Britain argued that Germany’s diplomatic support of Transvaal, including public expressions of friendship and a congratulatory telegram on the opening of Delagoa Bay railway, emboldened the Transvaal to pursue a more independent policy.⁴⁴³ Then, in the spring of 1895, Britain annexed tribal areas just south of

⁴³⁸ Ripon to Kimberley, November 25, 1894, in Wolf, *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon*, 2:232–233; Headlam, “The Race for the Interior, 1881–1895,” 529.

⁴³⁹ Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 220.

⁴⁴⁰ On efforts to convince the government embark on even more competitive policies, see, Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 410, 419, 438–439, 468; Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem*, 103; Headlam, “The Race for the Interior, 1881–1895,” 564.

⁴⁴¹ From Kimberley’s report of the conversation with the German Ambassador; Kimberley to Ripon, November 25, 1894, in Wolf, *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon*, 2:233. He also reported this conversation in Kimberley to Harcourt, December 7, 1894, in Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt*, 2:325.

⁴⁴² Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 220.

⁴⁴³ Marschall memo, February 1, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:366. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890–1902*, 221; Penner, “Germany and the Transvaal before 1896,” 51.

Delagoa Bay, the area where Transvaal had hoped to build its own port.⁴⁴⁴ These competitive policies marked a significant shift from the conciliatory diplomacy of the summer of 1894.

Predicted Change in German Perceptions

Both theories expect British competition to increase Germany's assessment of British resolve. However, they disagree over whether the policy will change German threat perceptions. In insecurity theory, conditions in the international system give the rising state incentives to be to be vigilant about threats. Threat perceptions are sensitive to any policies that might signal aggressive intentions or make escalation more likely. In this case, Germany should worry that Britain's naval deployment indicated that it already had plans to occupy Delagoa Bay, or, that with forces deployed in the area, Britain's aims might become more expansive.

Opportunism theory does not expect British competition to change German threat perceptions. Revisionist states like Germany take a benign view of the dominant state in order to convince themselves that it is safe to pursue expansion. The theory expects Germany to interpret British policy in a way that protects this psychologically useful belief. The Germans might reason that the British naval force was simply meant to deter German expansionism (in this case, an accurate assessment). Similarly, the seizure of tribal lands could be explained as a minor, isolated act of expansion, rather than a signal that Britain harbored wider ambitions. Moderate forms of competition like this will not be enough to force Germany to consider more psychologically uncomfortable interpretations, such as the possibility that British competition is a signal of expanding aims.

⁴⁴⁴ British officials did hold some informal discussions with the German ambassador about settling matters in southern Africa, but a competitive policy won out in the end and the British annexed the area around Kosi Bay; Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa*, 64. Wolf, *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon*, 2:230; Headlam, "The Race for the Interior, 1881-1895," 538-541.

Actual Change in German Perceptions: Threatened

In reality, Germany was threatened by British competition as insecurity theory expects. German leaders saw British policy as an indication that British aims might be expanding. In the fall of 1894, the Kaiser wrote that Germany needed to "watch over Delagoa Bay with greater vigilance."⁴⁴⁵ The foreign minister argued that Germany needed to put more effort into defending the "material interests which Germany had created with the Transvaal through the building of railways and fostering of trade connections."⁴⁴⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2, there are many possible policies a threatened rising state might choose. In this case, Germany responded with both competition and conciliation. First, the Germans sought to deter British expansion by sending two warships to the region and threatening to make its power "felt elsewhere" if Britain tried to seize the bay.⁴⁴⁷ Second, the Germans sought to reduce competition in the area by proposing negotiations over the future of Delagoa Bay. In particular, the Germans proposed neutralizing Delagoa Bay or granting it to Transvaal if Portugal could no longer control the area, a proposal the British refused.⁴⁴⁸

Unfortunately, there is no speech evidence available on German assessments of British resolve in this period and it is not entirely clear what policies Germany was pursuing. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence to judge whether German assessments increased over their already

⁴⁴⁵ Warhurst, *Anglo-Portuguese Relations in South-Central Africa*, 132. An overview of German concerns in southern Africa can be found in Marschall memo, February 1, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:366; Bixler, *Anglo-German Imperialism in South Africa*, 76.

⁴⁴⁶ Marschall memo, February 1, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:367.

⁴⁴⁷ Hatzfeldt's threat as reported by the British foreign minister; Kimberley to Harcourt, December 7, 1894, in Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt*, 2:325. Gooch and Temperley, *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, 323. The German threat was likely meant to imply that Germany would support France on the Egypt question.

⁴⁴⁸ Such negotiations would have considered the how Portugal's colonies would be divided once Portugal could no longer control them, so the bay would not have gone immediately to Transvaal. Seligmann takes a different view of the German demand that the bay be neutralized or designated for Transvaal. He believes that Germany set this condition because it hoped Delagoa Bay for itself some day; Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa*, 64–65.

high level.⁴⁴⁹ In spite of this uncertainty about German assessments of British resolve, the case still offers some important evidence. As insecurity theory expected and contrary to the predictions of opportunism theory, German leaders were threatened by British competition (Table 5.3)

Table 5.3: Southern Africa II: Predicted and Actual German Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. British deployment could make escalation more likely or indicate that British aims are already expanding.	No change. Benign view of the dominant state is entrenched. Moderate policy changes are not sufficient to provoke a reassessment.	Threatened. Worried British had active plans to expand to Delagoa Bay.	Insecurity Theory
Assessment of British Resolve	Deterred. Britain may be more resolute than previously believed. Since challenges are risky, better to err on the side of caution.	Deterred. Material competition indicates that the time is not right for a challenge.	Insufficient evidence.	Insufficient evidence.

Eastern Question I: Material Competition

The next change in British policy took place on the Eastern Question, an enduring debate among the European powers about how to manage the consequences of the declining Ottoman

⁴⁴⁹ As discussed earlier, the most Germany had been willing to do was to lend diplomatic support to Transvaal's efforts to expand to Delagoa Bay. It is unclear whether even this policy continued after British competition began. Seligmann notes that that Germany directly lobbied Portugal to sell the area around Delagoa Bay to Transvaal at least until November 1894. Elsewhere, he points to reports that German diplomats in southern Africa continued to lend support to Transvaal's efforts as late as the fall of 1895. However, it is not clear exactly what these activities might have been, what their motivations were, or whether they were authorized by the German government; Ibid., 46, 68–69; Andrew N. Porter, *The Origins of the South African War: Joseph Chamberlain and the Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1895–99* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 53.

Empire. By the end of the 19th century, nationalist movements had produced new states in the Balkans and threatened to further destabilize the empire from within.⁴⁵⁰ The decline of the Ottomans had already brought about competition between the powers. For example, the Ottoman Empire's inability to exercise control in Egypt led to a British occupation in 1882 and continuing Anglo-French competition in northern Africa. This section is concerned with the Eastern Question as it related to the control of the Turkish Straits, the waterways connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean (Figure 5.4). Historically, both Britain and Germany wanted to keep the Ottoman Empire strong and in control of the straits. British interests arose from concerns about the security of the Mediterranean. As long as the Ottoman Empire held the straits, Russia would find it harder to project power into the Mediterranean.⁴⁵¹ Germany's interests concerned the stability of its closest ally, Austria-Hungary. Germany worried that if Russia controlled the straits, it would gain greater influence in the Balkans, an already volatile region on Austria's border. The 1887 Mediterranean Agreements, discussed in the introduction, had been an explicit acknowledgement of the shared interests between Britain and the Triple Alliance when it came to this and other aspects of the Eastern Question.

⁴⁵⁰ Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem*, 19–21.

⁴⁵¹ A. L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (London; New York: Longman, 1996), 44, 94.

Figure 5.4: Eastern Question, 1895



Sources: Approximate national boundaries based on Richard Andree, "Europe (General Map)," in *The Times Atlas* (London: The Times, 1895), 13–14, <http://www.davidrumsey.com/view/atlas#world-atlases-1851-1900>; ESRI, *World (Countries, 1992)*; ESRI, *World (Continents, 2000)*, Vector Digital Data (Redlands, CA: ESRI, 2000).

By the summer of 1895, however, Britain began to question its traditional commitment to the status quo. First, the alliance between France and Russia meant that Britain might no longer be able to defend the straits at a reasonable cost. Second, defending the integrity of the Ottoman Empire seemed futile as it crumbled from within. Third, the British public was increasingly opposed to the defending the Sultan, especially after his violent response to an Armenian national movement in 1894. The result was that British and German interests in the Eastern Question began to diverge.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵² The pessimistic 1892 naval assessment of conditions in the Mediterranean and the political debates that followed are outlined in J. A. S. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1964), 28, 50–51.

British Policy Change: Material Competition

The first clear indication of these conflicting interests came in 1895 when British policy toward the Armenian massacres changed. When the violence against the Armenians initially broke out in 1894, Britain worked cooperatively with the other powers to encourage the sultan to undertake reform.⁴⁵³ However, in 1895, when the sultan refused to accept their proposals and the violence against the Armenians continued, Britain unilaterally sent a naval force to the Ottoman coast.⁴⁵⁴ The British chose this approach in the full knowledge that the other powers, including Germany, would see this as a dangerous change in policy.⁴⁵⁵

Predicted Change in German Perceptions

Since the Germans had no interest in changing the status quo on the Eastern Question, German assessments of British resolve are not considered here. Instead, this section focuses on the theories' divergent predictions about how British material competition should have affected German threat perceptions. Insecurity theory expects that competitive policies threaten, even when they are motivated by humanitarian impulses. It expects that the Germans would have adopted one of two lines of thinking. First, they might have seen humanitarian justifications as a pretext for moving naval forces meant to achieve other goals, like seizing more territory from the declining Ottomans. Second, the Germans might have worried that British moves would

⁴⁵³ Britain, France and Russia proposed the reforms, but the Germans supported the approach; Prince von Radolin to Hohenlohe, December 20, 1894, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:228. See also, the Kaiser's marginal notes on Marschall to Wilhelm, May 12, 1895, in *Ibid.*, 2:229.

⁴⁵⁴ Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 229–230, 241–244. A report on Britain's naval movement can be found in Count Henckel von Donnersmarck, Charge d'Affaires in Constantinople, to Hohenlohe, June 3, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:231. Although Britain shifted to material competition, it also continued to call on the other powers to find a cooperative way to stop the massacres; Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 47–49, 80–81.

⁴⁵⁵ Salisbury to Queen Victoria, Private, August 8, 1895, as cited in Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 38.

unintentionally create security competition among the European powers. Insecurity theory contends that rising states are aware that other state's intentions can change at any time. In this case, where all of the powers had stakes, British military moves could easily lead any one of the powers to respond with competition of its own. Whatever the exact chain of events, Germany would have had reason to worry that a local dispute could escalate to a major European war.

Opportunism theory does not expect German threat perceptions to increase in either of the ways that insecurity theory expects. First, the Germans should not have feared that Britain was using the build up as a pretext for expansion. This theory contends that rising revisionists believe that the dominant state has a strong preference against expansion. This belief is not easily changed by moderate forms of competition, such as the deployment of a few ships off the Ottoman coast. Instead, the Germans should have taken Britain's humanitarian justifications at face value without fearing that Britain had plans to expand. Second, opportunism theory does not expect the Germans to worry that a narrow British policy – coercing the Sultan on his Armenian policy – would produce far-reaching security competition in Europe. This is because the theory expects rising states to take a relatively benign view of the international system.

Change in German Perceptions: Threatened

The documentary evidence shows that German leaders were threatened by British competition in the Mediterranean, as insecurity theory predicts. Prior to this policy change, Germany had not been concerned about British aims in Europe. Germany was certainly frustrated at Britain's refusal to commit to a formal alliance in the early 1890s. However, Germany assessed that, on European questions, Britain would ultimately support the Triple Alliance. For this reason, as recently as 1893, the Germans lobbied Britain to increase its naval

spending and German operational planning considered scenarios in which Britain fought alongside the Triple Alliance.⁴⁵⁶ This low threat assessment continued into 1894. When the Armenian question first emerged in 1894, the foreign minister noted that the powers were acting together and wrote, “as far as it concerns us, we think that we can look on at the development of things without anxiety.”⁴⁵⁷

Britain’s shift to competition in the summer of 1895 led to a notable increase in German threat perceptions. German threat perceptions increased in a way that blended both of the mechanisms outlined earlier. German leaders believed, as insecurity theory expects, that the Eastern Question could easily escalate from a minor dispute to a major war. They also believed that Britain was intentionally manipulating that fact to make some kind of gain for itself. They generally suspected that Britain was attempting to either: (i) embroil the other powers in security competition and, while they were distracted, pursue colonial gains at their expense or (ii) provoke a European war during which the Triple Alliance would do the hard work of degrading Franco-Russian military power.⁴⁵⁸ Holstein, for example, wrote that Britain was trying to produce a “complication in Asia Minor and the Balkans into which all continental Powers, including ourselves would be dragged, rather than England.” Moreover, he suspected that England believed that complications on the Eastern Question might “smash up the Triple

⁴⁵⁶ Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics*, 40, 57, 70; Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem*, 100; Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 171; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 156, 481, 496. On the German irritation that Britain was unwilling to make a far ranging political commitment to the Triple Alliance in peacetime, see, *Ibid.*, 486; Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 213; Norman Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein: Politics and Diplomacy in the Era of Bismarck and Wilhelm II*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), 356.

⁴⁵⁷ Marschall to the Ambassadors in Rome and Vienna, January 8, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:227.

⁴⁵⁸ See, for example, Holstein’s views in an extract of a July 14, 1895 letter printed in Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:452.

Alliance.”⁴⁵⁹ Similarly, a foreign office dispatch argued that Britain planned take steps to accelerate the partition of the Ottoman Empire “in the hope that England might be able to hold aloof from the struggles on the Continent resulting from it, or, as she did in the early Napoleonic wars, control the situation and conditions.”⁴⁶⁰

Although dramatic, these concerns were suspicions rather than certainties, Germany decided to monitor events before taking action. The foreign office explained, “for Germany caution and reserve are essential, so long as the aims and even the methods of British policy are still in the clouds.”⁴⁶¹ When the German ambassador in London rejected Berlin’s concerns, Holstein encouraged him to gather more information.⁴⁶² Similarly, the Kaiser informed the British military attaché of German interest in holding discussions on the Eastern Question.⁴⁶³ In the months that followed, German leaders continued to wrestle with the question of what Britain was trying to achieve. The Chancellor contended that Britain’s attempt to divide the continental powers was designed to make colonial gains.⁴⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the Kaiser speculated that Britain

⁴⁵⁹ Holstein to Kiderlen, August 3, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:335. Similar views can be found in Holstein to Hatzfeldt, August 14, 1895, Private, in *Ibid.*, 2:341; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:453. After Britain had initiated its competitive policy, the Germans received reports that the British Prime Minister wanted to negotiate over how to partition the Ottoman Empire in the event it began to collapse. However, the above statement from Holstein shows that the possibility of diplomatic discussion did nothing to reduce these fears. Hatzfeldt to Prince Hohenlohe, July 10, 1895, Very Confidential Hatzfeldt to Holstein, July 31, 1895, Private, and Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, August 3, 1895, Secret, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:328–332; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 198. Grenville argues that Salisbury never made such a proposal and that the German ambassador made up the story in some kind of attempt to get the two sides negotiating; Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 33–36.

⁴⁶⁰ Baron von Rotenhan to Hatzfeldt, August 1, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:331–332.

⁴⁶¹ Baron von Rotenhan to Hatzfeldt, August 1, 1895, in *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:454.

⁴⁶³ Britain did not respond to these overtures; Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 40–43.

⁴⁶⁴ Hohenlohe to the Emperor, November 22, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:354–356. Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:452–456.

might actually have a complex scheme to take the straits for itself and, therefore, advised that “England’s actions must be watched most sharply.”⁴⁶⁵

By the end of the year, continued concerns about British aims led the Kaiser to go around his advisors and pursue two different policies.⁴⁶⁶ First, he tried to persuade England to change its approach. He explained that Britain’s policies on the Armenian question, including the Mediterranean squadron’s cruises near the Dardanelles, created a “strong mistrust of England.”⁴⁶⁷ He warned that this would push Germany closer to France and Russia. “England,” he argued, “could only escape from her present complete isolation, into which her ‘policy of selfishness and bullying’ had plunged her, by a frank and outspoken attitude either for or against the Triple Alliance.” He therefore suggested that Britain should pursue a “sealed and signed” guarantee with the Triple Alliance.⁴⁶⁸ Second, he briefly explored an understanding with Russia on the Eastern Question.⁴⁶⁹ Ultimately, his advisors convinced him to abandon such a radical policy change and instead to resume a policy of monitoring events and finding a way to change British policy.⁴⁷⁰ Whereas in 1893, Germany had seen Britain as a likely ally in Europe, by the end of

⁴⁶⁵ Wilhelm to Hohenlohe, October 20, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:345.

⁴⁶⁶ This was related to a dispute between the Kaiser and Marschall over domestic politics. Frustrated with his advisors, the Kaiser pursued a number of independent policies in this period, including in foreign affairs; Röhl, *Germany without Bismarck*, 160–161; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:491–495. Britain’s policies toward Italy exacerbated German concerns. The Italians had asked for control of the British port at Zeyla to support their campaign against the Abyssinians, a request the Germans supported. However, the British refused, explaining that they needed to maintain the port to protect their own interests in the Red Sea. The British refusal was frequently cited along with British policies on the Eastern Question; *Ibid.*, 2:452–453. Hatzfeldt to Holstein, July 31, 1895, Private, Baron von Rotenhan to Hatzfeldt, August 1, 1895, Holstein to Kiderlen, August 3, 1895, Holstein to Hatzfeldt, August 14, 1895, Private, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:329, 331–332, 335, 341.

⁴⁶⁷ He also pointed to Britain’s ongoing diplomatic competition on the Transvaal, including a threat by outgoing British ambassador, Edward Malet; Wilhelm to Marschall, October 25, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:349–350.

⁴⁶⁸ Wilhelm to Marschall, October 25, 1895, in *Ibid.*, 2:368. For Holstein’s objections to a similar, bold conversation between the Kaiser and the British attaché, see, Holstein to Eulenburg, December 21, 1895, in Norman Rich and M. H. Fisher, eds., *The Holstein Papers*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 576.

⁴⁶⁹ Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:45–463.

⁴⁷⁰ The Kaiser’s advisors convinced him that supporting Russia on the Eastern Question would undermine relations with Austria, and, therefore, the Triple Alliance that was the cornerstone of German security. The result of these consultations was a memo to German representatives clarifying that German policy remained the same. The Franco-

1895, German leaders were carefully monitoring British policy for a complex plan to provoke a European war. German leaders did not, as opportunism theory expects, see Britain's small naval movement as a minor act of meddling. Instead, German leaders were cautious, alert to the possibility of more nefarious motives and even the risks escalation to major war, as insecurity theory expects (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Eastern Question I: Predicted and Actual German Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. British deployment could indicate that British aims are already expanding or make escalation more likely.	No change. Benign view of the dominant state is entrenched and escalation is unlikely.	Threatened. Feared British competition was aimed at provoking a continental security competition or war.	Insecurity Theory.

Southern Africa III: Material Competition

At the end of 1895, British policy in southern Africa became even more competitive. Cecil Rhodes, the premier of the Cape Colony and the head of the British South Africa Company took the first steps toward direct interference in Transvaal's domestic politics. The Transvaal's political class was made up of Boers, descendants of Dutch farmers that had long lived in the region. Since the discovery of gold in the 1880s, the population of other European settlers, mostly British, had grown dramatically. The Transvaal worried that extending voting rights to

Russian combination was the key threat to Germany and German policy was to improve relations between England, Italy, and Austria, especially as it related to the Mediterranean. The November 15th memo was written by Holstein and approved by Marschall and the Kaiser; Ibid., 2:46–463. Hohenlohe to the Emperor, November 22, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:354–356. Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:452–456; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 761–763.

this group, known as *uitlanders*, would lead to further British interference. *Uitlander* grievances against the government continued to grow and Rhodes saw an opportunity. He began supplying arms to support a rebellion in the Transvaal. It is unclear if leaders in London were aware of the full extent of Rhodes' efforts to foment rebellion. However, they decided to take full advantage if rebellion did break out. They knew that Rhodes had an armed force on Transvaal's border led by Dr. Leander Starr Jameson, the British Southern Africa Company's Administrator for Rhodesia. This force was ready to assist the *uitlanders* as soon as the rebellion began. Moreover, British leaders were involved in plans for taking political control of Transvaal. They pursued this policy knowing Germany would object. As the Prime Minister put it, "of course Germany has no rights in the affair, and must be resisted if the necessity arises."⁴⁷¹ When the *uitlander* rebellion collapsed quickly, the British tried to call off Jameson's force. However, Jameson carried out his raid anyway. Within four days, Jameson surrendered to the Transvaal's forces and the British government repudiated the raid.⁴⁷²

Although Britain disavowed the raid, it soon chose more competition. British leaders and the British public were outraged when the Kaiser sent President Kruger a telegram congratulating him on the defeat of Jameson. British leaders saw the telegram as a German provocation that had to be answered. First, Britain increased its naval force off the coast of southern Africa. Second, on January 8th Britain announced the creation a "flying squadron," which consisted of two battleships and two first class cruisers that would always be on alert to

⁴⁷¹ The prime minister argued against any active effort being given to provoke rebellion, hoping to avoid conflict with Germany. But if rebellion broke out on its own, he believed Britain had to act. The colonial secretary was more involved in Rhodes's schemes; Quote on p. 425; Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 423–425; Eric A. Walker, ed., *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, 2nd ed., vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 576; Porter, *The Origins of the South African War*, 70.

⁴⁷² Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 230, 238–239. Hatzfeldt to German Foreign Office and Hatzfeldt to Holstein, Private, January 1, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:380–381.

respond to international crises.⁴⁷³ Third, diplomatically, Britain initiated discussions to settle differences with France and Russia.⁴⁷⁴ Finally, in 1897, Britain sent a larger naval force to Delagoa Bay and asserted suzerainty in the Transvaal.⁴⁷⁵

Predicted Change in German Perceptions

Insecurity theory expects British competition to further increase German threat perceptions. Rising states' threat perceptions are sensitive to any kind of competition. Therefore, this kind of direct attack on Transvaal should certainly lead to concerns about further encroachments. Furthermore, British naval activities should lead the Germans to worry about the possibility that this local conflict could escalate. On net, the Germans should assess that the costs and risks of defending the status quo are on the rise. Opportunism theory, on the other hand, expects a much lower level of concern about British activities. Britain had certainly engaged in a revisionist policy by conducting the Jameson raid. However, in order to preserve their generally status quo image of the dominant state, the Germans should have reasoned that this was an isolated incident or accept Britain's disavowal. Since the policy did not change the

⁴⁷³ These policies likely had many motivations. The naval deployments to Delagoa Bay, for example, were likely meant to deter Kruger as much as Germany. Unbeknownst to the Germans, the plan for the flying squadron actually originated in December 1895 as a response to the Venezuela crisis with the United States and growing concerns about German activities in the Transvaal. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 256–260. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 249. There were also reports about other possible British naval activities. On January 13, the German naval attaché in London reported that the East Indian and Southern African stations had been put on alert and were ready for deployment to Delagoa Bay if needed, though the British denied any plans for additional deployments; Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:393.

⁴⁷⁴ For example, the Britain and France completed the Siam-Mekong Agreement in January and opened up discussions on Egypt in February. Salisbury to the Queen, January 11, 1896, as cited in Sanderson, *England, Europe & the Upper Nile, 1882-1899: A Study in the Partition of Africa*, 230. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 241. Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics*, 107. Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 343.

⁴⁷⁵ Jeffrey Butler, "The German Factor in Anglo-Transvaal Relations," in *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, ed. Prosser Gifford, William Roger Louis, and Alison Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 205; Warhurst, *Anglo-Portuguese Relations in South-Central Africa*, 137. Reports to Germany on British naval movements can be found in, Norman Rich and M. H. Fisher, eds., *The Holstein Papers*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 21.

distribution of power, these policies should not have been a strong enough signal to force the Germans to entirely reassess their beliefs.

Both theories expect material competition to increase Germany's assessment of British resolve. However, since German assessments of British resolve were already high, it may not be possible to detect such as a change.

Change in German Perceptions: Threatened and Deterred

German threat perceptions increased in this period, as insecurity theory expects. The Germans assessed that continuing to defend the status quo on Transvaal had become very dangerous. Chancellor Hohenlohe argued that standing up to Britain could lead to a naval confrontation. Since "Germany could not enter upon such a war in isolation," he argued, "it must be our diplomatic task to draw to ourselves more and more the Powers that possess similar interests, and at any rate to avoid taking steps in isolation, such as may attract friends to England."⁴⁷⁶ Since it would require all of the powers to stop British encroachment, Germany encouraged Transvaal to ask for an international conference on the situation.⁴⁷⁷ In February, Holstein reiterated the chancellor's view that if Britain used force in southern Africa, Germany would have to look for an ally, remarking that "alone we cannot do anything at sea."⁴⁷⁸ This belief that defending a status quo on the Transvaal would result in a wider war – a war that would demand the help of other powers – is exactly the kind of logic that insecurity theory expects.

⁴⁷⁶ Hohenlohe to Emperor William, January 7, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:392–393.

⁴⁷⁷ The Germans believed the request had to come from Transvaal lest it look like Germany was the provocateur; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 237. Marschall to Herff, January 3, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:385–386. Baron von Marschall to Count Hatzfeldt, January 9, 1896, in *Ibid.*, 2:398.

⁴⁷⁸ Holstein to Hatzfeldt, February 15, 1896, as cited in Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics*, 95. Given that the Germans were already deterred from acting to change the status quo in the Transvaal in January, it is not possible to say whether Britain gained any additional reputation for resolve by its naval movements.

The Germans also saw the British southern Africa policy as part of a larger trend. The Germans assessed that British policy – both in Europe and Africa – was motivated by a mistaken belief that the other powers would do nothing to stop British policies. Britain, in this view, thought that the powers of the Dual Alliance and the Triple Alliance were so preoccupied with one another that Britain could do whatever it wanted.⁴⁷⁹ Holstein proposed challenging that belief by forming a continental league with France and Russia, an idea that was quickly adopted. The goal was not to form a permanent anti-British alliance, but rather to convince Britain to rethink its policies. First, the Chancellor explained, the league would show Britain that it was wrong to believe that other powers had “neither time nor the means for resisting England's gradual expansion outside Europe.”⁴⁸⁰ Second, and more importantly, it would convince Britain to turn toward the Triple Alliance in Europe.⁴⁸¹ England would not be attracted to the Triple Alliance as long as she found that she could “remain between the two hostile groups, not only quite happily, but also to be able to continue expanding.”⁴⁸² Once Britain observed that the cooperation among the powers was possible, Britain would “abandon her present system of

⁴⁷⁹ Quote on p. 372; Marschall to Hatzfeldt, December 28, 1895 and Memorandum by Baron von Marschall, December 31, 1895, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:370–372; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 786.

⁴⁸⁰ Hohenlohe, to Count Munster, January 1, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:376–377.

⁴⁸¹ Memorandum by Baron von Holstein, December 30, 1895, in *Ibid.*, 2:373–374. The British had also recently rejected an Italian request for help in its campaign in Abyssinia. Further evidence, for the Germans, that Britain failed to understand the importance of supporting the Triple Alliance; The Chancellor, Prince von Hohenlohe, to Count Munster, January 1, 1896, in *Ibid.*, 2:376–377. European considerations were always a countervailing consideration on German policy choices. In this case, the content of the proposal shows that Germany was unwilling to press a continental league to protect its colonial interests at the expense of its security in Europe. In order to keep British interests aligned with those of the Triple Alliance, the proposal explicitly excluded any cooperation on the Egyptian question. If France pushed Britain out of Egypt, Britain might simply withdraw from the Mediterranean all together, removing the strongest basis for cooperation with the Triple Alliance. The Chancellor's instructions show that the Germans saw larger issues at stake beyond the narrow crisis in Transvaal. He instructed his minister in Paris to put forward the proposal making it “look as though we were trying to obtain for ourselves the support of other Powers in this Transvaal question.” In fact, he explained, the primary goal was to reorient Britain toward the Triple Alliance more generally; The Chancellor, Prince von Hohenlohe, to Count Munster, January 1, 1896, in *Ibid.*, 2:376.

⁴⁸² The Chancellor, Prince von Hohenlohe, to Count Munster, January 1, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:377.

driving the two continental groups against each other.”⁴⁸³ Upon learning of the Jameson raid, the Germans proposed the idea to Russia and France.⁴⁸⁴

Britain’s naval response to the Kruger telegram caused a more significant increase in threat perceptions.⁴⁸⁵ The strongest evidence that German threat perceptions increased is found in German actions. In 1896, Germany initiated its first operational war plans against Britain.⁴⁸⁶ By the end of the year, German vessels abroad received orders for scenarios that included war with Britain.⁴⁸⁷ This was a very significant break with the past. As discussed above, previous German war planning and war gaming only imagined Britain as a possible ally, never an adversary.⁴⁸⁸ Competition caused an increase in German threat assessments that is consistent with the predictions of insecurity theory.

By the end of this period, German assessments of British resolve were incredibly high. As discussed earlier, Germany’s willingness to lend diplomatic, but not material, support to Transvaal’s expansion could be seen as evidence of a moderately high assessment of British

⁴⁸³ The Chancellor, Prince von Hohenlohe, to Count Munster, January 1, 1896, in Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ France refused to consider a continental league because Germany refused to put Egypt on the table. The Kaiser wrote to the Tsar about a continental league, but found no interest there either. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 785; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 233, 248. Germany’s concerns began with reports on December 24, 1895 that a British-instigated rebellion was imminent. News of the raid reached Germany on December 31st. It is not clear that the raid itself significantly increased German threat perceptions beyond where they already were. Rather, it provided the logical timing to put the continental league plan into motion; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:467.

⁴⁸⁵ Kennedy argues that the British response to the Kruger telegram is the major turning point in the Anglo-German relationship. After this period, Britain was no longer seen as an ally or neutral actor, but as an enemy; Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 221.

⁴⁸⁶ Paul M. Kennedy, “The Development of German Naval Operations. Plans against England, 1896-1914,” *The English Historical Review* 89, no. 350 (1974): 48–76; Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics*, 118. Rolf Hobson, *Imperialism at Sea: Naval Strategic Thought, the Ideology of Sea Power, and the Tirpitz Plan, 1875-1914* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 274. Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics*, 120–127.

⁴⁸⁷ Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics*, 132.

⁴⁸⁸ One potentially disconfirming piece of evidence is a sarcastic marginal comment, written by the Kaiser, saying that the British should thank him for providing a pretext for establishing the new flying squadron, which could be used against France and Russia. That could indicate that the Kaiser did not think it was aimed at Germany. However, the evidence of a significant change in German war planning seems to overwhelm this potentially off-handed comment by the Kaiser about one aspect of the British naval response. Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:403.

resolve in 1894. At some point in 1895, as British policies became increasingly competitive, Germany abandoned this policy. Most likely, this change reflects an increased assessment of British resolve that is consistent with the expectations of both theories.

The German logic in this period is, however, more consistent with insecurity theory claim that rising states fear that challenges are risky. There is little evidence for opportunism theory's prediction that revisionists see challenges as relatively risk-free. The Germans believed that even a perceived challenge could be dangerous. This assessment likely explains why Germany was cautious in its response to the initial reports that a rebellion might be brewing. Germany refused a request from its citizens to send forces and warned the Transvaal against taking any provocative steps.⁴⁸⁹ Following the Jameson raid, the Germans warned the Transvaal against making political demands, which were "bound to lead to war."⁴⁹⁰

This fear of escalation also explains Germany's ultimate decision to send the Kruger telegram rather than choosing a military response to the Jameson raid. True to form, the Kaiser's initial reaction to the raid was more extreme than the decision that resulted from consultation with his advisors. He wanted to declare a protectorate over Transvaal. In making this case, he initially made arguments consistent with opportunism theory: the Germans could keep a land conflict in Transvaal from escalating to a naval war. However, the Chancellor and the foreign minister persuaded the Kaiser that this logic was flawed and that his proposals were dangerous.⁴⁹¹ When the Kaiser still insisted that Germany must do something to respond to the raid, the Germans sent a note congratulating President Kruger on "restoring peace and in

⁴⁸⁹ Bixler, *Anglo-German Imperialism in South Africa*, 78–79.

⁴⁹⁰ Marschall to Herff, January 5, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:390.

⁴⁹¹ Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 235–237.

maintaining the independence of the country against attacks from without.”⁴⁹² A few days later, the Kaiser once again put forward a provocative proposal. This time, he wanted to order the navy to occupy the port at Delagoa Bay if the British appeared poised to take it. Once again, the Chancellor convinced him to abandon the idea, arguing that such a policy would result in a wider war.⁴⁹³

As British competition continued into 1897, the Germans eventually assessed that defending the status quo in southern Africa was too risky. Holstein argued that almost any German policy, even another political statement like the Kruger telegram, could lead to war with Britain. But to abandon Transvaal with nothing to show for it would have resulted in a backlash from German imperialist and nationalist groups.⁴⁹⁴ Holstein therefore proposed pursuing negotiations to address the dual risks at home and abroad. Germany would accept British expansion in Southern Africa in return for a territorial concession that would satisfy the German public. With the Kaiser’s blessing, Germany once proposed negotiations in May 1897, a suggestion Britain rejected.⁴⁹⁵

Overall, Britain’s material competition provoked changes in German thinking that are more consistent with insecurity theory. German leaders were clearly threatened. They

⁴⁹² Ibid., 237. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 785. The Kaiser also wanted to send a German military advisor to the Transvaal. On January 5, the Chancellor succeeded in cancelling such a plan; Bixler, *Anglo-German Imperialism in South Africa*, 91. At least part of the motivation for sending the telegram may have been to gain support for the Kaiser’s naval program. The Kaiser’s January 18, 1896 speech declaring that the German empire was now global, was also a way to take advantage of the Transvaal crisis to build support for more naval spending; Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 220; Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics*, 118; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*.

⁴⁹³ The emperor’s marginalia showed his acceptance, writing “I think differently, but I submit,” Hohenlohe to Emperor William, January 7, 1896, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:392–393.

⁴⁹⁴ In 1890, then Chancellor Caprivi had been punished for making colonial concessions, even though he gained the strategically valuable island of Helgoland off the German coast.

⁴⁹⁵ The British prime minister saw no reason to negotiate with Germany over the issue since he expected that the show of force would change Transvaal’s behavior; Holstein to Hatzfeldt, May 4 and Hatzfeldt to Holstein, May 12 1897, in Rich and Fisher, *The Holstein Papers*, 1963, 4:35–36. When Holstein proposed the idea on April 12, Marschall agreed that it was worth exploring the idea. Seligmann argues that the foreign minister was actually opposed to the plan. However, he must have been overruled, since the proposal went forward in May; Holstein to Hatzfeldt, April 12, 1897, in Ibid., 4:21–25; Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa*, 127–128.

reassessed the costs and risks of defending the status quo, expected further encroachments and worried that a conflict could not stay localized. In the end, they assessed that they would have to accept the extension of British control in southern Africa because stopping it would be too costly. As both theories expect, assessments of resolve increased. However, the German view that a challenge would be very risky and could result in a wider war is more consistent with the logic of insecurity theory (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5: Southern Africa III: Predicted and Actual German Response to Material Competition

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Threatened. Raid could indicate that more encroachments are likely. Deployments make it more likely that a local conflict will escalate to a wider war.	No change. Benign view of the dominant state is entrenched. The raid is an isolated event.	Threatened. Germany assesses that defending the status quo is risky and begins operational naval planning	Insecurity Theory
Assessment of British Resolve	Deterred. Britain may be more resolute than previously believed. Since challenges are risky, better to err on the side of caution.	Deterred. Material competition indicates that the time is not right for a challenge.	Deterred. Germany abandons its diplomatic support of Transvaal's expansion.	Insecurity theory. Germany worried that a challenge could lead to a wider war, a logic inconsistent with opportunism theory.

Eastern Question II: Material Conciliation

1896 also saw new developments on the Eastern question. A Christian rebellion on the island of Crete broke out in the summer of 1896. In August, an Armenian group attacked the

Ottoman Bank and Turkish authorities responded with renewed violence against Armenian civilians. For some time, these developments had no impact on British policy, which remained competitive as it had been in 1895.⁴⁹⁶

But then, in 1897, British policy became more conciliatory. Early that year, Creten rebels announced they would annex themselves to Greece and the Greeks sent a force to the island.⁴⁹⁷ This development led the British to choose material conciliation. Britain joined the other powers in landing a small force of Marines in Crete and blockading the Cretan coast. The British would not go further, rejecting the Kaiser's proposal for a blockade of the Greek coast.⁴⁹⁸ Still, compared to using the British navy independently, this was a notable shift in policy.

Predicted Change in German Perceptions

Both theories expect Britain's material conciliation to reassure Germany, though for different reasons. Insecurity theory contends that rising states face serious consequences if they underestimate threats, which makes them hard to reassure. These states therefore, only downgrade their assessments in response to material, not just diplomatic, conciliation. In this case, Britain's chose material conciliation when it coordinated its military operations with the other powers. When militaries work together, they have more insight into each other's movements and there is less risk of escalation due to uncertainty or miscalculation about each other's intentions. The Germans, therefore, should have been reassured by this shift in British policy. In opportunism theory, revisionist states are much more easily reassured. They hold a

⁴⁹⁶ The British continued to call for cooperation, but operated naval forces unilaterally.

⁴⁹⁷ Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:433; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 317–319, 325; Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power*, 266.

⁴⁹⁸ Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 357–366; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:480–481; Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd ed (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 84.

relatively benign image of the dominant state and are eager to accept new information that confirms this view. This theory expects that the Germans would have been reassured even if Britain had only pursued diplomatic conciliation.

Change in German Perceptions: No Change

As discussed earlier, German threat perceptions on the Eastern Question had been elevated since 1895. In August 1896, Holstein took the same view he had taken the year before, writing that Britain was trying to provoke a continental war “in order to establish herself comfortably in Egypt and Southern Africa.”⁴⁹⁹ The Kaiser wrote of the need to “unmask” the real aims of British policy.⁵⁰⁰ He also speculated that Britain would provoke competition on the Eastern Question, encourage French attacks on Germany, and seize German colonies for itself. He wrote, “[British Prime Minister] Salisbury will set Gaul at our heels! Then *vogue la galère*, and good-bye Africa for us?!”⁵⁰¹ The Chancellor, though using less colorful language, also remained concerned about British policy. He referred to the “conscious and consistent efforts of the London Cabinet to produce a state of war in the East, and with it a condition of stress for certain continental Cabinets.”⁵⁰² With their threat perceptions on the Eastern Question still elevated, the Germans continued to assess that the best way for Germany to respond to this risk

⁴⁹⁹ Holstein to Hatzfeldt, August 4, 1896, in Rich and Fisher, *The Holstein Papers*, 1961, 3:644. In the spring of 1896, the British sent a force into the Sudan, a policy that may have been intended, in part, to help the Italians in their fight against the Abyssinians. The Germans were relieved that the policy made it impossible for Britain and France to settle their differences on Egypt and Sudan. However, as the above narrative shows, this policy did not reassure the Germans more generally about Britain’s European intentions; Roland Anthony Oliver and G. N. Sanderson, “The European Partitiodn of Africa: Origins and Dynamics,” in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 149. Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:475. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 282–284. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 797–798. For German correspondence on the topic, see, Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:422–423, 429.

⁵⁰⁰ Marginal note on a February 1897 report quoted in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 939.

⁵⁰¹ Kaiser’s marginal comments on Count Hatzfeldt to the Chancellor, Prince von Hohenlohe, January 7, 1897, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:440.

⁵⁰² Hohenlohe to Eulenburg, February 6, 1897, in *Ibid.*, 2:444.

was to continue to "stay completely in the background so long as there is no unity between the continental powers and England."⁵⁰³

Contrary to the expectations of both theories, German threat perceptions on the Eastern Question remained elevated even after Britain chose conciliation in 1897. Though insecurity theory gets the prediction wrong, it gets the logic right. The Germans were so suspicious of British aims that they did not even acknowledge that Britain had shifted to a more conciliatory policy. Rather than seeing Britain's military cooperation, Holstein pointed to Britain's refusal to do more to stop the rebellion. Britain, he suspected, was intentionally encouraging Greece to annex Crete in order to set off a larger chain of events. Greek success, he argued, would embolden the other Balkan states to make territorial demands on the Ottomans, creating conflict among the continental powers. In the end, Britain would get the continental war "which has been the goal of her diplomatic activity for almost two years."⁵⁰⁴ To prevent this dangerous chain of events, German diplomats approached Russia and France about negotiations to prevent the annexation of Crete to Greece.⁵⁰⁵ The Kaiser took this policy even further, meeting personally with the European ambassadors in Berlin to build support for a blockade of Greece.⁵⁰⁶ The Germans were not, as opportunism theory expects, easily reassured. Instead, Britain's material conciliation was simply not enough to overcome German fears, a logic more consistent with insecurity theory (Table 5.6).

⁵⁰³ Holstein to Hatzfeldt, August 4, 1896, in Rich and Fisher, *The Holstein Papers*, 1961, 3:644.

⁵⁰⁴ Holstein Memorandum, April 19, 1897, as cited in Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:481.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 2:479–480. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 347–348.

⁵⁰⁶ It is unclear why the Kaiser became so personally invested in the issue. His behavior was so far outside of diplomatic norms that the British ambassador described him as "violently excited against England" and "in a wild state of excitement" over the events in Crete. Röhl attributes the Kaiser's behavior to personal animosity toward the Greek government. However, given past behavior, it also seems plausible that he wanted to magnify the issue for fleet propaganda purposes; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 938–941. British ambassador quoted p. 939; Germany abandoned its effort to gain support for a blockade in April when war broke out between Greece and Turkey. At that point, Marschall assessed that the Greeks knew that Britain supported their cause and, therefore, the blockade threat would not be effective; Rich and Fisher, *The Holstein Papers*, 1963, 4:26.

Table 5.6: Eastern Question II: Predicted and Actual German Response to Material Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	Reassured. Material conciliation can reduce the risks of escalation or be a costly signal of benign intentions	Reassured. Further evidence to support their benign view of the dominant state.	No change. Germany was so suspicious of British aims that this signal was not enough to reassure.	Partial support for Insecurity theory. Prediction is wrong, but logic is consistent with the theory.

Alliance Negotiations and Loans to Portugal: Diplomatic Conciliation

In 1898, Britain chose diplomatic conciliation on two issues. First, members of the British cabinet approached Germany about a possible alliance. Britain's offer was primarily intended to oppose Russian advances in the Far East, where Britain and Germany's interests were largely aligned.⁵⁰⁷ But the proposal of an alliance, a long-term political arrangement, meant discussions on the conflicting interests between them. No alliance resulted from these talks, but the two sides left the door open to the possibility of more limited forms of cooperation in the future.⁵⁰⁸

Second, in the summer of 1898, Britain added diplomatic conciliation to its policies in southern Africa as well. During the alliance negotiations, Britain's policy in southern Africa had

⁵⁰⁷ Britain had historically resisted efforts to partition China, but by 1897, Russian expansionism had changed British thinking. In May 1897, the British Prime Minister told Germany it could seize a coastal area of China, though Britain would expect some compensation in return. The German seizure of Kiaochow, within the Russian sphere of influence, was therefore not a conflict of interest with the British. British involvement came when the Russians seized Port Arthur, which in turn resulted in Britain taking Weihaiwei, another coastal area; Hatzfeldt to Hohenlohe, May 12, 1897, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1929, 2:482. Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 956–958. Holstein to Hatzfeldt, November 18, 1897, in Rich and Fisher, *The Holstein Papers*, 1963, 4:55. Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:556, 561–564. This policy was the result of divisions within the British cabinet. The colonial secretary, Chamberlain, pursued this policy while the Prime Minister was away; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 974. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 150–151.

⁵⁰⁸ Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 974–978; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890–1902*, 495–504.

remained competitive as it had been since 1895. The Germans learned that Britain was secretly negotiating a loan with cash-strapped Portugal. Portuguese East Africa, which included the area around Delagoa Bay, would be among the areas acting as collateral on the loan.⁵⁰⁹ When the negotiations came to light, Germany asked to be included in the deal. Britain dismissed the request, contending that Germany had no legitimate interests at stake.⁵¹⁰ However, in June, British policy turned more conciliatory. The British conceded that the Portuguese colonies were a matter of German interest and opened negotiations over the loan issue.⁵¹¹ The British view of German intentions in southern Africa had not really changed. The colonial secretary, for example, characterized the loan negotiations as paying “blackmail to induce [Germany] not to interfere” and argued that he “never anticipated that the Germans would be so greedy.”⁵¹²

However, at least some British leaders assessed that it was worth the price. They hoped that settling their differences with Germany might make Transvaal more cooperative.⁵¹³ An agreement was signed on August 30, 1898. Under the agreement, each country would make a loan to Portugal, with income from a designated part of the Portuguese colonies acting as collateral. Secretly, the two countries agreed to deter any such interference from outside powers and not to extract concessions from Portugal as long as she could maintain control of her colonies.⁵¹⁴ Moreover, they agreed on how to divide Portuguese colonies in the event that the Portuguese empire collapsed. Of relevance to southern Africa, the agreement left the southern part of Portuguese East Africa, including Delagoa Bay, within the British sphere. The German

⁵⁰⁹ Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 186–187.

⁵¹⁰ Hatzfeldt to the German Foreign Office, June 13, 1898, in E. T. S. Dugdale, ed., *German Diplomatic Documents, 1871-1914*, vol. 3 (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1930). Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 188–191.

⁵¹¹ Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 191.

⁵¹² Chamberlain to Balfour, August 19 and August 23, 1898, as cited in Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, 448. For similar views from other British leaders throughout the process, see, Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 523–524.

⁵¹³ Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 197.

⁵¹⁴ Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:588–589. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 193–195.

sphere included the northern part of Portuguese East Africa and central Angola.⁵¹⁵ To summarize, over the course of the spring and summer of 1898, Britain had embarked on two policies of diplomatic conciliation: the alliance negotiations and the Portuguese loan agreement.

Predicted Change in German Perceptions

Insecurity theory does not expect any changes in German perceptions in this period. First, the theory contends that the international system gives rising states strong incentives to be cautious. These states face high costs to underestimating threats or the dominant state's resolve and therefore they are hesitant to downgrade their assessments. In this case, Britain's diplomatic conciliation is simply not a strong enough signal to reassure or embolden the Germans. Opportunism theory, however, expects that these policies will reassure the Germans and even embolden them to demand more. Rising revisionists do not worry that much about the consequences of underestimating threat or resolve. At the same time, they have strong domestic reasons to try to make gains whenever possible. For the Germans, Britain's offer of an alliance and willingness to negotiate on questions in southern Africa should be seen as a promising sign that British resolve might be weakening. Since there is little risk to making challenges, opportunism theory expects the Germans to push harder to see if gains might be made.

Actual Change in German Perceptions: None

As insecurity theory expects, British conciliation had no impact on German threat perceptions. Another development, a May 1897 agreement between Russia and Austria, meant that Britain could no longer exploit divisions on the Eastern Question to provoke a European

⁵¹⁵ Butler, "The German Factor in Anglo-Transvaal Relations," 205.

war. But German leaders still had a heightened concern that Britain would sacrifice them to France and Russia over some other issue. The offer of an alliance in the Far East was, therefore, viewed with suspicion. Holstein wrote that the alliance offer was “a clever move whose only purpose is to compromise us with Russia and France.”⁵¹⁶ The Germans were therefore unwilling to bear the costs of an alliance, hostility from Russia and France in Europe, without far greater assurances from Britain.⁵¹⁷ When Britain chose further conciliation by consenting to negotiations on the loans to Portugal, Holstein remained suspicious, expecting that Britain would somehow manipulate the terms.⁵¹⁸

At the same time, there is no evidence that British conciliation on the alliance negotiations led the Germans to reassess British resolve. There are two pieces of evidence that German assessments remained constant. First, German demands on the southern Africa question were the same in 1898 as they had been in 1897, prior to British conciliation. As discussed earlier, in 1897, the Germans had been ready to accept British dominance in southern Africa in exchange for some small territorial concession that could be used to sell the policy at home. In 1898, they still had a similar view. As the foreign minister explained, “we were isolated against England in protecting German interests in South Africa, the only course left was to reach an understanding direct with England on the Southern Africa question.”⁵¹⁹ However, the Germans still expected some concession that would help them with their domestic audience. Bülow sent

⁵¹⁶ Holstein to Hatzfeldt, May 15, 1898, in Rich and Fisher, *The Holstein Papers*, 1963, 4:77.

⁵¹⁷ The Germans, for example, insisted that any alliance would have to cover European questions and be approved by the British Parliament. Britain’s leaders were unwilling, however, to make such a far reaching commitment. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 234–235; Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy*, 161, 172; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:578–579; Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle*, 129.

⁵¹⁸ These concerns were well-placed. When Boer War broke out in 1899, Britain negotiated a secret treaty with Portugal to control the flow of arms and goods to Transvaal, violating the spirit, if not the letter of the treaty with Germany; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:588.

⁵¹⁹ Bülow to Prince von Radolin, Very Confidential, September 2, 1898, in Dugdale, *German Diplomatic Documents*, 1930.

the ambassador in London a long list of colonies that imperialists hoped to gain and asked him to determine which things the British might be willing to concede in a settlement in southern Africa.⁵²⁰ The consistency of the German approach to the negotiations on southern Africa both before and after British conciliation suggests that there was no substantial change in assessments of British resolve, despite a change in British policy. Second, the Germans did not speak about Britain as weak-willed as one might expect if they had been emboldened. Instead, throughout the negotiations, the Germans showed logic consistent with insecurity theory. They pointed to their material weakness and saw it as limiting what they could gain. Acknowledging that Germany was going to get the smaller part of the bargain, Holstein wrote, “but we must not forget that they are now stronger than we are at sea, and will be for years.”⁵²¹ The Kaiser put the same sentiment in more colorful language, arguing that the British prime minister was “trifling around simply because he is not afraid of us, because we have no fleet”⁵²² In the end, Germany accepted a deal without any of the territory it hoped to gain. Instead, it simply gained diplomatic promises to divide the spoils of the Portuguese territories at a future date.

These diplomatic gains did not embolden Germany either, further evidence against the predictions of opportunism theory. Following the agreement on the Portuguese colonies, the Germans ended their support for the Transvaal, a politically unpopular move. Nor is there evidence that Germany was emboldened to pursue gains elsewhere. Notable is Germany’s continued restraint in Samoa, where domestic pressure for unilateral German action was high. The death of the Samoan King in August 1898 left a succession crisis and the possibility that

⁵²⁰ This list included parts of east and west Africa, islands in Asia, as well as the Caroline and Samoan Islands in the Pacific. Most of these belonged to the dying empires of Spain and Portugal; Bülow to Hatzfeldt, June 8, 1898, in *Ibid.*, 3:28. British leaders resented Germany’s demands; Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 524.

⁵²¹ Holstein to Eulenburg, July 21, 1898, as quoted in Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:588.

⁵²² Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 982.

civil unrest would bring further harm to Germany's commercial interests. Although Britain had recently conciliated, Germany was still deterred from taking action. Germany once again proposed negotiations and refrained from a military response when Britain refused to talk. Instead, Germany offered new concessions if Britain would accept a deal (Table 5.7).⁵²³

Table 5.7: Alliance Proposal: Predicted and Actual German Response to Diplomatic Conciliation

Perception	Predicted Change		Actual Change	Theory Supported
	Insecurity Theory	Opportunism Theory		
Threat Perceptions	No change. Diplomatic conciliation is a cheap signal, so it might be a bluff.	Reassured. Validates benign view of the dominant state.	No change. Still concerned about British aims in Europe.	Insecurity Theory
Assessment of British Resolve	No change. Challenges are risky so states are not willing to reassess resolve based on moderate policy change.	Emboldened. Challenges are not that risky, so it is worth reassessing based on any conciliatory policy.	No change. No new demands in southern Africa or Samoa.	Insecurity Theory

Conclusion

In the 1890s, Germany was a rising state with ambitions to make further territorial gains. However, this chapter shows that these ambitions did not lead Germany to engage in wishful thinking about the threat Britain posed or Britain's resolve to defend the status quo. As insecurity theory expects, Germany carefully tracked British policies to make assessments about the possibility of loss. Some might argue that German leaders only pointed to such policies to

⁵²³ Britain remained unwilling to negotiate because of concerns about colonial reactions in Australia; Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:590–591.

justify their plans for an increase to the fleet.⁵²⁴ However, two factors suggest that concerns about British intentions in both Europe and southern Africa were genuine. First, the evidence cited in this chapter relies on private correspondence between Germany's top decision makers rather than public statements aimed at selling the fleet plan. Second, and more importantly, this chapter shows that even fleet skeptics like Holstein and Chancellor Hohenlohe saw British competition as threatening.⁵²⁵

The case also provides evidence against opportunism theory's claim that revisionist states are easily emboldened. There is no evidence that Germany reconsidered challenges in 1894 or 1898 after Britain backed down over questions in southern Africa. Nor did Britain's offer of a Far Eastern alliance embolden Germany to make more demands. The theory would have failed an even harder test if there had been more than one example of material conciliation in this period. Still, these findings combined with additional evidence about German thinking should be seen as important evidence against opportunism theory. German leaders simply did not think about the world as opportunism theory expects. The Germans did not see challenges as low-risk endeavors. Instead, the Germans understood that challenges could lead to war and that war would bring them into conflict with a materially stronger power. Therefore, they were not waiting for the slightest conciliatory gesture that might indicate a change in resolve, as opportunism theory expects. Instead, the Germans knew that a challenge to the territorial status quo would only be possible once the distribution of material capabilities changed. The Kaiser's large fleet plan, launched in 1897, was intended, in part, to initiate such a change.⁵²⁶ As the

⁵²⁴ German leaders certainly did use the British threat cynically to build public support for the navy; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 359.

⁵²⁵ For their views on the fleet, see for example, Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein*, 1965, 2:505.

⁵²⁶ Insecurity theory cannot offer any insight into the initiation of the fleet program, which had its origins in the ideas of the Kaiser and domestic politics. The central role of unit-level variables in the fleet program is a challenge

Kaiser explained, “only when we can hold our mailed fist against his face, will the British lion draw back.”⁵²⁷ Overall, the Germans were not easily emboldened and understood that their

existing material weakness limited what they might gain, as insecurity theory expects.

British competition and the fear it produced had both positive and negative effects for British interests. On the positive side, British competition convinced Germany that defending the status quo in southern Africa was too risky. Therefore, Germany ultimately abandoned the area with very little compensation. But German concerns on the Eastern Question and inability to defend its interests in southern Africa also had downsides. German leaders developed operational naval plans against England after the dispute over the Kruger Telegram. And several times, German leaders considered forming anti-British ententes with France and Russia. Though Germany’s high assessments of British resolve did deter immediate German expansion in Samoa, Germany’s desire to expand did not go away. Instead, Germany sought a larger fleet so that it might one day be able to achieve its objectives.

to realist theories of foreign policy. It is not, however, a problem for insecurity theory, which focuses on the formation of perceptions and accepts that perceptions are only one of many variables that determine policy choice.

⁵²⁷ This particular comment was made in reference to America’s recent coercive success against Britain in a dispute over Venezuela. He attributed the outcome to U.S. military strength; November 1897 note as cited in Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 224. The initial fleet plan, which contended that Germany could shift the distribution of material capabilities quickly, was strategically misguided. Tirpitz’s risk theory claimed that Germany would be able to deter a British attack and pursue new gains without having to out-build Britain. Germany only had to be able to inflict enough damage that Britain would be vulnerable to a Franco-Russian attack. This belief in the value that would be derived from a small fleet relied on two faulty assumptions. First, that Britain’s differences with France and Russia were entirely irreconcilable. Second, that British were so committed to their colonial holdings that they would not retrench to defend the homeland. Many domestic political factors combined to keep Germany on a self-defeating course. Among them was the political constituency that the Kaiser created in industry and in society more broadly; Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday’s Deterrent; Tirpitz and the Birth of the German Battle Fleet*. (New York: Macmillan, 1966); Paul M. Kennedy, *Tirpitz, England, and the Second Navy Law of 1900: A Strategic Critique* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1970); Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 228.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Do a dominant state's policies have a greater effect on a rising state's threat perceptions or its assessment of the dominant state's resolve? As discussed in Chapter 1, this question is at the core of debates surrounding U.S. policy toward China. Many commentators argue that rising states are easily emboldened by conciliation but are not easily threatened. This argument, which motivates much of U.S. policy, relies on variations of Jervis's deterrence model, which is theoretically underdeveloped and has not been rigorously tested.

In order to advance theoretical and policy debates, this project proposed a new approach for assessing how a dominant state's policies affect a rising state's perceptions. Rather than following the traditional approach of dividing states by type – status quo or revisionist – I assumed that the rising state cares both about maintaining what it has and about making gains. Then, I asked what incentives such a rising state faces in the international system. I argued that anarchy and uncertainty about the dominant state's present and future intentions create strong incentives for a state on the rise. These incentives – more than any other factor – shape how a rising state makes calculations about the threat the dominant state poses and its resolve to defend the status quo. I also developed an alternative, opportunism theory, which expanded upon the conventional wisdom. Opportunism theory contends that psychological factors, rather than the pressures of the system, shape a rising revisionist's calculations. In order to reduce the psychological stress associated with difficult decisions and the uncertainty of a changing distribution of power, the rising state adopts a set of simplifying beliefs about the international system. In particular, it believes that the dominant state's intentions are benign and will only change under the most extreme circumstances. This belief convinces the rising state that it faces very little tradeoff to pursuing expansion and so very little downside to underestimating resolve.

I set up a hard test for insecurity theory and an easy test for opportunism theory by choosing cases of rising revisionists that had strong domestic political forces motivating expansion: the United States (1837-1846) and Germany (1894-1898). Such states should be among the most resistant to the pressures of the international system, the driving force behind insecurity theory. The findings from these hard cases provided evidence in support of three of insecurity theory's key hypotheses.

First, rising states are easily threatened by competition. This hypothesis enjoys the strongest empirical support. As Tables 6.1 and 6.2 show, there were many cases where Britain made competitive policy changes. In all but one of these cases, the rising state was threatened. Elevated threat perceptions came in two forms. In some cases, U.S. and German leaders saw British competition as an indication that Britain already had expansive aims. For example, British competition on the Eastern Question led German leaders to fear that Britain planned to create security competition among the powers in order to make its gains for itself. In other cases, the rising state saw competition an indication that British intentions were more likely to expand in the future. For example, Britain's competitive approach to the suppression of the slave trade led the United States to worry about slippery slopes: if the United States allowed the right of visit, Britain would soon get hungry for more and abuse the right in a wider range of situations. In another example, the U.S. worried that British troop movements along the disputed northeastern boundary increased the risk that Britain would expand its control in the disputed territory in the future. In these situations, the rising states often adopted policies such as deterrence or negotiation that sought to stop the expansion of British aims. In addition to correctly predicting changes in the rising state's perceptions, the theory correctly predicted the logic underlying the rising states' calculations. Both the United States and Germany were highly

alert to the possibility of loss, believed that British intentions could change at any time, and knew that major war in which they would be at a material disadvantage was a real possibility. They did not, as opportunism theory expects, assume that Britain had benign intentions or downplay the risks in the international system.

Table 6.1: Overview of U.S. Cases

Incident	Policy Change	Change in Threat Perceptions	Change in Assessment of Resolve	Theory Supported
Northern Border I	Material competition	Threatened. Future encroachments		Insecurity theory
Northern Border II	Mixed (Material competition and material conciliation)	Somewhat reassured, still alert		Insecurity theory
Northeastern Boundary I	Mixed (Material competition and diplomatic conciliation)	Threatened.	Insufficient evidence of to assess change. But U.S. had worries about escalation	Insecurity theory
Maritime Policy	Material competition	Threatened		Insecurity Theory
Northern Border III	Material competition	Threatened		Insecurity Theory
Northeastern Boundary II	Material competition	Threatened	Insufficient evidence of to assess change. But U.S. had worries about escalation.	Insecurity Theory
McLeod Affair	Material competition	Threatened		Insecurity Theory
Maritime Policy II	Mixed (Diplomatic competition and Material conciliation)	No change. Worried about expanding British aims.		Insecurity Theory
Maritime Policy III	Diplomatic conciliation	No change.		Insecurity Theory
Webster-Ashburton Treaty	Material Conciliation	Reassured	No Change	Insecurity Theory
Texas	Diplomatic competition	Threatened	Small increase.	Insecurity Theory
Oregon	Diplomatic competition	No Change	No change	Opportunism Theory
Texas II	Material Conciliation	Reassured	No change	Insecurity theory
Oregon II	Material Competition	No change	No change	Opportunism Theory

Note: Grey boxes indicate that the rising state had no expansive aims on that particular question.

Table 6.2: Overview of German Cases

Incident	Policy	Threat	Resolve	Supports
Southern Africa I	Diplomatic Conciliation	No change	No change	Insecurity Theory
Southern Africa II	Material competition	Threatened	Insufficient evidence	Insecurity Theory
Eastern Question I	Material competition	Threatened		Insecurity Theory
Southern Africa III	Material competition	Threatened	Deterred	Insecurity Theory
Eastern Question II	Material conciliation	No change. (Threat perceptions too high)		Insecurity Theory (Partial support)
Alliance Proposal	Diplomatic Conciliation	No change	No change	Insecurity Theory

Note: Grey boxes indicate that the rising state had no expansive aims on that particular question.

Second, rising states are hard to reassure. Although there were fewer instances of British conciliation, insecurity theory correctly predicted German and U.S. responses in every case. In the two cases where diplomatic conciliation was used by itself, the rising states were not reassured. Rather, it took material conciliation - territorial concessions or the drawdown of forces - to reassure. In one case, during crisis over Crete in 1897, even material conciliation was not enough to reduce German threat perceptions. Most importantly, there is no evidence that U.S. or German leaders uncritically accepted conciliatory policies as opportunism theory expects.

Third, rising states are not easily emboldened. Most strikingly, the British decision to make territorial concessions on the Maine-New Brunswick boundary dispute had no impact on U.S. assessments of British resolve to defend its holdings in Oregon. Similarly, Britain's acceptance of the U.S. annexation of Texas did not lead the United States to automatically assume that Britain would accept further U.S. encroachments on Mexican territory. Although

U.S. assessments of British resolve on Oregon changed when Polk took office, past British conciliation was not the cause. Likewise, Germany did not see Britain as irresolute in either case where it backed down on questions in Africa. This hypothesis would enjoy stronger support if, on an issue where Germany had expansive aims, Britain used material conciliation and Germany was not emboldened. Unfortunately, cases of material conciliation of revisionist states are difficult to find, due to the strong belief that such policies embolden.⁵²⁸ In spite of this challenge, future research should continue to look for such cases.

Evidence on a fourth hypothesis - competition leads a rising state to increase its assessment of the dominant state's resolve – is limited and the available evidence offers mixed support. In two cases – U.S. views about British resolve on Texas and German assessments in southern Africa - there is some evidence that assessments of resolve increased following British competition. In three other cases, U.S. and German leaders already saw Britain as resolute and there was not enough evidence to assess whether British competition further increased these assessments. That being said, in two of those cases there was strong evidence that the United States applied a logic consistent with insecurity theory: they believed that Britain would escalate to major war if challenged. Still, Polk's contention that British threats were merely bluffs during the Oregon crisis, presents some disconfirming evidence for the argument. Overall, this hypothesis requires further testing.

There was limited support for opportunism theory in the U.S. case. During the Oregon crisis, the United States did not show a high degree of sensitivity to British competition:

⁵²⁸ Finding examples of material conciliation in non-British cases might be even more challenging. Historians have pointed out that 19th century Britain was more willing than other states to pursue conciliatory policies. Yet, as the previous chapters showed, even British leaders were reluctant to pursue such policies, believing that even diplomatic conciliation would embolden; Paul M. Kennedy, "The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939," *British Journal of International Studies* 2, no. 3 (1976): 195–215.

diplomatic competition did not provoke a reassessment of the threat Britain posed or of British resolve. This success for opportunism theory suggests the need for more research about the conditions under which its logic applies. It might be that a rising state's leaders are more likely to downplay the risk of challenges in the during the most extreme interactions – where the dominant state has a peripheral interest at stake and the rising state makes an entirely unprovoked challenge based on purely greedy motives. However, the findings from the other cases show that opportunism theory's explanatory power is quite limited. After all, President Tyler, a known annexationist, was still easily threatened on Texas and deterred on Oregon. Similarly, imperialist Germany was easily threatened in southern Africa and was deterred from taking action in Samoa, where he was under strong domestic pressure to act. Most importantly, there are no examples of opportunism theory's central prediction that rising states are easily emboldened by conciliation.

Ultimately, these cases provide stronger support for insecurity theory and its central claim that rising states – even those with revisionist aims - are more easily threatened than they are emboldened. Although this theory contends that the international system induces caution in a rising state's calculations, the theory does not take a benign view of rising states or of the risks involved in a changing distribution of power. The theory assumes that the rising state is interested in making gains and might, even at an early stage in its rise, pursue expansion against the dominant state's peripheral interests. As the rising revisionist gets stronger, the theory expects that the rising state might even challenge some of the dominant state's more important interests. Still, the theory argues that the rising state's motives and its ambitions do not fundamentally alter how it interprets the dominant state's policies. These states are easily threatened by competition, but are not easily emboldened by conciliation.

Implications for Theory

This project produces two important implications for international relations theory. First, the project shows that a state's type does not determine how it perceives others' policies. The literature on how policies affect perceptions, therefore, needs to move beyond Jervis's initial framing. This does not mean that debates about state type are irrelevant. Certainly, understanding the rising state's goals can help a dominant state make decisions about its priorities and where it will want to stand firm. However, a state's type should not be used to make predictions about how the dominant state's policies will affect a rising state's perceptions.

Second, this project further refined the concepts of threat perception and resolve. Scholars treat these as two separate but closely related variables. Yet, the line between them has never been well defined. This project advanced this discussion by developing definitions and practical approaches to measuring these variables. The project showed that these variables do sometimes move together – competition can increase assessments of both threat and resolve – but also showed that they are not always perfectly in sync - conciliatory policies can reassure without lowering a rising state's assessment of the dominant state's resolve. These two variables are at the heart of so many other theories about international politics. Better definitions, may, therefore, shed light on a broader range of international outcomes.

Insecurity Theory and U.S. Policy

This section applies insecurity theory to contemporary debates about U.S. policy toward a rising China. To do so, I first make the case that China falls within the scope of the theory and that this project's findings apply in the current era. Then, I show that insecurity theory raises questions about the logic behind the current mix of U.S. policies.

China Falls Within the Scope

To fall within the scope of insecurity theory, a state must be on the rise but still materially weaker than the dominant state, and cannot be risk acceptant with respect to gains. China meets both criteria. First, China remains weaker than the United States both globally and in Asia. China has certainly increased its military spending as it has grown economically, giving rise to debates about China's current and future military capabilities. Although there is disagreement on the exact military balance, most analysts believe that the United States remains, for now, Asia's and the world's foremost military power.⁵²⁹ Second, although China is potentially a greedy revisionist, but it is not risk acceptant with respect to gains.⁵³⁰ Even those who categorize China as an "assertive" do not claim that China is reckless in pursuit of its goals.⁵³¹

Insecurity Theory Applies in the Modern Era

Although I tested insecurity theory in 19th century cases, the logic still applies today. Neither of the most important differences between the two eras – a denser network of international institutions, the presence of nuclear weapons, or growing economic

⁵²⁹ For an overview of the scholarship on this point, see, Michael Beckley, "China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (2012): 41–78; Avery Goldstein, "First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in U.S.-China Relations," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 49–89.

⁵³⁰ As discussed in Chapter 1, territorial revisionism includes claims to territory that is currently controlled by another state. China has several such claims. For example, its claims in the Senkaku Islands include areas that have long been under Japanese control. China also claims all of Taiwan, where it currently has no territorial control. Many argue that China adopts these policies, in part, for greedy reasons, such as satisfying nationalists at home. On China's claims, see, Fravel, "Power Shifts and Escalation," 82. For arguments that nationalism drives certain Chinese policies, see, Joseph S. Nye, "Our Pacific Predicament," *The American Interest*, February 12, 2013; Thomas J. Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, April 2011.

⁵³¹ Patrick M. Cronin and Robert D. Kaplan, "Cooperation from Strength: U.S. Strategy and the South China Sea," in *Cooperation from Strength: The United States, China and the South China Sea*, ed. Patrick M. Cronin, 2012, 15. For other arguments that China's aims are limited, see, Charles L. Glaser, "Will China's Rise Lead to War?: Why Realism Does Not Mean Pessimism," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2011): 80–91; Bader, *Obama and China's Rise*, 3; M. Taylor Fravel, "Maritime Security in the South China Sea and the Competition over Maritime Rights," in *Cooperation from Strength: The United States, China and the South China Sea*, ed. Patrick M. Cronin, 2012, 31–50.

interdependence – entirely eliminates security competition, the motive force behind insecurity theory. First, although there was a proliferation of international institutions in the 20th century, the United States never committed itself to binding multilateral institutions in Asia. Liberal internationalists argue that it takes deeper commitments, those that restrict the use of the dominant state's power, to reduce the fears associated with its material superiority. However, in Asia where the United States did not build such institutions, these liberal internationalist scholars contend that China and the United States might still fall into traditional security competition.⁵³² Second, there are strong reasons to doubt that having nuclear weapons has entirely eliminated Chinese security fears. If China believes that its nuclear arsenal effectively deters an existential attack, the intensity of the security dilemma between the United States and China may be dampened.⁵³³ However, the Cold War showed that even when two states have large nuclear arsenals, intense security competition can continue. For China, a conventional war with the United States could result in the loss of physical security on the coasts and a massive disruption of trade, especially by sea. I contend that the prospect of a conventional war with the United States, even if it falls short of a war for survival, is enough to induce the kind of caution that insecurity theory expects.⁵³⁴ Finally, economic interdependence between the United States and China likely dampens, but does not eliminate security competition. Britain and the United States had deep and substantial economic ties during the 19th century. This included not just trade, but substantial cross-investment, as discussed in Chapter 3. Although both sides saw these as

⁵³² G. John Ikenberry, "American Hegemony and East Asian Order," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 58, no. 3 (2004): 358–361.

⁵³³ There are reasons to question whether China holds that belief given the small size of its nuclear arsenal. Some have even gone so far as to argue that the United States may have the capability to carry out a successful first-strike against China. If true, China might even harbor fears about survival just like states in the pre-nuclear era; Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 7–44.

⁵³⁴ For an example of an argument that security dilemma dynamics exist in the current U.S.-China relationship, see, M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Search for Military Power," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2008): 125–41.

profitable relationships, they still believed that war might come. On net, security competition may be somewhat less intense in the current era, but remains substantial enough to shape a rising state's calculations.

Lessons for Policy Makers

As discussed in the introduction to this project, many U.S. policy makers and commentators advocate for a more active U.S. role in Asia. The so-called “pivot to Asia” calls for a mix of conciliation - increased diplomatic engagement and cooperation on areas of mutual interest – as well as competition - strengthening U.S. alliances in the region and deploying more U.S. forces. There are many claims about how this type of hedging strategy will promote U.S. interests, many of which fall outside the scope of this project.⁵³⁵ Insecurity theory and this project's findings can, however, challenge two of these claims. First, insecurity theory suggests that this mix of policies is more likely to threaten China than hedging advocates suggest. Simply put, conciliatory diplomacy is not enough to reduce the fears associated with competitive military policies. Second, adopting a more conciliatory stance would not, as many hedging advocates contend, embolden China.

Many hedging advocates contend that further military competition will not threaten a rising China. They argue that the conciliatory aspects of U.S. policy - engaging in strategic dialogues on conflicting interests and “shuttle diplomacy” to coordinate policies on issues of

⁵³⁵ For example, some contend that military competition will assure U.S. allies if the U.S. commitment to the region. Others contend that the current mix of policies will convince China to accept a rules-based order in Asia. Finally, others hope that U.S. policies will strengthen the hand of moderates within China or, that by interacting with the West, China will be transformed, adopting democratic norms and practices;. See for example, Christensen, “The Advantages of an Assertive China”; Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*, 90–91.

mutual interest - are sufficient to U.S. defensive intentions.⁵³⁶ This project raises serious doubts about that claim. Even if China believes that U.S. intentions are entirely defensive now, they will worry that U.S. competition makes it more likely that U.S. aims will expand in the future. With more U.S. forces in the region, there is an increased risk that a minor dispute, for example over one of the offshore islands, could escalate to a wider war.⁵³⁷ The U.S. might be more likely to use force in the face of a perceived Chinese provocation rather than waiting for diplomacy to work. As one commentator put it, “the steps from gun fire to exchanging volleys of anti-ship missiles between the fleets, to theater wide attacks on major bases, to all out global war could be all too abrupt.”⁵³⁸ Alternatively, China might fear that, over time, with a greater presence in the region, the United States might be tempted to use force in ways it had not originally planned.

Even competitive diplomacy could increase Chinese fears. Many commentators argue that the United States should do more to criticize China on issues such as internet freedom, human rights, and the repression of pro-democracy groups.⁵³⁹ Yet, they rarely address the tradeoffs associated with such a policy. This project shows that such policies, even when driven purely by moral considerations, can threaten. In the 19th century, Britain’s efforts to suppress the

⁵³⁶ Michael S. Chase, Timothy R. Heath, and Ely Ratner, “Engagement and Assurance: Debating the U.S.-Chinese Relationship,” *The National Interest*, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/engagement-assurance-debating-the-us-chinese-relationship-11608>. Similar arguments are found in, Nicholas Burns, “The China Challenge,” *BostonGlobe.com*, January 31, 2013, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2013/01/31/the-china-challenge/QNAUbqLMM4bKHXSr6g4E8N/story.html>. Brimley and Ratner, “Smart Shift”; Chase, Heath, and Ratner, “Engagement and Assurance”; Thomas J. Christensen, “Shaping the Choices of a Rising China: Recent Lessons for the Obama Administration,” *Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2009): 90. Ibid.

⁵³⁷ For a similar argument, see, Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why America Should Share Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 124–126. For others who argue that the pivot will threaten or already has threatened China, see, Lyle J. Goldstein, “How China Sees America’s Moves in Asia: Worse Than Containment,” *The National Interest*, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-china-sees-americas-moves-asia-worse-containment-11560>; Ross, “The Problem With the Pivot.”

⁵³⁸ Lyle J. Goldstein, “The World’s Most Dangerous Rivalry: China and Japan,” *The National Interest*, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-world%E2%80%99s-most-dangerous-rivalry-china-japan-11374>.

⁵³⁹ Carla Anderson Hills et al., *U.S.-China Relations: An Affirmative Agenda, a Responsible Course : Report of an Independent Task Force* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2007), 56; Elizabeth Economy, “Don’t Break the Engagement,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (2004): 108.

slave trade through peacetime visits led the United States to worry about whether Britain would go on to use such visits to disrupt American commerce. Similarly, German leaders saw grand designs behind Britain's attempts to coerce the Ottoman sultan over his policy toward Armenians. Insecurity theory suggests that Chinese leaders will look at U.S. competition in one of two ways. They might believe that the U.S. uses moral justification to mask an existing plan to undermine China's economy. Alternatively, China might worry that tough talk on these issues is a signal that the United States might adopt more expansive aims in the future – the United States may decide soon that diplomatic pressure is not enough and instead choose more aggressive policies, such as funding political dissidents within China. The United States may well decide that it is willing to pay the cost of pursuing such policies – a threatened China – but decision makers should be realistic about this potential tradeoff.

At the same time, the British experience suggests that transparency and diplomatic conciliation are unlikely to be sufficient to counteract the fears with either type of competition. If the U.S. goal is truly to reassure, it has a number of options that would do so without emboldening. However, such policies will not come cheap. Dialogues and diplomatic discussions on shared interests are unlikely to be enough. Although fruitful results of some kind might eventually emerge from such discussions, they will not reassure China unless they resolve substantial conflicts of interest – removing one potential path to war. Alternatively, the United States could reduce escalation risks by withdrawing some of its forces from the region.

Conciliation Will Not Embolden

Choosing such conciliatory policies would have lower costs than many imagine. Of course, the United States and its allies might pay immediate costs in terms of the issue conceded.

However, the long-term costs of such policies - meaning the impact that such a policy would have on Chinese assessments of U.S. resolve - are overstated.⁵⁴⁰ For example, if China were to assert its claims in one of its off shore island disputes in the region and the United States decide to do nothing, China might make some economic gains through the exploitation of raw materials in one of these offshore area. However, since such gains would not fundamentally alter the distribution of power, insecurity theory does not expect that China would be emboldened. Insecurity theory expects that China would weigh future challenges on their own merits rather than seeing conciliation as an indication that the United States is irresolute. Overall, insecurity theory rejects the claim that the greatest risk in the U.S.-China relationship is the possibility that past U.S. conciliation will lead China to underestimate U.S. resolve.⁵⁴¹ Instead, the British experience suggests that a still-dominant America can reassure China with material concessions or even limited reductions in its forces in Asia without inviting further Chinese aggression.

Getting the Balance Right

Hedging proponents assume that the United States has to work harder to deter than to reassure. This view ignores the strong incentives that rising states face in the international system, and, therefore, overstates the difficulty of preventing opportunistic expansion and understates the difficulty of reassurance. In reality, achieving a balanced outcome - a rising state that is neither emboldened nor threatened - requires a disproportionate emphasis on conciliation. A rising state is, first and foremost, a weaker state that is easily threatened and hard to reassure.

⁵⁴⁰ I make no claims about how such a policy would affect the perceptions of U.S. allies. See for example, Michèle Flournoy and Ely Ratner, "China's Territorial Advances Must Be Kept in Check by the United States," *The Washington Post*, July 4, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/chinas-territorial-advances-must-be-kept-in-check-by-the-united-states/2014/07/04/768294dc-0230-11e4-b8ff-89afd3fad6bd_story.html.

⁵⁴¹ Goldstein, "First Things First"; Flournoy and Ratner, "China's Territorial Advances Must Be Kept in Check by the United States."

It takes material concessions such as troop withdrawals or settlements of deep disagreements to reassure. Since the United States has sufficient material capabilities to defend its most important interests, it does not have to pursue costly policies to maintain a reputation for resolve. As long as the United States keeps its commitments in line with what it can reasonably defend, the U.S. can safely pursue a wide range of conciliatory policies without emboldening a China to demand more.⁵⁴² Overall, Britain's experiences suggest that today's American leaders should be more concerned about appearing hostile than about emboldening a rising China.

Implications for Future Research

Although this project provided initial support for insecurity theory, there are still many questions that merit further investigation. First, does insecurity theory apply in different distributions of power? Certainly, war is costly, even for the strongest states in the system, giving them reason to be cautious in their calculations. But since such states face fewer structural constraints, other factors, including psychological biases, may play a larger role. Second, how conciliatory can a dominant state's policies become before insecurity theory's predictions break down? This project tested the theories during periods when the dominant state chose a mix of both competition and conciliation. The theory would pass a harder test if, after a period of sustained and substantial conciliation, a rising state was still not emboldened. Third, does the order of competition and conciliation matter and exactly how different mixes affect a rising state's perceptions? Finally, and most importantly, more research is needed to determine how a rising state's perceptions translate into policy choices. Why does a threatened state

⁵⁴² This does not mean that the United States should always concede. When important issues are at stake, the United States may choose to compete and accept the cost – a threatened China.

sometimes choose conciliatory responses and, other times, respond with competition of its own? One can imagine that perceptions interact with domestic politics, alliance considerations, resource constraints, and many other factors to determine a policy choice.⁵⁴³ Understanding this second step of how perceptions affect the rising state's policies will allow a more complete assessment of the conditions under which competition is a better choice for the dominant state than conciliation, and vice versa.

⁵⁴³ Although this study focused on elite perceptions, there was evidence in the cases that British competition brought about nationalistic fervor and public pressure for more hawkish policies; Glaser also pointed to the need for such research in his earlier work; Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy," 500.

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