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DOI: 10.2478/cmc-2024-0006

PRESTIŽ, PONIŽANJE IN OHRANJANJE OBRAZA: NACIONALNA IDENTITETA IN POLITIKA VELIKIH SIL

PRESTIGE, HUMILIATION AND SAVING FACE: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND GREAT POWER POLITICS

Povzetek Članek zagovarja tezo, da je dinamika prestiža in ponižanja sila na sistemski ravni, ki oblikuje vedenje držav. Če psihološki dejavnik povežemo s strukturnim realizmom, ugotovimo, da močnejša, kot je država, bolj si lahko prizadeva, da bi preteklo ponižanje odpravila z agresivnimi dejanji, s katerimi si prizadeva za prestiž. Tako želi ponovno potrditi svojo moč in status, da bi izbrisala preteklo ponižanje in dosegla prestiž tudi na račun drugih. Obravnavani bodo trije zgodovinski primeri: izbris versajske pogodbe s strani nacistične Nemčije, kitajsko stoletje ponižanja in širitev Severnoatlantske zveze v Vzhodno Evropo proti Rusiji. V prispevku bo nato opredeljeno vedenje, ki omogoča tekmcu, da ohrani prestiž in se izogne ponižanju kot način za deescalacijo napetosti.

Ključne besede *Teorija, varnost, vojna, konflikt, konstruktivizem.*

Abstract This paper argues that a prestige-humiliation dynamic is a systems-level force that shapes state behavior. Connecting psychological factors to structural realism, we observe the following: the more powerful a state becomes, the more it could seek to overturn past humiliation through aggressive prestige-seeking acts. This is done to reassert its power and status to erase past humiliation and achieve prestige even at the expense of others. Three historical examples will be discussed: Nazi Germany's erasure of the Treaty of Versailles, China's Century of Humiliation, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's expansion into Eastern Europe against Russia. The paper will then define face-saving behavior, allowing a competitor to preserve prestige and avoid humiliation as a way to deescalate tension.

Key words *Theory, security, war, conflict, constructivism.*

Introduction Past national humiliation drives prestige-seeking behavior, creating the psychological mechanisms driving international systemic change. Joslyn Barnhart's article "Humiliation and Third-Party Aggression" describes increased French imperialism in Tunisia as a response to the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany. She asks the question: "Why would a state respond to territorial loss with such acts of aggression?" (p 532). She finds that states seeking to recover from humiliation are 84% more likely to become aggressive on the world stage (*Ibid.*). Her article is a large-n, quantitative study of the past. What of today? In a competitive international system, is it likely that state efforts to overturn past humiliation and increase national prestige serve as a central guiding principle of great power behavior? Will this be at the expense of others' prestige? This paper suggests studying the changing structure of the international system order through the psychological-motivational lens of a prestige-humiliation dynamic.

There are psychological issues which must be understood as part of states' motivations determined by systems-level forces (Hymens, 2010). The prestige-humiliation dynamic is one of these systems-level forces. This article incorporates the prestige-humiliation dynamic into structural realism, a theory of international relations that posits a systemic, rational explanation of state behavior (Waltz, 2010). To this end, we should observe the following: the more powerful a state becomes, the more it seeks to overturn past humiliation through aggressive prestige-seeking acts. This is done to reassert its power and status to achieve this prestige even at the expense of others. Hence, revisionist states seek prestige at the humiliation of status quo powers as an inherent part of state interests. Similarly, status quo states seek to protect their prestige at the humiliation of revisionist or subdued powers. Hence, building on the world of Robert Gilpin (1981), this paper submits a psychological framework simplifying the causes of systemic war.

To further observe and understand the proposed psychological dynamic, three historical examples will be discussed: the rise of Nazi Germany, China's Century of Humiliation, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's expansion into Eastern Europe against Russia (Wang, 2020; Sharafutdinova, 2020). To justify the choice, Nazi Germany's prestige-pursuing foreign policy culminated in World War II. This serves as a benchmark to describe a humiliated state's resurgence resulting in a push to eradicate past misdeeds in an international system. As Nazi Germany grew in power (and Great Britain and the west declined), it demanded to be recognized as a great power, tossing aside the source of its humiliation: the Treaty of Versailles. This case serves as a standard to compare challenger behavior (China and Russia) within the contemporary international system.

China and Russia provide more contemporaneous examples, showing that similar patterns of the behavior that defined Nazi Germany's experience are being repeated. As China and Russia increase in power, they will attempt to overturn past humiliation through prestige-seeking acts. China is pursuing this strategy as it attempts to push for dominance in the South China Sea and regain Taiwan, overturning its "Century

of Humiliation" and regaining its rightful place in the world (Wang, 2020; Hussaini, 2020; Mayer, 2018). Russia has successfully annexed Crimea in an attempt to stop further encroachment into its sphere of influence by the Europeans and the United States (Sharafutdinova, 2020). Scholars must then try to reconceive international relations theory by underscoring psychological components that are explicitly tied to the systems level of analysis.

1 HIGHLIGHTING STATUS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Structural realism submits that the anarchical international system produces state competition (Waltz, 2010). International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power; not simply for the sake of power alone, but for power to control outcomes that serve state interests (Morgenthau 1985). Kenneth Waltz (2010), the founder of structural realism, borrows from Stanley Hoffman's understanding of a system: "...a pattern of relations among the basic units of world politics" (1961, p 90). Hoffman here is referring to behavior between states. Waltz builds on this further by arguing that it is the structure of the system that drives state behavior (Waltz, 2010, p 81).

The international structure is determined by the distribution of capabilities across states, specifically the great powers of the era. Great powers balance against one another through military power or alliances forming the structure of the international system. States need to defend their position in the system through power to achieve security. Remaining secure is part of a state's interest in terms of survival as an independent political unit. In other words, defending interests as determined by power is necessary for national security and maintaining autonomy in a system without government (Wolfers, 1952).

Structural realists tend to focus on material military capabilities, specifically the "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence" (Waltz, 2010, p 131), as the main components of systems-level analysis. The distribution of capabilities, along with anarchy and security-seeking behavior, form the structure of the international system. Competence stands out from the rest because it has to do with the quality of leadership rather than something material that can be counted, such as the number of fighter jets, tanks, and soldiers. However, there is a psychological systems-level component missing which forms the main contribution of this paper: status.

Part of state behavior is the need or desire of states to defend or increase status. Status is not evenly distributed throughout the system. It is also not defined in a vacuum, but in contrast with competitors (Dafoe et al., 2014). It is not simply to see yourself as great; others must recognize your greatness and treat you with the respect you think you deserve. Any violation of this may result in an insult to your status and possibly lead to humiliation (Ginges and Atran, 2008). These are psychological factors, and whether the system's structure is unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar, psychological factors shape human reason and action. Human reason and action then produce state

behavior (Kahneman, 2011, p 139). These calculations are an inherent part of the international system.

Further, states do not just compare their relative power (Grieco, 1988), but also their relative status (Dafoe et al., 2014). From this, one might recognize there is a psychological and emotional need for states to be recognized for greatness, something the state and its citizens can ‘feel good’ about. So, even though status is an essential part of systems-level calculations, as a psychological factor it is ignored by structural realism due to its so-called irrational and immaterial characteristics.

Status has more to do with identification and cannot be measured objectively, but only through studying narratives and the perceptions of those narratives by the subject and others. The self-esteem of a nation is thus crucial, as it shapes the behavior of a state. Entire state or national belief systems exist that construct this identity which is inherently tied to self-esteem (O’Neill, 2006). To attack or alter self-esteem is an attack on the state itself (Chwe, 2003). Psychologically speaking, then, states seek to defend their status by overturning any humiliation or slight and, in doing so, they defend their prestigious status (Frevert and Bresnahanm 2020; Fontannm 2006; Ginges and Atran, 2008). These are emotional and cognitive functions that help form the international system.

Emotions are often omitted from international relations theory, specifically structural realism, due to the need to remain simplistic (Kahler, 1998). This is because they assume rationality, which posits that actors defend interests and an order of preferences (Golman et al., 2017). Others may add complexity to the theory to add nuance and sophistication. So, while a reasonable starting point, materialist theories like structural realism may benefit from adding layers of cognitive analysis to accurately hypothesize on the current world order. This article intends to do this through an emotional/psychological analysis of great power status.

Structural realism argues that states behave rationally to achieve security in a self-help system (Waltz, 2010). Emotions are seen as dichotomous to rationality, interrupting the coherent process of rationality in the decision-making process (Mercer, 2005). In neuroscience, it is argued that emotions actually play a crucial role in the formulation of rationality and thus decision-making (Damasio, 2005; 1999). Human emotion can be reduced to two states: positive, pleasant feelings such as joy and exuberance; and negative emotions like anger, sadness, and fear (Shaver et al., 1987). Emotions are produced in the brain and help manage the thinking process by determining “...the deployment of attentional resources, systemic mobilization, approach and defensive behaviors, and the formation of conditioned associations fundamental to the survival of individuals” (Lang and Davis, 2006, p 4). Decision-making is thus a subjective process, a result of specific experiences and an understanding of history and politics. Consequently, decision-making is “...influenced by cultural ideas and images, and refracted through roles and relationships” (Hochschild, 2009, p 30). Given the physical processes of the human mind, it cannot make decisions independent of

emotions. An individual may perceive or understand the world based on emotions rather than a purely scientific explanation. This perception includes comprehension of oneself and others, of one's own national identity, and that of others. States behave similarly, as they are governed by the international system's determination of status. Therefore, the role of humiliation and prestige in world politics is as feelings that undergird the understanding of self and other.

Humiliation is a feeling, a "...deep dysphoric feeling associated with being, or perceiving oneself as being, unjustly degraded, ridiculed, or put down—in particular, one's identity has been demeaned or devalued" (Hartling and Luchetta, 1999, p 264). This particular definition is a deeply personal one, focusing solely on a specific negative experience of one person. A deep experience may impact one's personality permanently, as the humiliation may alter the person's identity (Hymans, 2006). It is also possible for humiliation to be suffered across a population. This is very similar to trauma. Trauma may also be shared by an entire group of people (Fierke, 2007). Like national trauma, humiliation may take on a national dimension if an insult is leveled at the nation, the state itself, or some part of national identity (Masterson, 2020, p 23).

Humiliations and losses are based on the perceptions and understandings of identity (Frevert and Bresnahan, 2020). This means that calculations of power may not exactly be materialist in nature, as Waltz (2010) suggested, but rather must take on a cognitive sense. As a result, any calculation is subject to the misperception of a state's actual, material power (Jervis, 2017). The result could be disastrous, as states may take any perceived weakness as an opportunity to declare war (Wohlfarth, 2010; Jervis, 2017). This could be particularly dangerous in a hypothetical multipolar order, as states (whether status quo or revisionist) may attack either to gain or regain lost prestige or to humiliate/avoid humiliation (Wirth, 2020).

National humiliation may stem from an event such as a major defeat so intense that it led to a lowering of state status (Barnhart, 2017, p 536). In other words, the loss or insult harms prestige. Examples of national humiliation could be an embarrassing loss to a weaker state or non-state actor (the United States in Vietnam/Afghanistan), loss of influence (loss of Russian influence and NATO expansion into Eastern Europe), or loss of sovereignty (China's Century of Humiliation). One seeks to humiliate to gain prestige, which is associated with revenge attempts. Thus, states seek to avoid humiliation by increasing prestige and, in a zero-sum world, humiliating others. Research suggests that humiliation may drive conflict. For instance, Barnhart (2017) argues that "states—and great powers in particular—are more likely to engage in status-seeking acts, such as territorial aggression against weaker states, when they have experienced a humiliating event in which they fail to live up to international expectations" (p 533).

From this, we can borrow from Robert Gilpin's definition of prestige, which has everything to do with power and feeling powerful. It has to do with a specific

“reputation for power and military power in particular. Whereas power refers to the economic, military, and related capabilities of a state, prestige refers primarily to the perceptions of other states concerning a state’s capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise its power … prestige involves the credibility of a state’s power to achieve its objectives” (1981, p 31). While Gilpin may distinguish between power and prestige, it is important to note the reciprocal relationship between the two due to the notion of credibility. Credibility is the recognition of power by others, enhancing deterrence and thus security capabilities (Ibid., p 31). Powerful states with status are more likely to succeed without using force as “the bargaining among states and the outcomes of negotiations are determined principally by the relative prestige of the parties involved” (Ibid.). If a state’s power is recognized, it is more likely to succeed in diplomatic negotiation due to the threat of force (which comes from power). Thus, there is a reciprocal relationship between the two, because power feeds recognition and credibility, and recognition and credibility feed power. Power and credibility are thus tied together in terms of reputation, and therefore status.

National humiliation is a negative emotion that states seek to avoid. Humiliation from weakness brings reductions in status and further perceptions of weakness. At the opposite end of this emotional spectrum is the feeling of prestige. Prestige is primarily about high status within the international system. A great power, for instance, demands respect from others. To treat a great power like any other entity is insulting and may elicit responses, including a show of force, to garner that respect. Barnhart (2017) argues that states seeking prestige, or seeking to win back prestige from humiliation, may conduct an aggressive foreign policy (Wirth, 2020). The prestige-humiliation dynamic may also explain imperial overstretch (Kennedy, 1987), because a state may over-extend itself regardless of whether or not it has the material means to defend newly acquired territory; the state prefers to avoid being humiliated and will do whatever it takes.

States suffer from a deadly fear of losing status, so much so that they would rather continue a losing conflict, regardless of the cost, just to avoid losing (Renshon, 2015). As a consequence, great powers want to remain great powers and to be recognized as such. This is important not only for a state’s self-esteem, but also for how the state believes it should be treated by other states, “collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on valued attributes”, which may be manifested in international politics either as membership in a “defined club of actors” or as “relative standing within such a club” (Larson et al., 2014, p 7). Without prestige, a state accepts a demotion of status. This is equated with humiliation, taking a backseat in the global order, becoming a follower, and accepting the leadership of a competitor, possibly the very state which humiliated it. In other words, prestige is about the relative position of states in the international system (Wirth, 2020). Specifically, it has to do with recognition, power, and admiration in the international system. To observe these processes, three cases will be analyzed: Nazi Germany, China, and Russia.

In summary, this paper discusses the psychological mechanisms governing humiliation and prestige as part of the competitive, self-help, anarchic international system described by structural realism (Waltz, 2010). Consequently, this study argues that cognitively preparing for the humiliation-prestige dynamic is essential to avoiding war. This contribution is particularly important because it offers a cognitive explanation of state conflict. The proposed dynamic is often ignored by scholars seeking to address state conflict, with the psychological impetus for choosing war remaining unexplained. Adapting to this systemic component must be on the agenda, especially given specific prestige-seeking behaviors. Without respect for another state's status, the chances of war become more and more real.

States that have been humiliated in the past are likely to violently strike out against others. This dynamic must be understood if the international system is to change. By understanding the centrality of the humiliation-prestige dynamic, the paper makes a recommendation: allow face-saving behavior. Allowing a competitor to preserve prestige and avoid humiliation is a way to deescalate tension and avoid conflict. Hence, the system must be able to adapt to the behavior of Russia and China. Saving face is an essential contribution which fits into the cognitive explanation provided. Thus, the importance of this study follows that understanding the impact humiliation and prestige have on state behavior could help to predict and ultimately prevent conflict.

2 OBSERVING THE HUMILIATION-PRESTIGE DYNAMIC

Humiliation and prestige are systems-level factors that shape state behavior. Along with the distribution of capabilities, the distribution of status across actors impacts the decisions of states in the international system. This psychological factor motivates states to behave in specific ways, that is, avoiding humiliation through acts of prestige. At times, these behaviors are disruptive, as status is relative (based on the status of others). This makes the humiliation-prestige dynamic part of a zero-sum game, as explored through the following historical studies.

After the humiliating collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States emerged as the victor. As the international system's sole superpower; the most prestigious position in the system was given to the United States (Brooks and Wolforth, 2008). This gave it the ability to transform the international system as it saw fit (Layne 2012). Working through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international regimes and institutions, the United States was effectively able to dictate foreign policy outcomes for the rest of the world (Woods, 2007). Those states that did not fit the mold, that is, so-called rogue and Axis of Evil states, had to be deposed to fit into the vision of the new American century. Neoliberal economic foreign policy was the main objective, and China was its main target (Ikenberry, 2012).

It was thought that with increased economic transactions with China, eventually, it would transform into a democracy. However, this did not happen, and China has

grown by leaps and bounds (including in military power) since its admittance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001.

China now has a global presence and boasts the world's largest navy, with sophisticated anti-aircraft missile defense systems (Toje, 2018). Its overall grand strategy protects the homeland (militarized artificial islands) while tying the economies of the developing and developed world through the One Belt, One Road initiative. Now, China is seeking to overturn the past humiliation referred to as the "Century of Humiliation" through disruptive acts of prestige, such as pushing into parts of the South China Sea it sees as historically its own. China is also seeking to reunify with Taiwan and, if necessary, to do so by force (Hussaini, 2020; Mayer, 2018; Thies and Nieman, 2017).

Russia is also on a path to overturn past humiliation. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian influence in Eastern Europe (seen as vital to its security) has been reduced by the expansion of NATO (Sharafutdinova, 2020; Mearsheimer, 2014). This all came to a head in 2014, with Ukraine seeking closer ties with the European Union. The invasion of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia is an attempt to protect itself against further encroachment. This act was deemed an egregious violation of Ukrainian sovereignty by the United States, who preferred to protect the international political status quo from violent alterations such as this. However, the United States was unable to stop Russia from annexing Crimea.

From this analysis, it is clear that there is competition between the great powers of the international system (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016; O'Hanlon, 2019; Haass, 2017). It is interesting to note that rising states (Russia and China) are not suddenly appearing on the scene as great powers; they remain 'resurgent' or 'rising' powers. Nevertheless, Russia and China were once great powers. From the Russian and Chinese perspectives, they suffered humiliation at the hands of western powers. The United States is perceived to have played an important part in these humiliations.

The next section will apply the humiliation-prestige dynamic to the cases of Nazi Germany, Russia, and China.

2.1 Nazi Germany

The creation of the German Empire was a direct threat to the British Empire (Calleo, 1978). Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the British Empire had acted as the world's foremost power. As the global hegemon, Britain facilitated the international economic system ushering in Pax Britannica. Under Pax Britannica, the industrial revolution boosted the economic growth of most European powers, including Germany. The more powerful Germany became, the more it sought international prestige. Germany began to increase its global presence around the world, seeking colonies in Africa and demanding a say in global governance (the Balkan and Moroccan crises). Germany was seeking to become a great power on a par with

Britain. This became even more obvious with Germany's expanding dreadnaught ambition as a naval power. Britain took this as a test of its dominance on the seas, which resulted in worsening tensions (*Ibid.*). Germany's prestige-seeking behavior was a direct challenge to Britain, leading to the solidification of the balance of power in Europe and World War I.

When Germany surrendered in 1918, it was under false pretenses; Germany thought it would sign an armistice among equals. What happened was what Ellis Dresel, then American Diplomat to Berlin, called betrayal: "The people had been led to believe that Germany had been unluckily beaten after a fine and clean fight...that happily President Wilson could be appealed to and would arrange a compromise peace satisfactory to Germany" (Macmillan, 2003, p 493). Many Germans, civilians and those in leadership, thought that they would be offered an honorable surrender, embracing a new world order under Wilson's 14 Points. The 14 Points of Wilson promised self-determination and a new international community dedicated to open diplomacy, with a specific commitment to democracy (Wilson, 2001, p 4). Instead, Germany was forced to sign (under threat of the bombardment of Berlin) the Treaty of Versailles.

It is interesting to note that no major German officials wanted to sign the Treaty of Versailles. No one wanted to have their name on that document. Herman Müller, one of the officials (a lower level one) who signed the treaty, describes an emotional feeling: "A cold sweat such as I had never known in my life before broke out all over my body – a physical reaction which necessarily followed the unutterable psychic strain. And now, for the first time, I knew that the worst hour of my life lay behind me" (Macmillan, 2003, p 477). This inner turmoil expresses national humiliation as the Treaty of Versailles forced the Germans to give up 65,000sq kilometers of territory and with it seven million citizens. Germany went from being one of the largest continental powers pre-1914 to one that had no real standing army. They also had to pay \$132 million in gold marks in war reparations (Bell, 1997, p 20). To have policies dictated to Germany elicited a severe response from the German people.

The Nazi Party promised a swift return to greatness; to destroy those who had humiliated them and then to dominate the world. Adolf Hitler set about overturning the humiliating Treaty of Versailles. During this time, Great Britain, France, and the United States were reeling from the Great Depression (1929). These states are also demilitarized. On the other hand, Nazi Germany was faring a bit better, and began the process of remilitarization. From the remilitarization of the Rhine to the annexation of Austria and the invasion of Poland, Hitler, with the approval of many of the German people, sought to regain lost prestige. Overturning the humiliation was perceived as the only method, as Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German foreign minister in 1939 wrote: "The Fuhrer has done nothing but remedy the most serious consequences which this most unreasonable of all dictates in history imposed upon a nation and, in fact, upon the whole of Europe, in other words, repair the worst mistakes committed by none other than the statesman of the western democracies"

(Macmillan, 2003, p 482). In other words, for many Germans, the path to erasing humiliation was through gaining prestige at the expense of other states.

In sum, Hitler aimed to overthrow the humiliating Treaty of Versailles to achieve the prestige that he thought the German people deserved. In separate writing and speeches, Hitler expounded on the faults of the Treaty of Versailles and how it kept down Germany from its rightful status on the world stage. In a April 17, 1923 speech, he stated:

With the armistice begins the humiliation of Germany. If the Weimar Republic on the day of its foundation had appealed to the country [and said]: “Germans, stand together! Up and resist the foe! The Fatherland, the Republic expects of you that you fight to your last breath”, then millions who are now enemies of the Republic would be fanatical [supporters of the Republic]. Today they are the foes of the Republic not because it is a Republic, but because this Republic was founded at the moment when Germany was humiliated because it so discredited the new flag that men’s eyes must turn regretfully toward the old flag (quoted in Slavicek, 2010, p 96).

Two years later, he wrote in *Mein Kampf* (1929):

Without consideration of traditions and prejudices, Germany must find the courage to gather our people, and their strength, for an advance along the road that will lead these people from its present, restricted living space to new land and soil, and, hence, also free it from the danger of vanishing from the earth, or of serving others as a slave nation. For it is not in colonial acquisitions that we must see the solution to this problem, but exclusively in the acquisition of territory for settlement, which will enhance the area of the mother country, and hence not only keep the new settlers in the most intimate communion with the land of their origin but secure for the entire area those advantages which lie in its unified magnitude... (Hitler, 1939).

The power of this humiliation was so great for Hitler and the German people that when France surrendered in 1940, Hitler forced France to sign its surrender in the same train car Germany signed its surrender to France after World War I.

It is important to note that Nazi Germany’s defeat did not bring the same sense of humiliation as in 1919. The feelings of Germans were that of shame (Masterson, 2020). Shame and humiliation are similar negative feelings but are quite different. While humiliation is seen as something undeserved, shame is the feeling one gets when the wrong-doing is known by the person (Klein, 1991).

Like Nazi Germany, China might be now seeking to overturn its own experience of humiliation, labeled the “Century of Humiliation” by the Communist Party of China (Wang, 2020). This term was first used after the “Twenty-One Demands” placed on

China by Japan during World War I. Callahan's 2004 article "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism" explores the *Atlas of the Century of Humiliation in Modern China*, a textbook used by the Chinese Communist Party to document and teach this particular history to China's citizens. Further, Callahan notes the various textbooks, novels, museums, songs, and parks that surround the Century of Humiliation.

2.2 China

The Century of Humiliation is a term used by the People's Republic of China to document the years of subjugation of China by western powers, Japan, and Russia before the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Scott, 2008). The specific historical events used to personify this period of unequal treatment are as follows:

- China's defeat in the First and Second Opium Wars (1839-1842; 1856-1860);
- China's defeat in the Sino-French War (1884-1885);
- China's defeat in the War with Japan (1894-1895);
- Defeat of the Boxer Uprising and the aftermath of occupation and destruction of Chinese culture;
- War with Japan before and during World War II (1937-1945).

These losses led to harsh outcomes, such as loss of territory, reparations, terror, and crimes against humanity (the Rape of Nanjing). The Boxer Rebellion is a particularly dark moment in Chinese history. Rebels attempted to drive out European powers from China. Several European nations and Japan invaded and destroyed the rebellion. The victors then marched to the capital city and forced a treaty, the Boxer Protocol, on China (Lee, 2009). This treaty forced China:

1. to pay war reparations (450,000,000 taels of silver);
2. to destroy twenty-five Chinese forces, including those defending Beijing;
3. to allow foreign troops to be stationed at strategic points, including Beijing;
4. to refrain from investing in arms;
5. to allow Russia all of Manchuria (Ibid.).

So powerful were these years that Mao Zedong vowed to overcome: "Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up" (Zedong, 1977, p 17). According to Zedong and following leaders, it is the responsibility of the CCP to overturn past humiliations and claim China's position of esteem (Callahan, 2004).

Today, past humiliations find themselves in China's political discourse (Hussaini, 2020; Mayer, 2018). In his October 1, 2019 "National Day" address, President Xi Jinping focused on history, looking back at China's historical experience as a global power and its relationship with the western world. Some key phrases:

The founding of the People's Republic of China completely changed China's miserable fate of being poor and weak and being bullied and humiliated in over 100 years since the advent of modern times...The Chinese nation has since then embarked on the path of realizing national rejuvenation...Chinese people of all ethnic groups have made great achievements that amaze the world, over the past seven decades through concerted efforts and arduous struggle...No force can ever shake the status of China, or stop the Chinese people and nation from marching forward...We must upload the principles of 'peaceful reunification' and 'one country, two systems', maintain lasting prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macao, promote the peaceful development of cross-Straits relations...The Chinese People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police Force should always preserve their nature, purpose, and character as the forces of the people, resolutely safeguard China's sovereignty, security, and development interests, and firmly uphold world peace...China's yesterday had been inscribed in human history while China's today is being created in the hands of millions of Chinese people. China will surely have an even brighter future (in *China Daily*, 2019).

President Xi here frames his speech by first acknowledging the Century of Humiliation. He then explains that the CCP was and remains the main vehicle for China's success (Callahan, 2004). He points to the status of China and describes the ability of the armed forces to safeguard the state and its sovereignty from outside intervention, sparing citizens from another humiliation.

Xi points to future reunification with Taiwan, uniting all of China. China today is a global force, boasting the world's largest navy and army, and building islands in the South China Sea to defend its historical 9-dash line claim (Hussaini, 2020; Gao and Jia, 2013). China's One Belt, One Road initiative hopes to bring the world together and provide an alternative to the American Bretton Woods system (Ferdinand, 2016). Hence, for China to recover from 100 years of humiliation, it must overturn the injustices suffered at the hand of western powers and Japan (Wang, 2020; Hussaini, 2020; Mayer, 2018). To undo humiliation is to embrace conflict, if necessary, to return to prestigious status. Another power, Russia, demonstrates a similar modus operandi.

2.3 Russia

NATO expansion may have humiliated the identity of Russia as an exceptional power (Martin, 2020; Radchenko, 2020). This feeling of humiliation finds its beginnings in NATO and EU expansion. Russia sees itself as a prestigious power and demands some level of respect as a great power. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought on decades of Russian weakness which, according to Russia, gave rise to an expansionary American foreign policy. By 1999, states once considered within the Russian sphere, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the Baltic States (among others), were firmly in the American camp. In 2014, during the height

of the Crimean conflict, Vladimir Putin described the Russian perspective during the period of NATO and European Union expansion, and connected it to Russia's actions in Ukraine:

We understand what is happening; we understand that these actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and Eurasian integration. And all this while Russia strived to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in the West. We are constantly proposing cooperation on all key issues; we want to strengthen our level of trust and for our relations to be equal, open, and fair. But we saw no reciprocal steps.

On the contrary, they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, and placed us before an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO's expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders. They kept telling us the same thing: "Well, this does not concern you." That's easy to say... they are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally (Address by President of the Russian Federation, 2014).

When Putin took power in December 1999, he promised to throw off Russian humiliation and regain prestige: "Belief in the greatness of Russia. Russia was and will remain a great power. It is preconditioned by the inseparable characteristics of its geopolitical, economic, and cultural existence. They determined the mentality of Russians and the policy of the government throughout the history of Russia and they cannot but do so at present" (Putin, 1999). From Russia's perspective, Russia had been humiliated (Whitehall Papers, 2008). Mearsheimer (2014) described Russia's perspective:

NATO enlargement is the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and integrate it into the West. At the same time, the EU's expansion eastward and the West's backing of the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine—beginning with the Orange Revolution in 2004—were critical elements, too. Since the mid-1990s, Russian leaders have adamantly opposed NATO enlargement and in recent years, they have made it clear that they would not stand by while their strategically important neighbor turned into a Western bastion. For Putin, the illegal overthrow of Ukraine's democratically elected and pro-Russian president—which he rightly labeled a "coup"—was the final straw. He responded by taking Crimea, a peninsula he feared would host a NATO naval base, and working to destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West (Mearsheimer, 2014).

For Russia, the annexation of Crimea had more to do with defending Russia and avoiding yet another humiliation. Winning Crimea back (in the Russian mind) increased the prestige of Russia, as western media began discussing the Russian resurgence. Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022) seems to be a continuation of this endeavor. However, as of time of writing (February 6, 2024), it remains difficult to ascertain whether or not Russian efforts will be successful. If Russia fails to achieve its aims, it will suffer another grave humiliation.

2.4 Synthesis: Illustrating psychological contributions

From these examples, there is a direct connection between humiliation and prestige making them seem to act as a dynamic, working together to describe state behavior or even to convince the population that any aggressive state strategy may be pursued to overturn a past misdeed. Avoiding cherry-picking but focusing on two major contemporary cases (and one past case), the prestige-humiliation comes alive. State leaders must actively choose to go to war. This is simply not a rational choice, a decision to go to war or not or to hold a territory or not. These decisions are also emotional in nature and thus must have a cognitive approach. Wendt's line "anarchy is what states make of it" (1992) is a good one but possibly incomplete: anarchy is what emotions make of it. Cognitive and psychological factors, and emotions like humiliation and prestige, add an emotional layer to the study of international relations.

To summarize, humiliation is costly to a state's perception of itself and others. Losing prestige and suffering humiliation may cause the state to lash out and seek to overturn the humiliation and return to prestige. They fear they may be seen as weak. Emotions are at the center of this argument as this fear follows, hurting deterrence and increasing the likelihood of further attack. This article applied three major examples: Germany after World War I, the Russian loss of influence over Eastern Europe, and China's undoing of the Century of Humiliation.

To avoid humiliation is to embrace conflict, which might be able to explain intractable and never-ending conflicts, for instance, the United States being unable to withdraw from Iraq/Afghanistan due to fear of humiliation. No cost is too great to avoid being humiliated. The introduction of emotion into the decision-making process may help us understand the reasons great powers seek and defend their prestige while avoiding humiliation. What may seem like a rational choice is hindered by emotions, preserving identities, and saving face (saving face to be discussed later). Great powers function to survive, but also to protect self-esteem by pursuing prestige and avoiding humiliation. These are thus dichotomous:

Prestige vs. humiliation

Strength vs. weakness

Winner vs. loser

Demand vs. accept

Leader vs. follower

There is thus an inverse or opposite relationship: humiliation for one may mean prestige for another. However, a weak state may accept being the weaker partner, but that weaker partner knows and accepts its weakness. For a great power to accept weakness would be an eradication of its great power status. One positive for weaker states in the international system is the fact that great powers give aid and preferential loans (Wolf et al., 2013; Essex, 2013). To be an aid donor is a sign of prestige and an important part of being a leader. In the international system, this aid is not a sign of benevolence, but rather part of the state's grand strategy to gain some control of the weaker state's sovereignty. In other words, these states may become dependent; vassals to a great power; and vassals are important for prestige.

Leaders need followers, and vassals are necessary to show the world that they are indeed prestigious states. Competition over spheres of influence may generate the need to humiliate the opponent by further encroaching into disputed territory. The three history-making case studies explored in this paper serve to illustrate the humiliation-prestige dynamic. The first example is Germany. Adolph Hitler sought to overturn every facet of the Treaty of Versailles to undo the humiliation wrought upon Germany at the end of World War I. Nazi Germany strove to recover its lost prestige as a great power. Today, China is seeking to recover from its "Century of Humiliation" in the 19th century by seeking the prestige it sees itself as deserving today (Wang, 2020). Chinese leaders are specifically using historical narratives that describe these humiliations to justify and legitimize their expansionary foreign policy (Mayer 2018). The same can be said about Russia, in the light of the collapse of the Soviet Union (Sharafutdinova, 2020).

The humiliation-prestige dynamic is fundamental when examining the international system. There is a human, psychological and emotional element that impacts state behavior. Connecting this systems-level force to the state, and studying the behavior of Nazi Germany, China, and Russia described here, helps us observe the centrality of status. The aggressive action by these actors is caused by their need to overturn humiliation and gain prestige. By identifying these as motivating factors, international relations theory must try to incorporate these psychological factors into the analysis. Knowing these factors could assist the state to develop better foreign policy as they interact with others and shape their own foreign policy choices.

The next section tries to break the cycle by offering up a suggestion already forwarded by Hans Morgenthau: allowing a humiliated state to save face. Saving face is a term we use to describe social settings to allow an embarrassed person or state the courtesy of retaining respect and honor. A classic example of saving face in international relations is during the Cuban Missile Crisis, where the United States and the Soviets both compromised in secret to de-escalate the situation (see Graham and Zelikow, 1999). While the problem of status reassertion is the core of the article,

the author finds it necessary to provide a solution. The next section explores the term ‘saving face’ as an attempt to problematize or understand the central importance of psychological factors in international politics.

3 SAVING FACE: AVOIDING HUMILIATION, DEFENDING PRESTIGE

The distribution of power (and status) across states tends to ebb and flow with time. Why are states so resistant to changes in power distributions? E.H. Carr wrote on the eve of World War II: “...we cannot return to the pre-1939 world any more than we could return to the pre-war world of 1919” (2001, p 238). Carr here calls for some accommodation: if status quo powers do not appease revisionist powers, the two forces will come to blows. Applying this to the prestige-humiliation dynamic, states are less likely to back down. Backing down may bring humiliation for one and prestige for another (Wirth, 2020). States do seek to defend their interests, defined in terms of power and security; however, this is complicated by cognitive variables. It could be argued that it was not in the interests of either party (Great Britain and France and Nazi Germany) to go to war as neither side was ready (Martel, 1986). Forcing an opponent to back down in the international system might be construed as a sign of weakness. Appeasement is also dangerous to maintaining deterrence, that is, remaining credible and capable (Mearsheimer, 2001). It is thus important for great powers to avoid humiliating others. The challenge is in allowing states to save face.

Saving face is the ability to maintain dignity and status in the light of losing power and prestige. It is about avoiding embarrassment, which may lead to a violent response and attempts to embarrass the initial humiliator (Barnhart, 2017). One historical example is when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain appeased Hitler in the annexation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain saved face by showing the world that he was responsible for establishing world peace by getting Hitler to sign a treaty that would effectively stop its expansion. By allowing Chamberlain the ability to proclaim responsibility for the peace accord, Hitler allowed Great Britain to save face. In other words, an actor must give a challenger the ability to show that there were some gains allowed in the light of appeasement.

In his seminal work *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1946), Hans Morgenthau devoted many pages to diplomacy and the idea of saving face. Writing during World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War (and experiencing the war firsthand as a person of German Jewish origin), for Morgenthau there were “Four Tasks of Diplomacy” which underscore an appreciation for all the states involved in the conflict. He stated the following:

1. Diplomacy determines objectives in terms of power;
2. Must understand the objectives of other nations;
3. Must understand how different nations’ interests are compatible;
4. Must employ means at its disposal (power). Failure to do so will bring no peace and war (p 419).

Morgenthau was mindful that compromise is essential for longer-term peace and security, so understanding the objectives of others, especially how there might be compatibility, is key to solving international crises. To this, Morgenthau added what he called the “Four Prerequisites of Compromise”, which elaborates on the previous four points:

1. Give up the shadow of worthless rights for the substance of real advantage; (meaning ignore the letter of the law to embrace strategic benefit).
2. Never put yourself in a position from which you cannot retreat without losing face and from which you cannot advance without grave risks.
3. Never allow a weak ally to make decisions for you.
4. The armed forces are the instrument of foreign policy, not its master (pp 441-442).

To combine point two from the “Tasks” and point two from “Prerequisites”, we can conclude that a major objective of all states would be to never lose face. Morgenthau stated that diplomacy is made more difficult because of this humiliation factor. There must be an allowance for saving face. In this way, diplomacy might be able to make “the peace more secure than it is today...” (Ibid., p 445). This not only minimizes the chances of a possible violent clash, but provides competing states with the acknowledgment of the prestige they seemingly crave. Thus, acknowledging greatness and saving face is necessary to keep the peace by providing a sort of balance of status in the international system. However, establishing this balance could be difficult if an actor feels that it needs to act aggressively to defend prestige and avoid humiliation. This requires diplomatic finesse. The United States must now deal with other great powers, China and Russia, with serious power potential. These two powers seem determined to overturn past humiliations. It may be necessary to placate their need for prestige and status through the recognition of their spheres of influence.

Some recognition of Chinese and Russian greatness may be necessary to maintain a balance of power to secure international stability. This might be achieved by advocating a spheres of influence model. As defined, a sphere of influence is any “geographic region characterized by the high penetration of one superpower to the exclusion of others and particularly of a rival superpower” (Kaufman, 1976, p 11). Etzioni (2015) suggests dividing the world into three spheres of influence:

- The United States: Central and South America and the Caribbean;
- Russia: Eastern Europe and the Caucuses;
- China: South-East Asia, the South and East China Seas (p 126).

He justifies this by looking at two main factors: geographic proximity and history. By acquiescing a specific area for a specific power, states will recognize one another for their power and prestige. Mutual recognition of spheres of influence, especially if deemed necessary to a state’s security, may be beneficial in order to stabilize status,

specifically limiting any feelings of humiliation and thereby eliminating the need to seek prestige aggressively.

Ignoring the humiliation-prestige dynamic disregards the identity of states that have specific historical circumstances driving their contemporary behavior. Russia, the United States, and China all have exceptional histories and think of themselves as exceptional powers. To admit that these states are indeed behaving in an anachronistic manner may allow scholarship the ability to explain and understand what is at stake: international peace and security. It takes courage to allow competitors to save face and to do something that is indeed humiliating but in the state's best interests. There is little marginal benefit at stake save great power pride.

By understanding the systemic importance of psychological/emotional feelings of humiliation and prestige, states will be better prepared to deal with one another. Appreciating that states behave in this way allows us to explain and predict aggressive or expansionist behavior. By adjusting structural realism slightly by adding the psychological/emotional variable to the analysis, one might see the benefit of face-saving behavior. It seems clear that humiliation causes the state to hurt, and this hurt may lead to future aggression, as prestige-seeking behavior may be perceived as the only real solution.

Prestige-seeking behavior may be destructive, as states use military and other forms of power to humiliate others to gain higher status. It could be useful to start tracing the psychological histories of states to understand the potential destructive ramifications of a possible rise to power. By documenting the prestigious rise and humiliating fall of great powers, we could extract patterns of behavior reflected by the prestige-humiliation dynamic. If this psychology did not matter, then why did the leaders of the cases discussed (Nazi Germany, China, and Russia) put so much emphasis on moments of humiliation, with hopes of future prestigious recognition? It seems clear that states are focused on their own identity, and in particular their status. They seek to avoid humiliation and win recognition from others.

Conclusion

Thousands of years may separate humanity, yet state behavior seems similar. Words like humiliation and prestige are better suited for the 19th century. Withdrawal signals weakness and humiliation. Emperor Aurelian of Rome had to withdraw from Dacia, once a gold and silver-rich province of Rome conquered by Trajan, a beloved emperor. By Aurelian's time, much of that gold had been depleted (MacKendrick, 2000, p 132). Dacia had little material benefit, but to withdraw was to signal weakness. The problem was worsened by the fact that Dacia was difficult to defend and easy to attack. Aurelian made the difficult decision to withdraw, fending off much criticism for it. The United States has similar considerations. Mitch McConnell, in the light of President Trump's sudden partial withdrawal from Afghanistan, said: "As several former officials and ambassadors recently stated, 'The spectacle of US troops abandoning facilities and equipment, leaving the field in Afghanistan to the Taliban and ISIS, would be broadcast around the world as a symbol of US defeat and

humiliation, and a victory for Islamist extremism” (McConnell quoted in the *New York Post*, 2020). A United States withdrawal would mean humiliation for the United States and a much-admired victory for terrorist networks. McConnell compared it to another humiliating withdrawal: Vietnam. As a result, a state needs to save face: defending one’s reputation by avoiding humiliation and shielding prestige (Frevert and Bresnahan, 2020). Thus, this paper argues that there is a dichotomy between prestige and humiliation.

There is a negative, zero-sum relationship which drives prestige and humiliation: one state’s prestige is based on the humiliation of another. These are psychological forces that form part of the international system. These forces shape state behavior and must be included in any structural realist analysis. Even though these forces are immaterial, humiliation and prestige are major drivers of international relations. Saving face is a policy that avoids feelings of humiliation. A humiliated state may lash out, leading to conflict. We must thus understand the importance of the psychological aspects of state behavior.

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