

CHAPTER 9

**SCALING THE STATE INTERESTS:
MIDDLE POWER ALIGNMENTS WITHIN THE
DUALITY OF STATUS QUO AND REVISIONISM**

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Abstract

In the evolving dynamics of international politics, new groups of countries, labeled as middle powers or regional powers, among other terms, have gained increased attention and played critical roles, distinct from great powers. This study delves into how these middle powers shape their alliance preferences by using multiple case study method. In this context, the oversight of existing alliance theories in neglecting middle powers is highlighted, with a particular emphasis on the gap in realist literature. To address these shortcomings, the alliance preferences of three historical cases, namely the Ottoman Empire, the Japanese Empire, and the Kingdom of Italy, in the late 19th century have been examined. While the Balance of Interest Theory constitutes the main theoretical framework, modifications have been made where it falls short. The findings of the study confirm the preliminary hypotheses, indicating that the base for middle power state interest and the primary systemic influence on the alliance preferences of middle powers is not the international system but the regional system which they operated in. The regional system forms the foundation for the interest definitions (status quo or revisionism) of middle powers. This is because the capacities of middle powers are limited compared to great powers. Therefore, contrary to the original Balance of Interest Theory, a revisionist middle power can form an alliance with a status quo great power or a status quo middle power can ally with a revisionist great power in an unpredicted manner.

Keywords

Alliances, Middle Powers, Regional System, Revisionism, Status Quo

What we are witnessing in the debates of political science of the third decade of the 2000s is a consistent focus on reordering of international politics through alignments, realignments, and regional or sectoral blockings (Friedberg, 2023). Not only the academic world but also international media and various think-tanks provide in-depth analysis on the ongoing trend all around the World. “Is Macron right claiming the brain-dead of NATO? (The Economist, 2019)”, “How can an international organization suffer from a brain-dead?”, “Does AUKUS mean a new type of cooperation based on shared cultural background or a necessity regarding new threats?”, “Is the United States abandoning its traditional allies?”, “Is Russia and China building a new block in the new cold war?”, “Will there be conflict between the democracies and autocracies?” These are some of the many popular questions in the political and academic circles in Europe and the U.S roughly since 2010. Although the debates have been so much intense, the central concept that these debates revolve around, ‘alliance’, have not attracted the attention as a scientific inquiry as it had in 1980s and 1990s until recently.

Several recent international political developments and the looming possibility of structural changes in the international political order brought back to the international political agenda. The first development, which was forgotten amidst the impact of the 9/11 and the predominance of the war on terror discourse that followed, but which can be seen as an opportunity for alliance studies to come to the fore again, was the revelation on the eve of the 2003 Iraq War that the traditional allies of the United States (such as Germany, France and Türkiye) would not support the United States in this war (Bölükbaşı, 2008). The realization of such a development in the new order, which was almost unimaginable during the Cold War years, showed that the issue of alliances is not a frozen issue. On the contrary, issues such as when allies would support each other and when they would let each other down, and what conditions were required for the continuity of alliances, became the subject of debate once again. By the 2010s, the question of whether the world was no longer unipolar, and how the behavior of states would change in bipolar, multipolar, and non-polar worlds became a matter of curiosity (Kupchan, 2023).

In recent years, the ascent of China and Russia’s pursuit of the status quo have been construed as indicative of the resurgence of the great power struggle. Nevertheless, prevailing international predicaments and concerns underscore the imperative of transcending the focus solely on these states typically labeled as great powers. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, for instance, has revealed unexpected shifts involving both the traditional allies of the USA in Europe and countries often referred to as part of the global south (Echols, 2022). The increased visibility of non-traditional international actors like India, Türkiye, and Brazil, who managed to engage with both sides during the conflict, suggests the emergence of a new reality (Sweijts & Mazaar, 2023).

In the context of alliance politics, the second decade of the 21st century has brought attention to another issue—the growing role of countries designated as rising powers, swing states, regional powers, or middle powers in international politics. Despite the occasional inclusion of middle powers in the international relations literature, it is evident that these countries have not been adequately explored in comparison to their current impact. Existing literature tends to generalize various policy preferences, often drawing from the historical experiences of specific countries, particularly during the Cold War era. The studies frequently rely on the foreign policies of compliant members of the Western alliance and the UN system, such as Canada, Norway, and Australia. More recently, this focus has expanded to encompass actors like Brazil, South Africa, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, India, and Türkiye as emerging middle powers (Jordaan, 2003).

This study asserts that middle powers indeed play a significant role in contemporary international politics, challenging the prevailing notion that the global stage is solely dominated by great powers. Unlike the conventional view that perceives middle powers as having limited international political objectives and constrained policy-making capabilities, this study, along with others in the literature, ascribes a more dynamic and non-static role to these states. Middle powers are broadly categorized in two ways: they are either former great powers experiencing a decline in relative or absolute power over time, or they are dynamic, often ambitious political actors poised to become the next great powers. In this conceptual framework, the definition of middle powers transcends the traditional understanding of compliant international actors, suggesting that these states share similar pursuits in terms of international power, status, and interests with the established great powers.

What IR Theories Tell Us about Middle Power Alliances

The major debates within Alliance literature revolve around three central questions: Why are these alliances established? What are the positive and negative impacts of alliances on international conflict? And, finally, how are inter-alliance relations managed? Typically, in the literature, these questions are addressed in chronological order as outlined above. Various methods have been employed in answering these questions. For instance, while theoretical qualitative studies have primarily focused on the first question, quantitative theory testing studies and formal modeling are predominantly used for the next two questions (Crescenzi et al., 2012; Fordham & Poast, 2016; Midlarsky, 1983; Morrow, 1991, 2000; Niou & Ordeshook, 1994; Rood, 1975; Sprecher, 2004). Naturally, there are also cross-cutting situations where complementary mixed methods have been employed.

Following the thematic emphasis of this research, the examination of responses to the first question will be conducted with heightened scrutiny. In the subsequent sections of this chapter will critically engage with the literature on alignments based on systemic explanations. The primary focus will be on two key theories: The Balance of Power Theory (BoP) and the Balance of Threat Theory (BoT). The subsequent section will be dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the Balance of Interest Theory (BoI) proposed by Randall Schweller, highlighting its principal strengths in comparison to other theories. Nevertheless, the discussion will extend to advocating for the necessity of reformulating the Balance of Interest Theory to enhance its explanatory power for middle power alignments.

Balance of Power

What is striking to the student of international relations today is the elusive and dispersed definition of the BoP in the literature. Even though many pretend the BoP is one of the central concepts or theories in international relations, the usage of the term varies not only in different studies but also in the very same research (Levy, 2004, p. 30). The multifaceted usage of the BoP concept indicates that it is not merely a theory of foreign policy, let alone an alignment theory. Instead, it can be more aptly characterized as a theory of international politics. However, for our investigation, we will narrow our focus to the foreign policy aspect of the concept. This undertaking necessitates a concise yet potent conceptual distinction between “balance” and “balancing.” Given that our study aims to comprehend alignment behavior within the context of foreign policy-making, it becomes imperative to center our attention on the decision-making process and actions, rather than exclusively on the outcomes implied by the term “balance.”

Nevertheless, the elusive nature of the BoP persists, as theoretical explanations of “balancing behavior” in foreign policy decisions vary in the literature. These explanations can be categorized into three distinct approaches. First is the unit-level drive to balance, positing that states may adopt balancing behavior for two primary motivations: a state with significantly superior capabilities may prompt others to prevent the potential emergence of its hegemony, or in a relatively equal distribution of power, states may form alliances to pursue their interests, prompting others to respond with counter-alliances to balance them (Levy, 2004, p. 32; Morgenthau, 1948, p. 130). Secondly, a specific state may act as a “balance holder,” as exemplified by Britain in much of the 18th and 19th centuries (Morgenthau, 1948, pp. 142–144). Lastly, balancing behavior is perceived as a systemic imposition, where units have limited agency in the decision-making process (Claude, 1989, p. 81; Layne, 1997, p. 117; Levy, 2004, p. 33).

The contemporary manifestation of the BoP has undergone significant development, particularly within the behavioral approaches of international relations, gaining prominence in the 1960s. According to this framework, states persist as oligopolies in the landscape of free-market economies, where these oligopolies are emblematic of great powers (Waltz, 1979). The systemic logic embedded in this structure dissuades any single great power from attempting the destruction of others. Waltz (1979, p. 71, 121-122) explicitly positions the BoP not solely as a foreign policy theory but, more significantly, as a comprehensive theory of international politics. However, Waltz’s arguments extend further, contending that systemic factors impose distinct behavioral patterns on states. The foundational assumption here is the anarchic nature of the international system, characterized by the absence of any authority above states. This anarchic structure begets uncertainty and a security dilemma, prompting states, akin to like-units, to act as unitary actors seeking security within the system (Waltz, 1979, p. 126):

Only if survival is assured can states safely seek such other goals as tranquility, profit, and power. Because power is a means and not an end, states prefer to join the weaker of two coalitions. They cannot let power, a possibly useful means, become the end they pursue. The goal the system encourages them to seek is security. Increased power may or may not serve that end. Give two coalitions, for example, the greater success of one in drawing members to it may tempt the other to risk preventive war, hoping for victory through surprise before disparities widen. If states wished to maximize power, they would join the stronger side, and we would see not balances forming but a world hegemony forged. This does not happen because balancing, not bandwagoning, is the behavior induced by the system. The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system.

To sum up, the BoP theory is primarily a theory of international politics rather than an alignment theory. Among the various conceptual and theoretical perspectives within the balance of power theory, only a specific version proves practical as a foreign policy strategy—where states consolidate their power to deter potential aggressors or the emergence of hegemony.

Balance of Threat

Walt contends that the fundamental proposition of the BoP is flawed, contributing to its lack of historical empirical evidence, especially during the Cold War period. In contrast to the assertions of the BoP theorists, who argue that states adopt a balancing strategy to prevent other states from dominating them, bandwagoning is considered the opposite—a strategy involving aligning with the powerful or supporting them to benefit from their victories. The BoP acknowledges the prevalence of balancing behavior, attributing it to two main factors. The first is the prevention of dominance, while the second posits that being on the weaker side makes a state more valuable in an alliance (Waltz, 1979, pp. 126–127). In essence, according to the BoP, power is synonymous with threat. Stephen Walt disagrees with this proposition and argues that by modifying the original BoP, he enhances its explanatory power. According to Walt, what states aim to balance is not power per se, but rather the threat, and threat is not synonymous with power. Power is just one of the constitutive elements of threat. Although the aggregate power of other states is a crucial factor in states' threat perceptions, the "level of threat is also affected by geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions (Walt, 1987, p. 5)".

A Critique to Balance of Power and Balance of Threat

Several shortcomings in the explanatory power of the BoP and its BoT versions can be summarized through three main points. Firstly, a crucial inquiry emerges concerning the suitability of the BoP in elucidating the foreign policies of states. Waltz (1979, p. 122) contends that BoP does not serve as a foreign policy theory explaining the actions of individual states. If it is perceived merely as an outcome emerging from the aggregate political preferences of all states, its capacity to effectively explain alliances, intrinsic to foreign policy matters, becomes questionable. Despite one interpretation of BoP Theory encompassing the balancing responses of states against rising powers, Schweller (1994, p. 72) suggests that historical empirical data often contradicts such behavior, thereby limiting theory's explanatory power. A similar critique is applicable to BoT regarding its limitations in explanatory scope. Schweller (1994, pp. 84–88), in his analysis, underlines a fundamental problem with both theories: the reduction of the fundamental motivations of states to one and only, survival. In essence, these theories exhibit a noteworthy status quo bias.

BoT makes a theoretically straightforward inference in this regard, further narrowing alliance strategies to an even more limited scope. As claimed by the BoT theory, when states face a threat, attempting to balance it is already the highest-expected option. However, how this balancing will occur and whether it will indeed be considered as an alliance theory is a question mark. For instance, according to the empirical study conducted by Parent and Rosato (2015), it is true that states largely pursue a balancing policy, but they do this not so much through alliances but rather through what is termed internal balancing, taking measures to enhance their own capacities. This behavior is particularly prevalent during times of peace. Therefore, while the BoT theory expresses the balancing of threats, which is a simple truth, as a grand theoretical explanation in terms of alliance strategy, on the other hand, it overlooks that involvement in an alliance is not the prerequisite for this balancing to occur.

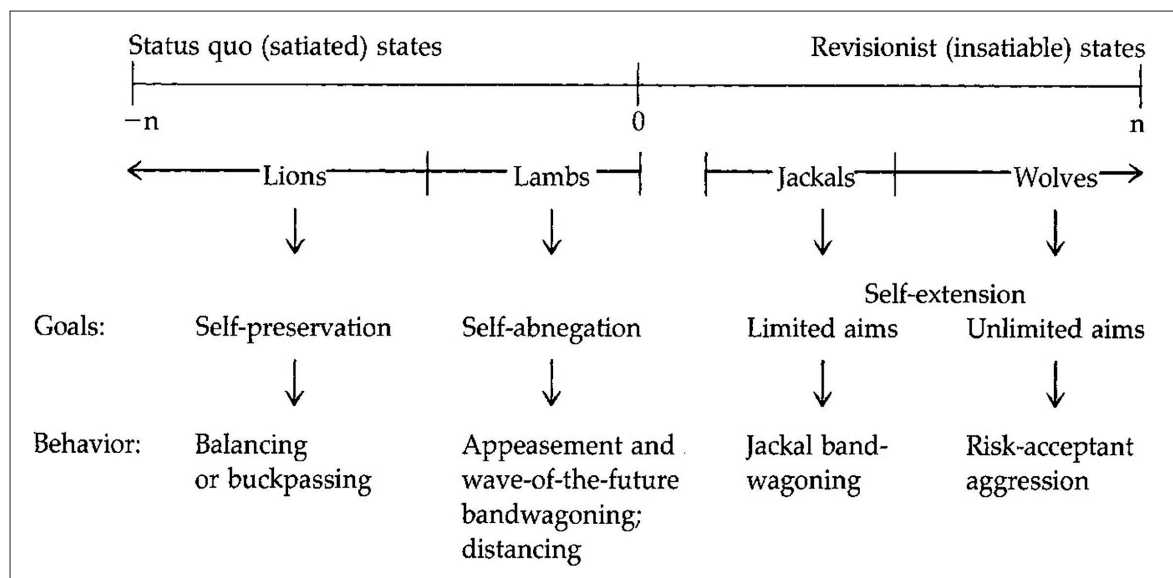
Secondly, both BoP and BoT theories limit the alliance behaviors of states to a binary choice or motivation. According to this, states either balance the power or threat, or they bandwagon. However, especially, as emphasized by both Schroeder (1994) and Schweller (1994), states do not always operate with these strategies. They might choose strategies such as keeping a distance from two opposing powers, shifting responsibility to another (buck passing), or their reasons for entering into an alliance may not be to balance the power or bandwagon but rather to control the reckless behaviors of that ally that might disrupt another balance.

Third, one significant disadvantage of both BoP and BoT, which our alternative model would better highlight, is their assumption of a monolithic single system when providing systemic explanations. Since the determinants of this monolithic system are major powers, the units of analysis they deduce when constructing their theories and test are major powers. However, foreign policy preferences of states vary based on the capabilities, which are actually the core argument of the realist paradigm, starting from the immediate surroundings of them. Undoubtedly, the system affects even the smallest units within it. However, as the foreign policy behaviors, which serve as feedback to this systemic impact, will be based on their capabilities, it is natural to expect states to begin making foreign policy decisions by considering the systemic effects that are closer to them. In this case, applying an alliance theory that treats all great powers as independent variables, considering their behaviors and taking the entire international system as an independent variable, actually contradicts the fundamental argument of the realist paradigm, which primarily sees the distribution of capabilities as the determinant of state behaviors. One of the most significant consequences of this singular explanation is the reduction of alliance preferences of states other than major powers to a necessity

Balance of Interest Theory

Thus far, it is explicit that what incites the states to form an alliance with one another is the presence of an external or internal threat which Randall Schweller criticize. Schweller (1994, 1998) argues, instead, alliance can be results of not only responses to threat or fear but also profit seeking or greed. However, both neorealist BoP and the BoT overlooked the alliances for profit because they are status-quo biased theories. In contrast to neorealism, classical realism categorizes states according to not only their relative power but also their different interest and motivations (Schweller, 1994, p. 86). Accordingly, states differ from each other as status-quo forces, who want to continue to benefit from the existing order, and as revisionist forces, who think that the order does not yield enough interest to them (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Interest Scale in Balance of Interest Theory (Schweller, 1994, p. 100)



Units operate within systemic boundaries that are not boundless in their preference pool, and while the system restricts some options, it does not provide a singular choice, as acknowledged by Waltz (1979). Additionally, the structural impact on units is not a direct and unmediated process; there are intervening variables at the unit level that interpret this effect (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 12; Rose, 1998, p. 146). Accordingly, Schweller (1994; 1998) primarily divides states into four groups. Those who want to preserve the status quo at any cost, i.e. lions, Wolves who take everything to change the status quo at any cost, jackals that can take the risk at a certain rate to change the status quo and often chase opportunities, and lambs that are largely insensitive to the status quo. The alliance preferences of the differentiating states vary accordingly. The states that are satisfied with the status quo generally embrace balancing behavior while bandwagoning is preferred when the intention was the alteration balance of power or the principles of the order.

Figure 2
Balance of Power Theory



Figure 3
Balance of Threat Theory

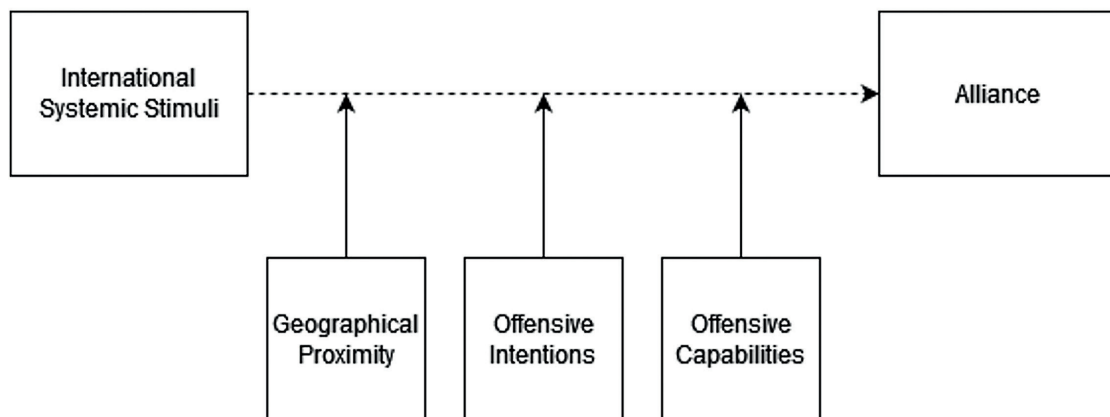
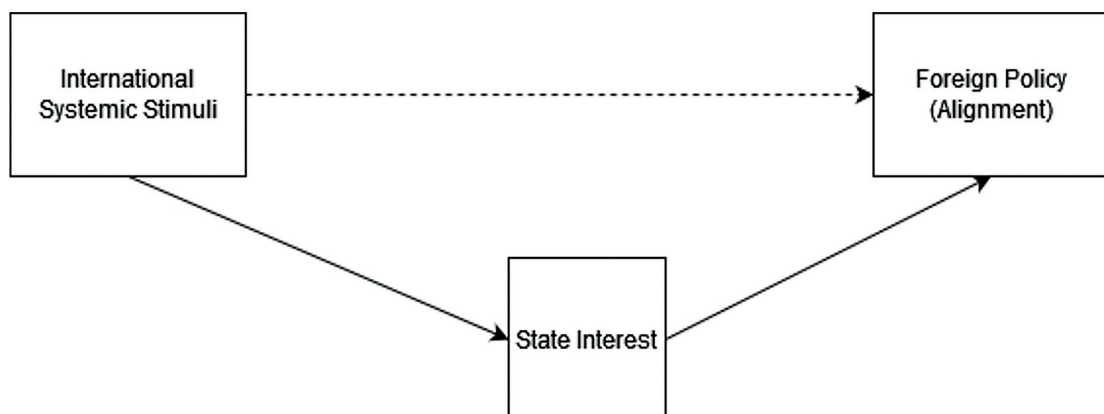


Figure 4
Balance of Interest Theory



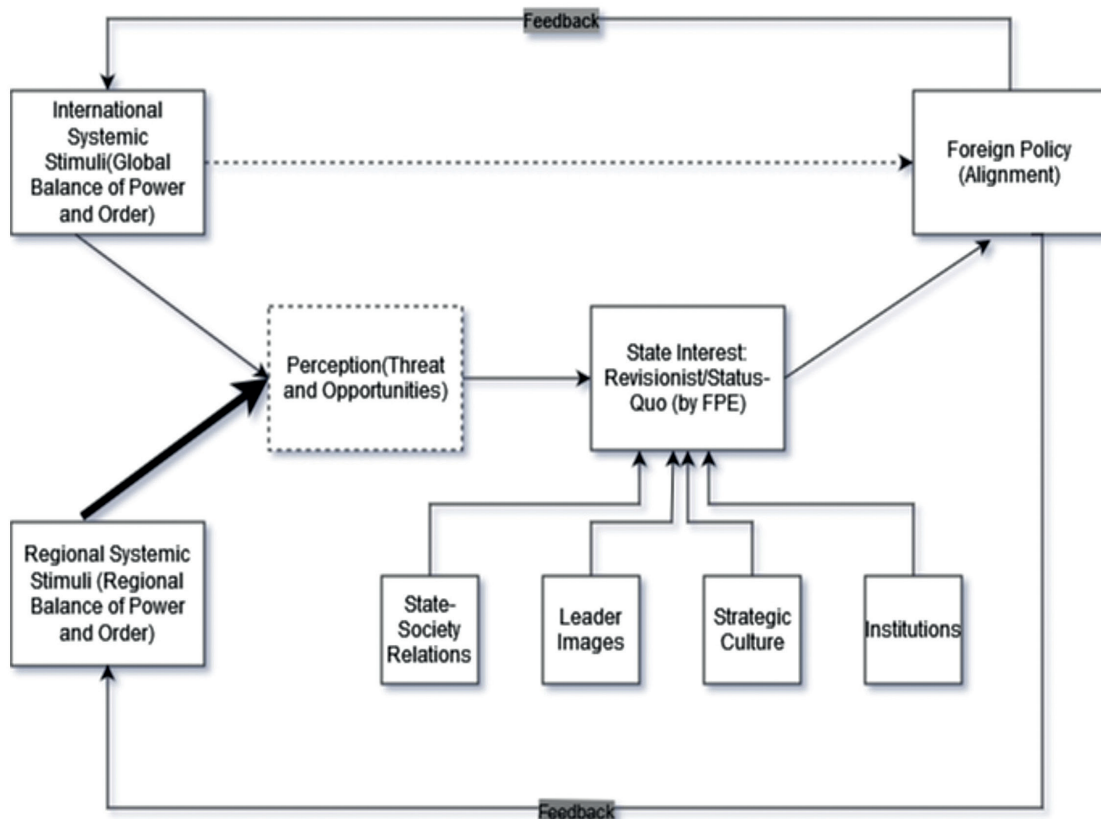
Modified Balance of Interest Theory and Middle Power Alignments

This study claims to modify Schweller's classification of states according to their capacities. Schweller identified the states that he considered to be great powers and focused only on the distribution of power and power change among them. In this regard, he tried to support his classification empirically by using the data of Correlation of War (COW) project. For the reasons mentioned above, he did not consider states other than the great powers as an important part of the system and categorized states only through the system of great powers. Instead, I classify states as great powers, middle powers and small powers by taking all states in the system and using the COW's National Material Capability dataset (Singer, 1988; Singer et al., 1972).

In relation to the definitions of state interests that are rightfully incorporated into Schweller's model, I introduce two new modifications to the Balance of Interest Theory. Firstly, Schweller's theory does not adequately explain why states are satisfied or dissatisfied with their positions in the system and why they develop revisionist or status quo policies. Particularly, the presence of decision-makers in the states and the factors influencing them domestically, as well as how they are influenced, have not been discussed when these interest definitions are formed. In this context, I extend the Balance of Interest Theory by asserting that both revisionist and status quo foreign policies are frequently outcomes of processes influenced by systemic positions, power shifts, and domestic dynamics. Utilizing Davidson's definitions of revisionism and status quo, I have made my case studies' interest definitions more explanatory.

My second modification regarding to states' interests is related to the source of systemic influence, which, like domestic factors, has an impact on establishing the state interests. Unlike the other three systemic theories, it concurrently alters the independent variable within the alliance model. Consequently, the delineation of interests for middle powers is shaped more by the regional system level than the overarching international system. Thus, the power distribution and order within the regional system play a pivotal role in shaping both the extent of revisionism and adherence to the status quo for these states, as well as their perceptions of status quo and revisionism concerning other states.

Figure 5
Alternative Model for Middle Power Alignments



Middle Powers

The definitions of middle power lack a consensus and are not widely accepted as a concept (Cooper et al., 1993; Cox, 1989; Holbraad, 1984; Jordaan, 2003; Ping, 2018). This complexity poses challenges in establishing consistent categorizations over time. The limited attention given to middle powers in both international relations literature and the practice of international politics further complicates research on the subject. The lack of a cohesive framework hampers the feasibility of conducting comparative analyses. In this study, the concept of middle power will be reconceptualized by redefining the realist tradition's notion of material capability and interest. So, Martin Wight's (1978, p. 63) description of middle power is quite useful for the purpose of the current study. Accordingly, middle powers have lesser capabilities for pursuing system-wide interests but rather they have general interest as wide as their international sub-systems i.e. regional systems.

Region as a Base for State Interest and Perception of Threat and Opportunities

The regional level of analysis is more explanatory to understand middle power behaviors. First and foremost, variance in capabilities dictates states' perception of priorities in their policy making. Therefore, states' capabilities are definitive on short or long sightedness of state's policy making in geographical terms. To put it simply, what matters for Croatia, for example, is not the developments in the South China Sea but rather Ukraine, while for the US, both crises are almost equally vital. Similarly, middle powers are more concerned their respective regional system than international system as whole for two reasons. First, middle powers do not designate international system-wide interest due to the lack of adequate capabilities. Secondly, they don't develop defensive strategies to counter any possible threat originated beyond their immediate regions in advance, simply because they cannot do it without the help of a great power.

Secondly, behavior of a unit is not independent from its understanding of the system. This is actually parallel to the main premises of all systemic theories. All the policy goals and strategies for these goals come into existence not in a vacuum but rather on a base. Systemic thinking provides the answer for the search of this base. However, what is missing in especially in systemic theories of international relations discipline is the discussion of the awareness or priorities in the units' understanding of system. In theory, all sovereign states are the main units of the overarching international system. But in reality, are the perceptions of Lithuania and Indonesia about the system in which they are part of identical as Neorealism argues? Ignorance of structural realist theories about the different understanding of system of the different actors rooted in their great-power centrism. This bias leads to Eurocentrism, since almost all great powers in the modern international history have been located in the Europe. Once a state claim and is recognized as great power, it means its interest designations are becoming system-wide and after this stage, dissociation regional system(s) from the international system starting to fade away.

However, for non-great powers, be it middle powers in current study, the base for interest designation is regional system rather than entire international system. Middle powers do not determine their immediate foreign policy preferences on the off chance that some changes occur in the parts of the world in which they cannot put an impact on. As Kardas (2010, p. 79) asserts, an actor's identity whether it is a security seeker in order to survive or an explorer of non-security goals are very much subject to system in which it operates. Therefore, establishing a revelatory systemic theory for middle power require to deal with the identifying the accurate system that has a primary impact on actor's preferences and behaviors i.e. regional system.

State Interests and Base of Status-Quo Seeking and Revisionism

The absence of consensus over the portrait of these concepts despite their frequent use has given rise to different definitions in the literature. Morgenthau, for example, defines status-quo states and revisionist states in accordance with their main policy aims. If a state aims to keep the present distribution power and achieve security, it is a status-quo state. On the other hand, if a state aims to alter the present distribution power in its favor and seek for acquiring more power, it is a revisionist state (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 53). Wolfers uses "distribution of values" instead of distribution of powers.

For him, states who are content with the distribution of values are status-quo powers while the ones who ask for the 'values not already enjoyed' are revisionists (Wolfers, 1962, p. 18). Davidson takes over the Wolfers's definition and yet prefers the notion of 'goods' instead of 'values'. In this study, I adopt Davidson's (2006, p. 14) definitions as follows:

Revisionists: Those states that seek to change the distribution of goods (territory, status, markets, expansion of ideology, and the creation or change of international law and institutions).

Status-quo Seekers: Those states that seek to maintain the distribution of goods (territory, status, markets, expansion of ideology, and the creation or change of international law and institutions) in the international system.

However, I don't close the case here and further put two pivotal arguments forward. First, I divide the goods that states care in two: territorial and non-territorial. It is important because states do not attach equal importance to them. Territorial aspect of goods is relatively more important for states for two reasons. First, territoriality is the main aspect of the modern state system. A polity acquire its state status once it achieves to establish sovereignty on a piece of territory. So, territory is the prerequisite of being a state. Secondly, territorial changes have consequential impacts all other types of goods which reverse causality does not exist. Considering all these reasons, for status-quo states, it is hard to swallow the territorial revisions than the revisions in all other aspect of goods.

Secondly, I want draw the attention to the necessity of a base in which state interests originate that is missing in the debates of the origins of status-quo seeking and revisionism. State interests are not constituted in a vacuum. Rather they are, be it revisionist or status-quo seeker, systemic attributions and basically the consequences of states' relative positions in the system vis-à-vis other actors in the system. Here, relativity implies the recurrent processes of comparison between self and others in terms of possession of goods which are available in the system. However, such comparison should be logical and rational. At this point, this study, in parallel with the realist paradigm, assumes that states are capable of making of logical comparison between the self and the others regarding the capabilities. Therefore, their preferences over preserving the status-quo requires a base that enable them to make rational calculations. The base in which states' perception of the change in their relative positions occurs is dependent on the states' capabilities. Since both preserving the status-quo and revising it are costly actions, capabilities is the determinant of the in which system(s) a state seeks for change or stability and to what extent. To put it simply, great powers identify their interest regarding the entire international system, middle powers prioritize their relative position in the regional systems.

Shift in relative power of states is also an important factor for states' taking a status-quo oriented or revisionist stance in their foreign policy. "Rising states often become revisionists and declining states frequently become status-quo seekers" (Davidson, 2006, p. 21). Status-quo states are mostly the victors of the last major-wars and founders of the existing order and responsible for the distribution of goods. The cases handled in this study also demonstrate the similar tendency. The Ottoman Empire, once a great power in international politics -especially before 1774- was aware of its relative decline and adopted the policies aiming the cease further losses and keeping what she already had while newly established energetic rising Japanese Empire and the Kingdom of Italy seek for more power and alteration of the status-quo in their respective regional systems.

Types of Revisionism

In actual political life, state interests are not binary as status-quo seeking on the one end and revisionism on the other. Rather it is a continuous variable within the range of unlimited revisionism and strongly supporting the status quo (Schweller, 1998). Therefore, we can mention at list two types of revisionism which are unlimited revisionism and limited revisionism as Schweller (1994, 1998) argues. States preferences limited or unlimited revisionism contingent on the power they have. Great power revisionists mostly aim to overturn the systemic status-quo completely in their favor while middle power revisionist aim to alter the status-quo in their sub-system. Unlimited revisionism implies the altering the distribution in every aspect of goods. Unlimited revisionist powers aspire after hegemony in the system at the end therefore they want to reconfigure the order in the line of interests. Limited revisionism on the other is more complicated.

In this study, I argue, two types of limited revisionism. First is the revisionism pursued by middle powers in the regional sub-systems. Accordingly, middle power revisionists aim and are capable of changing the arrangement of goods in their regions not in international system entirely. They even sometimes support to the status-quo in the most part of the system except their own regional system. This kind of revisionism actually pose a challenge to the Schweller's argument about the revisionist ally with revisionist since he does not separate the regional/limited revisionism from systemic revisionism.

The second variant of limited revisionism, which is also missing in original BoI Theory, is the hegemonic/selective revisionism as I called it. In International Relations literature, hegemon or the stronger advocates of the existing order, by definition, cannot be revisionist and do not pursue revisionist policies. However, I argue that hegemon also seek for revisionism in limited or sub-systemic sense for two reasons. The foremost reason that a hegemon opt for revisionism in some selected regional systems is the strategic readjustments against the current or potential challenger(s). A hegemon, in order to preserve the overarching status quo in the system, perceive the inadequacy of the configuration of strategies in sub-systems (i.e. balancers, buffers) that aim to prevent the rise or expansion of the contenders in the system or obtain more efficient means. In such circumstances the hegemon prefers to reconfiguration of the system by intervening the existing distribution of the sub-systemic goods. Among the cases of this study, Ottoman Empire and Britain relations is one of the good examples. Britain saw the Turkish Empire as balancer and later buffer against her contender Russia for a long time. However, opening of the Suez Canal and later British occupation of Egypt and obtaining naval base rights in Cyprus decrease the importance of the Ottomans in the eyes of British decision-makers. Moreover, continuing decline of the Ottomans cause the suspicion of British for Sultan's Empire's ability to deter the Russian anymore. The second reason for hegemonic/selective revisionism is hegemonic norm diffusion. Hegemons, after securing their relative power position in the system, mostly try to rearrange the normative aspect of the order. Such revisionism may cause the dissident even among the allies of the hegemon who are the supporters of the established norms. The paragon of the hegemonic norm diffusion revisionism was the United States' democracy promotion campaign especially in the Middle East.

Case I: Origins of Ottoman Empire's Pro-Status quo Stance and German Alignment

The defeat in 1774 turned Ottoman Empire to a defensive power (Gürpınar, 2013, p. 58). Expansionist politics of the traditional empire had already ended since the late 17th century and early 18th century but the Empire was still seemed as solid force, having ability to change the status-quo at any time. However, 1774 demonstrated the inability of the Empire and changed its priorities to preserve the what it had rather than enhance its share (Karaosmanoğlu, 2000, p. 201). Britain was a helping hand in this status-quo oriented policy. The common interest of two empires was to resist the further expansion Russia towards Turkish straits and Mediterranean (İnalçık, 2020, p. 272). This interest compatibility continued till 1876. Allies repetitively changed but what matter for the Empire is to preserve status-quo as much as possible. But what is status-quo?

For the Ottoman Empire status-quo had changed after every defeat at the battlefield or on diplomatic tables. Since 1774 to 1815, What ottomans tried to preserve is the diplomatic independence and the maneuver capacity of the Empire and stopping the further territorial loses particularly to Russia. As already discussed de facto alignments with one of the European Powers was the main strategy for this end. So, for this period, the threat is coming from the external powers and the solution was mainly diplomatic and militarily. Since 1815, the Ottoman Empire encountered a growing array of threats, necessitating the protection of not only territorial integrity but also the cohesion of Ottoman social and legal life. The challenges evolved beyond external perils to encompass significant nationalist uprisings within the empire. In response to this complex situation, defensive measures extended beyond diplomatic and military strategies to include legal and social arrangements (Shaw & Shaw, 1978). The Crimean War in 1856, despite being victorious, introduced a new facet to the Ottoman Empire's predicaments—the issue of financial independence. In the pursuit of essential resources for war and subsequent reforms, the empire resorted to borrowing. However, over the next two decades, the inability to repay these debts led to financial insolvency. Now, the empire faced the imperative of addressing not only military, diplomatic, and legal challenges but also the intricacies of financial stability (Quataert, 2005, pp. 71–72).

Between the 1878 Treaty of Berlin and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, a new status quo emerged, signaling the end of a series of arrangements that the Ottoman Empire had meticulously reestablished and endeavored to sustain through downsizing (Armaoğlu, 1997, p. 529). Designated as a Balkan state, the Ottoman Empire had ceded nearly all its territories in the region, retaining only those under significant pressure to reform, such as Macedonia. Concurrently, Western states expressed concerns about the Armenians, the non-Muslim element residing under Ottoman rule in Anatolia, intensifying the challenges faced by the Empire (Hanioglu, 2008, p. 123). Established in 1881, the Ottoman Public Debt Administration fell largely under the influence of European creditors, and the empire no longer enjoyed the support of Britain, upon which it had long relied. Adding to the complexity, the Congress of Berlin in 1878 led to the emergence of new independent states from former Ottoman subjects. These entities, now integral elements of the regional international system, had to be taken into account. Many of these states pursued foreign and security policies dissatisfied with their achievements and constantly sought to alter the regional status quo to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire, often with the backing of great powers.

Western great powers, with an increasingly unfavorable view of the region and the Ottoman Empire, pursued policies that swiftly altered whatever the Ottoman Empire sought to protect as soon as it suited their interests. While Russia's stance in this regard was anticipated, the significant shift of France and Britain to a strongly anti-Ottoman position heightened the magnitude of the threat (Armaoğlu, 1997, p. 529). Essentially, by 1878, the Ottoman state had to safeguard its financial independence, territorial integrity, and legal legitimacy. The chosen strategy to address these challenges was to stabilize the status quo in the regional system and refrain from changing it, at least temporarily.

An Overstretched Empire: Identifying Ottoman Regional System

To comprehend the regional system and international developments surrounding the Ottoman Empire in 1878, it would be useful to first identify the regional structure(s) in which the Ottoman Empire was located and then explain the developments in these political structures. Unlike other two cases in this study, the Ottoman Empire found itself entangled in more than one regional axis of competition due to its unique geography and historical context (Quataert, 2005, p. 76). Since the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire has been intricately linked to the European political system through the Balkans. The ever-shifting balance of power in this region had a continuous impact on the Ottoman Empire. Simultaneously, the Ottoman Empire played a central role in the Mediterranean, with its territories in Albania, the Levant, and North Africa, along with the western coast of Anatolia. Changes in this Mediterranean region held paramount importance for the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire was also inadvertently part of another axis of conflict—the Anglo-Russian rivalry extending eastward from a line drawn northward from Basra. Russia's post-Crimean War policy of conquest in Central Asia, coupled with British attempts to establish a presence around Basra and secure the Indian route, created an additional battleground into which the Ottoman Empire was drawn (Yasamee, 2018, p. 75). Caught in the middle of multiple regional conflicts, the Ottoman Empire faced the daunting challenge of formulating a balanced policy in each theater. Choosing the right stance, especially when great powers took opposing positions in various moments and regions, presented a complex and delicate task for the Ottoman Empire.

During the historical juncture under consideration, the Ottoman Empire found itself entangled in intricate geopolitical webs across various regions (Yasamee, 2018). The Balkans emerged as a focal point where intense rivalries unfolded, with Austria and Russia engaged in direct competition and Germany, under Bismarck's influence, playing a role in maintaining equilibrium. British interests in the Balkans were heightened due to their repercussions on Istanbul and the critical passage through the Straits. Meanwhile, the Mediterranean, spanning from Tunisia to the Levant, took center stage as a strategic conduit to African colonies and Far Eastern markets. The opening of the Suez Canal further underscored its importance (Yasamee, 2018). In the longstanding Anglo-French rivalry dating back to the Napoleonic period, Egypt, under Ottoman legal rule, embarked on a more independent administration quest initiated by Mehmet Ali Pasha, intensifying challenges for the Ottomans. Italy, a middle power, entered the Mediterranean fray, and conflicts between Greece and the Ottomans unfolded in regions ranging from Crete to Thessaloniki. Simultaneously, the Ottoman Empire grappled with indirect repercussions emanating from the delicate balance in Central Asia and the

Basra-South Asia line. The geopolitical contest between the British colonial presence in India and Russia's southward expansion after the Crimean War extended to encompass territories like Iran and the Basra region of Iraq (Yasamee, 2018, p. 75). The Arab territories under Ottoman dominion and the overarching issue of the Ottoman caliphate became integral facets of this intricate geopolitical competition, widely recognized as the Great Game (Yasamee, 2018, pp. 75–76).

Converging Strategic Interest:

Revisionist Weltpolitik meets Ottoman's Desperate Seek for Status Quo

For the Ottomans, the preservation of territorial integrity and the regional status quo was the most important strategic interest. This status quo was highly threatened by the policy changes of the traditional powers that penetrated the regional system. While before 1878 Russia and the Balkan nations were seen as actors seeking to change the regional status quo and the Ottomans, Austria and Britain were seen as actors seeking to preserve the status quo, by 1890 there were almost no countries other than the Ottoman Empire that were frightened by the changes in the region. Only Austria-Hungary was keeping a close eye on the western and northern Balkans. In 1896, the British were saying that it no longer mattered whether even the straits fell into Russian hands. Despite economic cooperation with Germany, the Ottomans sought more substantial political support. While the Germans were not inclined to formalize an alliance relationship, they did express support for the Ottomans in international crises. During the Armenian events of the 1890s and the Greek provocations and preparations for war over Crete in 1896, Germany took positions favoring the Ottoman Empire and attempted to persuade other states to take punitive measures against Greece (Miller, 1966, p. 431). This demonstrated a growing alignment of strategic interests and political cooperation between Germany and the Ottoman Empire.

On the other hand, the deterioration in German-British relations was exacerbated by Germany's departure from the established balance and its involvement in extra-European rivalries. Germany's miscalculation rested on the assumption that a stronger Germany would make Britain more dependent on it, especially in overseas competition with Russia and France (Schöllgen, 2021). However, Britain perceived the Russian threat as diminished, particularly in the Near East, and a relative rapprochement had occurred in this region. The resolution of rivalry in the Far East with the emergence of Japan further eased British concerns. Germany's Weltpolitik discourse, aimed at securing a "place in the sun" without hindrance, was seen by Britain as a significant threat to the international status quo, the Pax Britannica. While Germany sought its place in the sun, Britain perceived this as a challenge to its established dominance.

In conclusion, the Ottoman Empire's strategic interests and the economic imperialistic goals of Germany converged, leading to a relationship where the Ottomans sought to replace the British with Germany as a friendly great power. While the Ottomans aimed to fill the void left by the British with German support, the Germans sought access to the wealth of Anatolia and Mesopotamia through peaceful means. This alignment of interests did not result in a formal alliance, but it marked a significant shift in international politics. The Ottomans' break with the British and Germany's position as the closest great power to the Ottomans from the 1880s to 1918 had lasting consequences. Although the full alliance negotiations occurred in the spring and summer of 1914, signs of Ottoman-German rapprochement, and the anticipation of eventual alignment against the British, were evident by the end of the 19th century. The unfolding events laid the groundwork for the Ottoman-German alliance during the Great War.

The Ottoman-British rift was not rooted in Ottoman objections to the Pax-Britannica or a pursuit of geopolitical revisionism. They already lacked such capability. Instead, the Ottomans perceived the British as a threat to their survival and the regional system they operated in, especially due to a change in British policy. While the German Empire attempted to revise its position in the entire international system during this period, it shared similar status quo policies to the Ottoman regional system, and began to be viewed as a potential friend and ally by Sultan. This shift in perception contributed to the alignment of Ottoman interests with Germany, leading to the Ottoman-German relationship in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Case II: East Asian Status-Quo, Transformation in Japan and Anglo-Japanese Alliance

After the birth of the new regime of Japan in 1868 revolution, there were two main challenges that it expected to face. The first was posed by foreign powers who wanted to maintain and perhaps deepen the unequal treaties that had been established with the Tokugawa regime. The second was the potential for local resistance to the new regime from within (Gordon, 2003, p. 62). Dealing with these two challenges in foreign policy presents a two-fold challenge. On the one hand, the regime needed to avoid being caught off-guard by a crisis outside of its borders that could threaten its consolidation, while at the same time, it needed to find a solution that would appease the domestic public's sense of humiliation caused by the unequal treaties, which had been the most compelling argument for the revolution process (Iriye, 1989, pp. 735–738). This two-sided problem reminded the Meiji leaders how closely connected local and international politics were. Firstly, the legal regulations necessary to ensure internal stability would also make Japan a modern and reliable country against international powers (Iriye, 1989, pp. 736–737).

What Japan Wanted to Revise

In the second half of the 19th century was a transformative period for Japanese Empire. The old empire of Tokugawa period ultimately transformed into a full-scaled modernized power under Meiji regime. The new empire learned lesson from the China's position towards Western imperialist power. Accordingly, there two ways ahead the new Japan which are either to be colonized nation as China was or to be a colonizer as Western powers were. The choice was made in favor of the second way and Japan adopted an expansionist policy in his regional system.

The international and regional settings paved the way for such an expansionist policy. First, regional status-quo was on the brink of abyss. Traditional order led by Chinese territorial, political, economic and normative hegemony was collapsing. The imperialist pressures and resulting domestic discontent paralyzed the Chinese administration to deal with the regional developments and maintain its hegemonic statue over the region. Korea, on the other hand, as vassal to China, was also weak and corrupted. Therefore, there was no chance for regional resistance against Japanese expansionist. Particularly, after the victory in Sino-Japanese War, Japan appeared as the only true national power in East Asia. Secondly, in consequence of Bismarckian alliance system, a stable balance of power was established in European continent and therefore European great imperialist powers directed their attention to overseas rivalries (Schöllgen, 2021, pp. 18–19). The People East Asia felt this rivalry to their bones. China was usual victim. However, Japan turned such tragedy to her favor and first put an end to unequal treaties then found a place in imperialist club.

Domestic pressures, as well international developments, played an important role in both emergence of Japanese revisionism and its alliance with British. Nationalist tendencies among the population further increased after the Meiji restoration. Japanese nationalism was an aggressive and expansionist rather than defensive as in the case of China. Japanese nationalist asked for higher statue for their nation in the international scene believed that the way for it rested on becoming an imperialist nation. Korea and North China were two promising areas for Japanese expansionism. Moreover, there was growing belief in Japanese intellectuals that Japan as the first and only modernized Asian nation should lead the modernization in Asia. All other nations should bow in front of Japanese power for their own sake. If Asians wanted to repel European colonizer, they should take the road of Japan. Such a revolutionary ideology also pushed for more stronger Japan even at the expense of other Asian people. Thirdly, Japan's rapid modernization increased the necessity of raw material and markets. Korea and China could provide what Japanese industrialists need. Therefore, no other nation should be allowed to gain the control of these territories.

Before the tripartite intervention of 1895, when the need for an ally to realize Japan's political goals became apparent, the western country that Japan considered closest to itself was Germany. It is possible to say that this was a somewhat one-sided sympathy. In particular, the fact that the Japanese army renewed itself with the German example, that Germany, as a late-comer modern state like Japan, established a significant superiority in its region in a short time, and also that Germany did not have

conflicting interests with Japan in the Far East until that date were the positive aspects of this alliance idea that were emphasized in the Japanese public opinion. It was also assumed that Germany would be in competition with already established countries like Japan, especially in imperial rivalry, and would understand Japan. However, the presence of Germany in the tripartite intervention reversed this positive image of Germany in Japanese public opinion.

As the Sino-Japanese war was about to end, contrary to expectations, with a decisive defeat of the Chinese empire, Germany, like all other states, began to worry about the status quo in the Far East. In particular, Kaiser Wilhelm was worried that China could collapse at any moment and that the established colonial powers of Britain, Russia and France would take the lion's share of the spoils and Germany would be left empty-handed, while Chancellor Hohenlohe tried to reassure the Kaiser by saying that Britain would not allow this to happen (Becker, 2022, p. 5). However, developments proceeded quite differently. Japan's decisive victory had changed Britain's pre-war position. Prime Minister Kimberley announced that the changes in Northeast Asia brought about by the Japanese victory were not so detrimental to Britain's interests that they would not take part in a possible intervention. For Britain, Japan's limited changes could be an opportunity to limit Russian influence over China and perhaps lure Russia into a trap that would keep it out of Persia, Afghanistan and Anatolia. For Germany, when the policy of escalating Anglo-Russian tensions failed, the idea of intervening with Russia and obtaining a naval base, especially in China, began to develop. Russia was clearly uncomfortable with the Japanese victory, and for Germany this discomfort presented an opportunity. The trilateral intervention brought Germany and Russia together, although it is not known exactly who took the first step (although the signs point to Russia). With the full support of Russia's ally France, a note was presented to Tokyo in April 1895, demanding that Japan cede the Liaodong peninsula back to China, one of the main post-war gains Japan had made in the Shimomoseki treaty. Japan had no power to confront these three countries. Seeing that Britain would not intervene in its favor, Japan accepted Dreibund's demands.

Russia's position for both Japan and Britain was a complex one. Especially after the triple intervention and Russia's increasing influence in Chinese administration, Petersburg began to improve its status in China and further its control over the Northern China and Korea. Both Japan and Britain firstly try to seek for reconciliation with Russia. Japan's attempts to reconcile with Russia brought little success because to nations expansionist policies and defined areas of expansion coincided. Britain's position at that time was still irresolute. Britain wanted to protect the status-quo regarding China's territorial integrity and great powers' peaceful trade-base competition with the open-door policy on the one hand but on the other hand she had no idea how to do it. 'Splendid isolation' policy was still intact but the successive developments in East Asia after the Sino-Japanese War required more than it. As repeatedly mentioned, for British, the main source of the menace against the status-quo in the region is Russia. However, no power resembling Germany's role in Europe seemed poised to balance Russia in East Asia. France, although not explicitly named as such since 1894, had aligned itself with Russia through an alliance implicitly opposed to Germany and Britain. For Germany, engaging in an anti-Russian alliance outside of Europe, particularly one directed by Britain, was undesirable, as any step taken by Russia or any power outside Europe against Britain would render Britain more dependent on Germany. Furthermore, Germany's expectations in East Asia could potentially conflict with those of British Empire.

In light of all these developments, England had two options before it. The first was to come to an agreement with Russia, and initiatives toward this end were initiated in 1898. In fact, these initiatives could be viewed as part of England's overall policy of détente with Russia, which began in 1898 and culminated in 1907. As will be elaborated in the Ottoman section, as the perceived threat of Russia diminished in the Near East, England could engage in partition of spheres of influence agreements with Russia in countries such as Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and China, theoretically preserving the territorial integrity of these nations. However, the significant gap between England's initiative and Russia's pursued demands in East Asia quickly became apparent, leading to the failure of these endeavors. In this scenario, the most viable option for Britain appeared to be forming an alliance with Japan. However, it was well-known that Japan harbored expansionist intentions over China and Korea. For England, the choice lay between Japan's revisionism, encompassing parts of Korea and northeast China, and Russia's potential dominance over the entirety of China, with an unlimited

revisionism that could potentially impact other global spheres of competition. Britain made her choice following to St. James Gazette advice right after the Sino-Japanese War. The decision makers sitting in London was convinced that status-quo in East Asia no longer sustainable. Either Japanese or Russo-French alliance would change it soon because China is too weak to resist. And Japanese having a long on Northeastern Asia seemed less dangerous than the aggressive revisionism of Russia.

Japanese attempt to engage with Russia within the framework of so called 'exchange policy' and reaching an understanding regarding Korea and Manchuria also collapsed. Especially younger generation members of the administration argued that Russian presence in Manchuria would be a perpetual threat to the Korea and Japan's interest in the region. They strongly supported an alliance with Britain particularly giving guarantees for the Japan's special position in Korea (Best, 2010, p. 23). Boxer rebellion and Russia's response to the rebellion became the turning point for the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Rebellions were threatening not only Russian but all power's interest in China, especially Britain's. However, the question was who would bear the cost of any possible military intervention. British asked for Japanese to intervene and Japanese respond positively, particularly by virtue of encouraging views of Japanese Foreign Minister Aoki Shuzo (Shigeru, 2000, p. 164). Japanese troops demonstrated quite success in repressing the uprising and Japanese image in British public reached its zenith in 1901. Although the informal talks of a possible alliance started in April, they were not able to concluded until 1902. There were objections in Britain as well Japan. First of all, the cabinet was not in favor of any alliance with terms already leaked. the cabinet, expressed objections to confining the alliance to the Far East; they contended that Japan should pledge assistance in India as well. Additionally, they were averse to acknowledging Korea as a Japanese sphere of influence, finding it incompatible with their stated policy of preserving the status quo in the Far East. However, any agreement which not accept the Japan's position in Korea meant nothing for Japan (Taylor, 1954, p. 399).

The parties found alternative statements regarding the disputed topics and the alliance agreement signed on 30 January 1902. It was a win-win agreement for both sides. British found a solution to three important they would face in the near future. First, they found an alternative way to counter the Russian-French Naval supremacy in the East. Secondly, Japan's strength could be useful to counter the any further inclusion of Russia in deeper China. And thirdly, any possible Russian-Japanese alliance that may further threaten the status-quo in the region and beyond was prevented. Japanese, on the hand, achieved to get an approval from a Western great power over their special interest in Korea. Furthermore, they found a balancer against the possible Franco-Russian combination in a war against Russia regarding Korea and Manchuria.

The underlying logic behind the Japan's seek for an alliance is to secure its base for expansion. Indeed, neither Russia nor another power was a real threat to Japanese land and its sovereignty when the alliance with British was signed. It was rather the consequence of Japanese expansionist policy in the region and British choice of Japanese revisionism in the region over the Russian one.

Case III: The Italian Kingdom's Hopeless Revisionism and The Triple Alliance

While Italian foreign policy has, at times, exhibited a conservative approach since its foundation, its fundamental essence has always contained elements of revisionism (Doumanis, 2001, p. 92). It's essential to remember that even the concept of Italian unity, spearheaded by Piedmont since 1848, was inherently a revisionist movement. It can be argued that even Italy's engagement in status quo alliances was primarily motivated by its revisionist aspirations in other regions. Therefore, Italy distinguishes itself from the other two examples, the Ottoman Empire and Japan.

Since its establishment, the Kingdom of Italy has consistently leveraged intra-European power dynamics to advance its expansionist agenda. This strategic pursuit persisted beyond 1876, with Italy focusing on three key regions: Austrian territories, including Trieste and Trento; Balkan territories along the Adriatic coast; and North Africa. Italy identified two crucial international developments to support its ambitions. First, the power vacuum in the Balkans and North Africa, stemming from the weakening Ottoman Empire, presented an opportunity for Italy, alongside other major powers, to

secure influence in these regions. Second, Italy sought to exploit intra-European balances to counter Austria, a strategy it successfully employed between 1859-1870. However, Italy's assessments proved inaccurate, as Bismarck's alliance strategies and his adept manipulation of France in the Mediterranean did not create a favorable international environment for Italian expansionism.

Italy's domestic politics underwent a shift in favor of expansionism and revisionism. The left, which assumed power after 1876, championed both irredentist politics and colonial expansionism as means to enhance the welfare of the southern population and mitigate internal discord. Although the modest future politics of the right was abandoned in favor of a more ambitious foreign policy and an endeavor to establish Italy as the sixth great power of Europe, domestic politics became a saleable arugula. Figures such as Carioli and the more radical Crispi stood out as the carriers of this policy.

International and Regional Setting: Stability in Europe vs. Colonial Competition

The strategic course of the newly united Kingdom of Italy prior to 1870 was shaped more by diplomatic events in Europe rather than the kingdom's own decisions. Similar to Piedmont's approach before unification, the Kingdom of Italy adeptly seized the opportunities presented by the turbulent events in Europe, particularly during the 1860s. In this period, the possibilities of satisfying Italy's ambitions were inversely proportional to the relatively calm political atmosphere prevailing in Europe. Whenever there were winds of war and developments that brought rapid changes across Europe, such as in the 1860s, Italy emerged from even the wars it lost by gaining territory and, in a sense, achieved what it wanted (Bosworth, 1996, p. 15). However, in the period starting in 1870 and lasting until 1900, the relatively calm process prevailing in Europe brought about various crises of legitimacy for Italian diplomacy both internally and externally. There appeared two regions to satisfy the Italy's urge for expansionism in that period: Ottoman possessions in the Balkans and the North Africa and the Austrian territories which were the targets of Italia Irredenta.

After the last Prussia-France war in Europe in 1870, states entered a relatively peaceful period where they considered mutual interests. Undoubtedly, the most significant role in this was played by the German Chancellor, Bismarck, and his politics (Taylor, 1954, p. 256). After the last war, the Chancellor believed that Germany had expanded sufficiently on the continent, and the subsequent period required both internal consolidation and a diplomacy to resolve Germany's strategic dilemmas (Lee, 1998, p. 37). The most significant strategic dilemma Germany faced was the possibility of defeated France seeking revenge by forming an alliance with Russia. This fear, which influenced German strategic thinking for the next approximately eighty years, drove Bismarck to construct a complex diplomacy and alliance system. This structure had the most significant regional and international structural impact, influencing the foreign policies of all other states.

The main motivation behind Bismarck's complex alliance system was to divert the attention of major European powers, primarily France and Russia, if possible, towards competition in distant regions away from Europe. He aimed to prevent these powers from uniting against Germany in Europe. The most significant threat in this regard was the rivalry between Austria and Russia. If Austria and Russia engaged in a war over the Balkans, it could potentially draw France into the conflict, and perhaps later, even Britain, which had not yet abandoned its policy of splendid isolation (Lee, 1998, p. 37). In such a scenario, Germany's chances of staying out of the conflict would be eliminated. Within this context, Germany sought to win the goodwill of Russia, which had its image tarnished in Paris in 1856, by making gestures that would reintegrate Russia as a significant part of the European system. Examples of this strategy include altering the Paris arrangements concerning the Black Sea or refraining from taking any action to hinder Russia during its conflicts with the Ottoman Empire (Mutar, 1999, p. 50). Germany even attempted to soothe Vienna in this regard. The Three Emperors' League, comprising Germany, Austria, and Russia, was the most important alliance step that helped preserve the existing status quo for conservative Eastern European states (Lee, 1998, p. 37). This alliance allowed Germany to enable Russia to focus on Eastern Asia.

Revisionist Italy in a Status Quo Alliance

By 1879 Italy was somewhat isolated in European diplomacy (Langer, 1926, p. 252). The Congress of Berlin exposed the gap between Italian expectations and reality of diplomacy. Even France, isolated state by Bismarckian alignments network, secured an unofficial support in their future endeavors in the North Africa. Italians, on the other hand, had no result regarding the compensation in Trieste and Trento in return for Austria-Hungary's gaining in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Such failures lead Italian decision-makers to look for other opportunities. Expansion and revisionism were seen a necessity for both strategic rationale and also providing a satisfaction for status anxiety in Italian politics. Beneditto Cairoli's prime ministry was a crucial turning point for this aim. Cairoli himself, who was married a countess from Trent, leaned towards to irredentism in foreign policy. Therefore, rather than securing Italy's aspirations in North Africa at the expense of France in the Congress of Berlin, Cairoli government instead prioritize the irredentist claims (Langer, 1956, p. 220).

Cairoli's belief was that British would not allow any French attempt to change the balance of power in the Mediterranean. However, Salisbury and Bismarck in Berlin, already informed the French about their green light for any actions regarding Tunis. As already states, Bismarck was aiming to keep France satisfied as a great power in the regions that Germany had no interest at all while Salisbury needed France support in the Near East against Russia (Taylor, 1954, p. 272). The news from the congress inflamed the anti-French rage on the and irredentist fever on the hand. Cairoli government did nothing stop this irredentist protests against Austria and it brought the relations at the breaking point (Langer, 1956, p. 220). His effort to turn the tide in favor of Italy in Europe and Balkans further irritate the both Germans and Austrians. Especially when Italian administrations seriously thought the possibility of a Russian alliance, Germans told Austrians that they would be no objections on their side if Austria wanted to take the lost territories (in 1866) back (Langer, 1926, p. 253, 1956, p. 222).

Italy's incoherent foreign policy created a spiral effect. Whenever, she took an irredentist and anti-Austrian stance, it expected Russian, British and even French support but never got it. Whenever, she turned her face from continental Europe to Mediterranean he clashed with France expected a German and British support which she never got it either. Cairoli turned once again to Germany for an alliance. Bismarck's respond was that the road to Berlin pass through Vienna and implicitly underlined the necessity of the Italians' dropping their irredentist claims over Austrian territory. Italian ambassadors in Paris and Vienna was aware of the French danger due to Tunis policies of Cairoli and therefore strongly advised the government to find a way to reach an understanding with central powers in order to balance France. However, these attempts in 1880 did not reach anywhere and Italy was still alone against France.

This was a significant setback for Italy's imperial aspirations. The challenge for Italian foreign policy at the time was that it attempted to exert influence beyond its capabilities. Italy couldn't forsake its irredentist goals regarding Austrian territories and secure support from the central powers against France. It could neither abandon its irredentist policy towards Austrian territories and secure central power support against France, nor could it recognize French supremacy in the Mediterranean and convince France of a Latin alliance against Germany and Austria. The French invasion of Tunisia became a turning point in this regard. Not only did the invasion itself pose challenges, but the response of the European great powers signaled to Italy that its excessive demands wouldn't be fulfilled. Furthermore, this defeat fueled domestic discontent, especially against the monarchy. The prospect of an alliance with France became unattainable, leaving Britain and Germany as the only potential allies for Italy. However, it was clear that Britain would not participate in an anti-French alliance while maintaining its policy of avoiding entanglement in any coalition. Faced with this situation, Italy once again turned its attention to Berlin and Vienna.

Austria was more inclined to ally itself with Italy, which was now on its knees, especially in view of the rising anti-monarchical anger in Italy. Kalnoky also convinced Bismarck of the danger posed both by the rising anti-monarchical wave in Italy and by Gambetta, a staunch nationalist and republican who had come to power in France. The Italian monarchy had to be saved somehow. For Italy, an agreement with Austria would first and foremost pave the way for an agreement with Berlin. German support against France was of the utmost importance. It seemed unlikely that they would be able to convince

Bismarck that France was preparing for war in Europe, but it was also true that Bismarck had become more skeptical about France with the Gambetta government. He also believed that providing a defense guarantee to Italy wouldn't impose an overwhelming burden. In reality, the Italians were attempting to enhance their bargaining position by exaggerating the perceived French threat:

...he knew that the French were not intending to attack Italy, and therefore he did not regard the obligation as onerous. The Italians knew this also; recognition as a Great Power, not protection from France, was their real need. The Triple Alliance gave them this; it bolstered up the myth of Italian greatness, and therefore staved off internal discontent for almost a generation. There was one striking omission in the original Alliance. Though humiliation over Tunis played only a secondary part in driving Italy over to the central Powers, the Italian politicians certainly wanted backing for their imperialist designs in the Mediterranean. In 1882 they did not get it. But just as the Austrians thought that the Austro-German alliance would gradually draw Germany into supporting their Balkan plans, so the Italians counted that the Triple Alliance would gradually involve Germany in their Mediterranean schemes. (Taylor, 1954, p. 276)

The anticipated alliance agreement was finally signed in 1882. According to the agreement, Germany and Austria committed to defending Italy against France, and in return, Italy would align with Germany if France attacked. In the event of a Russian attack on Germany or Austria, Italy would maintain a neutrality close to its allies. As part of the deal, Italy renounced its irredentist claims. In reciprocation, the Italians sought to have provisions in the treaty supporting Italian expansionism, particularly in the Mediterranean. However, the other two states rejected this request, citing the ambiguous limits with Italy's colonial policy.

The Italians anticipated that this alliance would serve two distinct purposes beyond safeguarding them from the French threat. Firstly, the Italians had acquired the status of a state capable of forming alliances with great powers. Secondly, and more crucially, the Italians hoped that this alliance would eventually become a backbone for Italy to reshape the Mediterranean status quo in its favor. Particularly during Crispi's leadership and the two attempts to renew the alliance, Italy frequently raised this issue and achieved some success in 1887. However, the Italians' expectations turned into disappointment during their expanding colonial ventures in Africa. As Di Scala (2009, p. 141) underscores, "Crispi misunderstood the fundamental function of the Triple Alliance as a conservative instrument designed to preserve the European status quo, and he attempted to use the pact to win a colonial empire." This expectation remained unfulfilled as the allies lacked both the interest in Italy's colonial ventures and the means to support it in this policy. One of the pivotal developments illustrating that the Italians joined the Triple Alliance not merely to preserve the status quo but to leverage the rivalries among great powers for revisions in their favor, akin to their practices between 1859-1870, occurred when the Italians realized that the alliance did not offer the expected support in the Mediterranean and Africa. Particularly, when the Germans forged close ties with the Ottoman Empire after Bismarck and did not endorse policies that would counter the Ottoman Empire in regions where Italy also had its interests, the Italians gravitated towards the Franco-Russian alliance. By 1902-1903, with the specter of war between Austria and Italy looming, the Italians betrayed the Triple Alliance by aligning with the Allied forces that promised them expansion in Ottoman territories during the First World War, marking the first crucial test for the alliance.

Conclusion

The three cases elucidated in this paper underscore how disparities in capabilities can fundamentally alter the scope of interests. This shift in scale illustrates the potential for alliances between a revisionist great power and a status quo middle power, or vice versa, challenging the conventional assumptions of the Balance of Interest Theory. The research posits that the unexpected emergence of these alliances stems from disparities between the regional and international systems. For middle powers, the power dynamics within the regional system mirror the significance of power distribution within the international realm for great powers. Decision-makers of middle powers craft policies in response to systemic imperatives shaping state behavior, predominantly directed towards the regional context in which their states are situated. This dynamic accentuates the nuanced interplay between regional and international dynamics, emphasizing the pivotal role of regional context in comprehending the alliance politics of middle powers.

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