In this project, in asking both theoretical and empirical questions, I advance a more granular understanding of balance-of-power theory. I maintain that states act against shifts in elements or components of power of emerging states rather than shifts in aggregate power alone. The combination of structural modifiers and intervening variables such as leader images of power and narrow parochial interests all combine to encourage the FPE to disaggregate the power of emerging states into its components or elements. The import of this more granular view of balance-of-power theory is that shifts in aggregate material power might not provoke counter-balancing behavior, imbalances of power can be stable, the security dilemma is not inevitable, and some dyads can engage in peaceful power transitions.

Prepared for
International History and International Relations Theory
Workshop 1 of the AHRC-funded Research Network:
‘The Practice of International History in the Twenty-First Century
University of Glasgow, 22 April 2016

Rough draft, please do not cite, quote, or circulate
This draft paper explores the close relationship between neoclassical realism, international history, and international relations/international politics theory. It does so by engaging the research methodology framework of Type III neoclassical realism developed by Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro, and Steven Lobell in *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. Coined by Gideon Rose in a review article of four books published in the spring 1998 issue of *World Politics*, neoclassical realism maintains that the international system is an imperfect transmission belt; systemic influence on outcomes pass through intervening domestic-level process variables that can amplify, obstruct, or distort it. Neoclassical realists are in agreement with structural realists that states construct their foreign security policies primarily in response to the threats and opportunities that arise in the international system and which shape each state’s range of policy options. While neoclassical realism is an extension of the core assumptions of structural realism and the broader *Realpolitik* tradition, neoclassical realist scholars maintain that a purely structural theory, one that is not augmented by unit-level intervening variables, can explain very little about the behavior of states in the international system.

Neoclassical realism has a close relationship with international history. First, it requires that researchers investigate, among other factors, the role of idiosyncratic intervening and unit-level variables such as state institutions, leader images, state-society relations, and/or national culture on policy choices. For this reason, neoclassical realism lends itself to careful, qualitative and historical case studies. Second, the research puzzles raised by neoclassical realists are drawn from empirical/historical observations. Third, the standards of evidence and in particular the examination of the decision making processes is necessary to determine why states did what they did and whether the variables of interest were the cause. Finally, process-tracing analysis, which entails primary historical sources, is often employed by neoclassical realists to evaluate the causal impact of the specific hypothesized independent variables (IVs) and intervening variables (IVVs) on the dependent variables (DVs).

In this project I develop a more granular understanding of balance-of-power theory. I maintain that states act against shifts in elements or components of power rather than shifts in aggregate power alone. The combination of structural modifiers and intervening variables such as leader images of power and narrow parochial societal interests combine to encourage the state leaders or the foreign policy executive (FPE) to disaggregate the power of emerging states into its components or elements. The import is that this will affect how states balance (whether states target-balancing against specific elements of power or engage in broad-balancing as understood by conventional balance-of-power theory), whether states balance against shifts in aggregate power, and why some states can engage in peaceful power transitions. It also sheds some light on the precipitants of preventive war, windows logic of opportunity and vulnerability, the causes of deterrence failure, the nature of arms races, and the prospects for ameliorating the security dilemma.

I. Type I, II, and III Neoclassical Realism

The purpose of neoclassical realism is to construct an approach that retains the primacy of the international system, which structural realists emphasize, while relaxing the constraints of external determinism, which reduce its explanatory power. The extant neoclassical realist
literature (Type I and Type II Neoclassical Realism) seeks to rectify the shortcomings of structural realism. In our book we advance Type III Neoclassical Realism.

What we term **Type I** neoclassical realism, including the authors identified by Gideon Rose, sought to fix structural realism by using domestic-level and leader perception intervening variables to explain away historical anomalies such as underbalancing, underexpansion, and overexpansion. Specifically, Type I neoclassical realists maintain that the international system sends clear signals to states but that these signals inform national policy responses only after passing through the often imperfect transmissions belts of leader perception and domestic politics. In rare cases, either the signals are misunderstood or national leaders are prevented from responding properly by domestic political constraints. In the longer term, though, Type I neoclassical realists agree that states behavior according to systemic imperatives. For instance, for Randall Schweller, in explaining instances of underbalancing, he discusses French failure to prepare itself for a war against rising Germany prior to World War I and British and French appeasement of a resurgent Germany in the 1930s.

**Type II** neoclassical realism, including the contributors to our 2009 edited volume (*Neoclassical Realism, The State and Foreign Policy*), use systemic stimuli, moderated by domestic-level intervening variables, to explain a particular state’s foreign policy and grand strategic adjustment, rather than explain merely pathological departures from structural incentives; it seeks to build a comprehensive approach to foreign policy. This second type of neoclassical realism proceeds from the assumption that the approach can do more than explain anomalies; it can also explain a broader range of foreign policy choices and grand strategic adjustment.

Type II neoclassical realism maintains that states are rarely faced with stark choices. In the more common circumstances, when the international environment does not present a clear and imminent threat, states often have a range of policy options to choose from, rather than a clearly optimal policy dictated by international circumstances. The actual choices states make under these circumstances may have more to do with the worldviews of leaders or what we term the foreign policy executive (FPE), the strategic cultures of the states they lead, the nature of the domestic coalitions they represent, and domestic political constraints on their ability to enact and implement various policy alternatives.

What we term **Type III** neoclassical realism is a theory that can explain international politics. We argue that neoclassical realist theory can explain political phenomena ranging from short-term crisis decision-making, foreign policy behavior, and patterns of grand strategic adjustment of individual states, to long-term systemic outcomes, and ultimately to the evolution of the structure of the international system itself.

In this project, reflecting a Type III approach, I advance a more granular understanding of balance-of-power theory. I maintain that states act against shifts in elements or components of power rather than shifts in aggregate power alone. The combination of structural modifiers and intervening variables combine to encourage the FPE to disaggregate the power of emerging states into its components or elements.
II. Research Questions and Puzzles
There are two ways to identify a research agenda. My book project Balance of Power, Component of Power, and International Politics combines both means – it raises research questions and research puzzles.

Research Question: My research question is: Do states, and in particular, great powers and regional powers balance against concentrations and aggregations of material capability through internal resource mobilization and converting economic wealth into military capability, the formation of counter-balancing alliances, or through the process of emulation of the successful military practices of states? The second research question of this project asks: Are balanced distributions of power more stable and less war-prone than unbalanced orders? A related question, which will become clearer later in the paper, is: What impact does target-balancing versus broad balancing have on the likelihood of conflict in particular and the stability of the international system more broadly?

Research Puzzle: My research agenda is also driven by identifying a research puzzle. My research puzzle challenges the conventional wisdom that in the 1930s Neville Chamberlain (as Chancellor of the Exchequer and later as Prime Minister) and the other Guilty Men abandoned Britain’s tradition of balance of power.1 A number of scholars argue that Britain prudently balanced against Wilhelmine Germany prior to World War I but failed or was too slow to balance in the inter-war period, even though Nazi Germany posed a much greater threat. The evidence is that Chamberlain and the appeasers rejected massive rearmament and were outspent by a four-to-one ratio (in 1937 Britain spent six percent and Germany spent 13 percent of a much larger economy, in 1938 Britain spent seven percent and Germany 17 percent, and in 1939 Britain spent 18 percent and Germany 23 percent),2 blocked the formation of a Continental size army and rejected a Continental Commitment strategy, failed to establish a counterbalancing Grand Alliance with France and the Soviet Union, and favored bilateral agreements and appeasement.3

I argue that in the 1930s London target-balanced against specific components of Germany, Japan, and Italy’s power that threatened vital interests rather than net shifts in the balance of power. Specifically, London balanced against the air component of Germany, first through the buildup of the deterrent bomber force and later through the development of the defensive Fighter Command, and against the naval components of Japan and Italy’s power. Retreat from business as usual allowed London to direct resources, skilled labor, plant, and tools to rearm against the most threatening components of German and Japanese power.

Chamberlain downgraded all other threats and treated them as secondary in terms of Britain’s rearmament priorities. Britain was less threatened by the army and land components of Germany, Japan, and Italy, at least in the initial stages of the war, and therefore buck-passed to France and Russia rather than balanced against these specific components of power until 1939. Thus, Britain was able to narrow the gap with Berlin in particular components of power of vital importance such as aircraft production or to exceed Germany in areas such as the Royal Navy and its battle-fleet.4 After all, London matched and even exceeded Germany in the specific components that mattered to the survival of the British Isles, such as the Royal Navy (RN) and
the Royal Air Force (RAF). Britain’s larger and deeper aircraft production base allowed it to out-produce Germany during the war, and the Royal Navy exceeded the size of the Axis powers in capital ships, destroyers, and cruisers, had an equal number of aircraft carriers as Japan (both had six, while Germany had none), and was surpassed only in submarines by Germany and Japan.

III. Theory Construction

Neoclassical realism identifies independent variables (IV), intervening variables (IVV), and dependent variables (DV). It also states the scope conditions.

Dependent Variable: The selection of my DVs flow directly from the research question and empirical puzzle identified above.

The first dependent variable is balancing behavior. I define balancing in terms of the traditional distinction between internal and external balancing. Balancing entails the internal mobilization of national power, the formation of counter-balancing alliances, the emulation of the successful military practices of states, or the innovation of new capabilities and practices. Balancing does not include preventive strikes, preventive military action, or the use of diplomacy.

In presenting a more granular model of balance-of-power, I maintain that states target-balancing rather than broad-balance, which is too blunt of a concept.

Internal target-balancing means the FPE will: (1) rank, prioritize, and address the most probable challenges and distinguish them from the mere possible challenges; (2) direct rearmament programs to redress the imbalances in specific components of power that threaten strategic interests before redressing components of power that threaten less strategic interests; and (3) direct industrial production, equipment, plant, and capacity to address specific shortcomings.

External target-balancing means that state leaders use ententes, agreements, or alliances to target-balance against specific elements of another state’s capabilities that challenge vital interests. The intent is to further strengthen an existing element or add an element that is missing.

The second DV is at the international outcomes level-of-analysis. The strategic choices of target-balancing will lead different great powers to interact and to have an impact on international systemic outcomes; how states balance (i.e., target-balancing versus broad-balancing) affects the interactions of states and can impact their differential growth rates, and hence international outcomes such as the war proneness. Specifically, what impact does the choice of target-balancing versus broad balancing have on the likelihood of conflict? Did target balancing prior to WWI and WWII make war more or less likely than the impact of broad-balancing?

Independent and Moderating Variables: For Waltz and for neoclassical realism, the structure of the international system drives state behavior. The three characteristics or features that determine a system’s structure are: 1), the principles by which the parts are arranged (anarchic rather than hierarchical); 2), the characteristics of the units (functionally undifferentiated rather
than specialized); and 3) the distribution of material capabilities across the units (as the
distribution of capabilities change so does the structure of the system). 7

However, Waltz’s conception of structure ignores important variables. 21 Barry Buzan, Glenn
Snyder, and Stephen Van Evera’s work identify broad systemic, but not structural, factors that
“not only affect the ability and the willingness of units to interact, but also determine what types
of levels of interaction are both possible and desired.” 23

Buzan calls these factors “interaction capacity” and identifies two of them: the continual
evolution (and diffusion) of technological capabilities and shared international norms and
organization. While these factors are not part of the structure, they are clearly systemic and
“profoundly condition the significance of structure and the meaning of the term system itself.” 24

Glenn Snyder terms these variables “structural modifiers” in reference to systemic variables that
“modify the effects of the more basic structural elements on the interaction process, but they are
not interaction itself.” 26 For Snyder, these structural modifiers are external and systemic, as they
affect all units in a similar manner, but they are distinct from the number of units and the
distribution of capabilities that Waltz defines as structure itself. Military technology, for
example, is a structural modifier because technological change affects all great powers, at least
potentially. 27

Stephen Van Evera argues that the “fine-grained structure of power,” which he defines as the
distribution of particular types of (military) power, has a greater impact on the likelihood of
interstate conflict than does the aggregate structure of power or polarity alone. The fine- grained
structure of power encompasses the offense-defense balance, the size and frequency of power
fluctuations (and resultant windows of opportunity and vulnerability), the magnitude of first-
move advantages, and the cumulativity of resources (that is, the degree to which states can parlay
territorial conquests into further gains). Each of these can affect the intensity of the security
dilemma. 28

Structural modifiers include geography, the rates of technological diffusion, and the offense-
defense balance in military technologies, etc. These various factors can modify the effect of the
system’s structure - namely, its anarchic ordering principle and the relative distribution of
capabilities - on the parameters of strategic interactions of the units and their behavior.

Unlike Buzan, I maintain that structural modifiers are material based. Unlike Snyder and Van
Evera, I maintain that structural modifiers do not affect the behavior of all states in the system
more or less evenly. Some structural modifiers do indeed have a uniform impact on the likely
behavior of all units within the system, but there are others whose impacts are limited to
particular sectors, regions within the system, or specific dyads.

Similarly, geography is a structural modifier because it can create constraints and provide
opportunities for some units and for patterns of strategic interaction but rarely pertain to the
system as a whole. Physical distance (and consequently, the loss-of-strength gradient), strategic
depth, and topographical barriers, or the lack thereof, can have an effect on the security environment in which states operate.\textsuperscript{34}

**Structural Realist Baseline:** Balance-of-power theory is both the structural realist baseline for my research project and the source of alternative hypotheses.

For Waltz and other structural realists, differential growth rates, which over time change the relative distribution of capabilities between states, are the driving forces of international politics.\textsuperscript{3} Rising states pose a challenge to others and “shape and shove” them to balance against the challenger either internally, by arming or emulating one another’s military practices and technologies, and innovation, or externally, by allying with other states. In addition, to ensuring their long-term survival, states are compelled to anticipate future power shifts and forestall them through policies such as preventive war.\textsuperscript{4}

Balance of power theory generates two probabilistic predictions: first, that across different types of international systems (bipolarity and multipolarity), balances of power will recurrently form; and second, that states will emulate the successful practices of others.\textsuperscript{19}

Structural realism can answer two general questions. The first question concerns which distribution of power is more stable, that is, less prone to war among the major powers. For most structural realists, following Waltz, the answer is that bipolar distributions are most stable, followed by balanced multipolar distributions. They conclude that the least stable systems are unbalanced multipolar distributions.\textsuperscript{8} These scholars also view unipolarity as inherently unstable, as all other states fear that the unipole would act in a predatory manner and would naturally align against it to resist its designs and restore a balance of power.\textsuperscript{9} The second question concerns the strategies states use to secure themselves. More specifically, what are states likely to choose from a range of survival strategies, including balancing (internal and external), buck passing, bandwagoning, and other options?\textsuperscript{11}

**Intervening Variables:** Neoclassical realism posits a hierarchy of variables beginning with structure and including IVVs to explain the DV.

I maintain that state leaders or the FPE disaggregate a state’s power into its elements. The first reason is that the FPE think in terms of specific capabilities because aggregate power alone rarely provides sufficient information to assess power bases and power relations.

The second reason is the limited fungibility of aggregate power.\textsuperscript{8} For the FPE, what matters is whether the state has the appropriate or necessary elements of national capabilities: For the attacking state, the correct elements can create windows of opportunity for expansion and victory, even if its overall material power is less than the target state’s. For the defending state, the incorrect elements can contribute to deterrence failure and possible military defeat.

By all indices and metrics, China is much more powerful than Taiwan. Despite China’s aggregate power, in 2000 Michael O’Hanlon projected that Beijing could not conquer Taiwan and might not be able to do so for another decade.\textsuperscript{9} Geographic structural modifiers, including
Taiwan’s island locale, had lead Taipei to emphasize air and naval capacity, coastal defense, heavily fortified practical landing locales, and extensive civil defense network. Technological structural modifiers, including advances in missile technology, also favor Taiwan because of the increased vulnerability of large objects such as ships and transports. Concomitantly, China lacks the appropriate landing craft and sealift capacity and airborne capabilities required to conquer Taiwan by air or by sea assault.

The FPE are further encouraged to differentiate power from below by narrow interests which advocate for parochial interests over general interests.

**Scope Conditions:** The scope of this project is limited to balancing behavior by major and regional powers that have sufficient national resources to balance. It does not explain crisis decision making, military strikes or preemptive strikes, or situations where states are forced to go with what they have mobilized.

**Identifying Key Actors:**
I distinguish the foreign policy executive (FPE) from the rest of the government and from society. The FPE consists of the individuals who are responsible for making the foreign policy choices, which often include the head of government, secretaries, or ministers — such as the minister of foreign affairs and the secretary of defense – charged with foreign policy issue areas. In addition, the FPE may also include other individuals that are members of ministerial, sub-committee, or sub-cabinet sessions on foreign security policy, and therefore have some influence over foreign policy choices. Many individuals inside and outside of the government have an interest in foreign policy, however, not all of these actors have meaningful input into the policymaking process.

The FPE are separate from and supported by an extensive bureaucracy including defense, economic, intelligence, and regional experts. Although these foreign policy experts might be present at meetings with the FPE, they do not weigh in on the final decision. Instead they provide expertise on political, economic, military, or intelligence matters to the FPE, often writing background and support papers, and making policy recommendations.

It is important to further distinguish the FPE from the rest of the cabinet or government, which does not play a central role in matters of foreign, security, and economic affairs. The FPE can be as limited as the president, prime minister, or a dictator. More often, the FPE consists of a small group or inner-circle of decision-makers such as President John F. Kennedy’s ExCom during the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Lyndon Johnson’s Tuesday Lunch Group, Prime Minister Golda Meir’s Kitchen Cabinet, or Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s Ministerial Committee on Security Affairs. Begin’s Ministerial Committee, for example, consisted of a sub-group of the full Cabinet, with access to secret information that was not available to the general Cabinet.

**Alternative Explanations:** Balance-of-power theory serves as both the structural realist baseline and the source of alternative hypotheses.
a). Rising states pose a challenge to others and “shape and shove” them to balance against the challenger either internally, by arming, emulating one another’s military practices and technologies, or innovating, or externally, by allying with other states. 
b). States will emulate the successful practices of others. 
c). Bipolar distributions are most stable, followed by balanced multipolar distributions. The least stable systems are unbalanced multipolar distributions. Unipolarity as inherently unstable, as all other states fear that the unipole would act in a predatory manner and would naturally align against it to resist its designs and restore a balance of power.

**Standards of Evidence:**
To discern a causal impact on grand strategic adjustments due to shifts in material capabilities requires the examination of the decision-making processes of particular states to determine why they did or did not target balance and whether they did (or did not) due to structural modifiers, leader images, and narrow parochial interests. I will use process-tracing analysis to evaluate the causal impact of specific hypothesized independent variables (IVs) and intervening variables (IVVs) on the dependent variables (DV$s). This entails consulting primary sources—such as government documents, memoirs, speeches, decision-maker interviews, and oral histories—in addition to secondary sources.

**Possible Thumbnail Cases:**
**US-Soviet Union 1969-1972:** In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Soviet Union achieved nuclear strategic parity with the United States. The Nixon administration dismissed restoring U.S. superiority and instead target-balanced against a particular element of Soviet power—land-based missile forces. The Soviet SS-9 missile was a large ICBM and reflected major improvements over previous generations in the use of liquid fuel, accuracy and targeting, a large payload capacity (or throw weight), and rapid production in large numbers. Moreover, Moscow was making advances in developing multiple and independently targetable reentry vehicles or MIRVs. The SS-9 missile, which had a high MIRV potential, threatened the U.S. Minuteman nuclear missile force.

The Nixon administration target-balanced against this potentially counterforce element of Soviet power. First, the U.S. reformed its nuclear strategy and it developed more advanced MIRV technology that could destroy the SS-9 missile sites. Second, the U.S. balanced by building up its MIRV capabilities. Third, strategic arms control was, for the U.S., a form of target-balancing. The Nixon administration engaged Moscow in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) and especially the Interim Agreement to slow Soviet gains in land-based heavy ballistic missiles. The agreement mentioned no limits on other strategic weapons such as bombers or MIRVs. The Nixon Administration was willing, moreover, to make compromises in secondary issues, such as limits on defensive anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs), in order to constrain Soviet gains on the primary issue of offensive and counterforce strategic weapons.

**Britain-Germany, 1880-1883, 1899-1902:** In the 1880s, newly unified Germany experienced rapid industrial growth, built a large standing army, and established the Continental-wide Bismarckian alliance system. Britain’s FPE, however, did not target-balance against Germany.
Steven E. Lobell

Germany lacked a blue-water navy, the essential component necessary to challenge Britain’s commercial and naval interests. London did not identify Germany as a challenger until after 1902 and perhaps as late as 1908, when Germany commenced a major battleship construction program. London countered with its own naval program, engaging Berlin in a naval arms race because this particular element of power challenged Britain’s survival.21

Britain–France and Russia, 1880s: In the 1880s, Britain did target-balanced against France and Russia, each of whom was less powerful than Germany. Both states engaged in new naval construction programs – an element that challenged Britain’s survival. Moreover, London worried about the danger from their combined fleets. A Franco-Russian naval combination meant that in 1894 Britain would retain its superiority by five first-class battleships, in 1895-96 it would fall to mere equality, in 1896-97 it would drop behind by two, and by 1897-98 it would plummet by seven first-class battleships. London target-balancing against France and Russia’s naval programs in the 1880s and 1890s,22 resulting in the Naval Defence Act of 1889 and the Spencer Act of 1894. The Naval Defence Act would bring Britain’s fleet up to a two-power standard by constructing 10 battleships, 42 cruisers and 18 torpedo-gunboats over five years, at a cost of 21.5 million pounds.23 The Spencer Act approved the construction of seven first-class battleships, six second-class cruisers, and 36 destroyers to be completed by 1899.24

Israel–Iraq, 1979-1982: Israel’s FPE viewed Iraq’s power in component terms. In subcommittee meetings and in Ministerial and Cabinet sessions, they argued that Iraq’s nuclear program was moving toward achieving the correct components to challenge Israel’s survival. After 1975, when France sold two nuclear reactors to Iraq and enough highly enriched weapons grade uranium to fuel the reactors for a year or about 80 kilograms and provided experts to train Iraqi nuclear technicians, Israel’s concern was that Baghdad had two possible routes to produce a nuclear bomb.25 The first route was that Iraq could divert some of the highly enriched uranium fuel for the reactor.26 The second route to a bomb was that Iraq could master control over the nuclear fuel cycle.27

Israel’s FPE prioritized Iraq’s nuclear program as a danger over other elements of Iraq’s military capabilities and over the elements of the military capabilities of neighboring states.28 First, geographic structural modifiers predisposed Israel’s FPE to identify this element of power as a danger. Israel’s small size, its lack of strategic depth, and the concentrated nature of its population meant that it was vulnerable to a single nuclear strike.29 As Yair Evron explains, “[Geographically] … Israel is operating … within the narrowest of security margins.30 In this respect, there is an enormous difference between the superpower context and the situation in which Israel finds itself. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union could have absorbed a limited nuclear strike.”

Israel’s FPE did not identify other elements of Iraq’s capabilities as an immediate challenge. For Israel, it was possible to protect against chemical and biological weapons. In the 1960s, Israel made a similar distinction regarding Egypt’s burgeoning missile program and its conventional capability and chemical weapons program.31 Among the FPE there was consensus that Israel had no counter measures against Egypt’s ballistic missiles. The import is that the FPE engaged in components thinking and launched preventive actions and strikes against Egypt’s missile
program, though not against other elements of Egypt’s growing military capabilities. Thus, in contrast to Iraq’s nuclear program, Israeli decision-makers could address Iraq’s chemical weapons and biological weapons “and therefore there was no acute need to take preemptive action.”

**Britain-Germany, 1936-1939:**
Britain’s 1936-1939 rearmament program reflects target-balancing and not broad-balancing behavior. This balancing distinction highlights that Britain did balance against Germany, Japan, and Italy. In separating the capabilities and the power bases of these major states, London target-balanced against the elements of German, Japanese, and Italian power that challenged its survival. For London, the most dangerous military components were Germany’s Luftwaffe and the threat of a knock-out air assault against the homeland, Japan’s Imperial Navy and its threat to Britain’s commercial trade routes and the Dominions in East Asia, and Italy’s navy and the threat to Britain’s line of communication through the Mediterranean Sea to India and Asia.

Sir Thomas Inskip, Britain’s Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, conceptualized power relations in component terms. In his 1937 Review of Defence Expenditure, Inskip gave first priority to fighters and defense over a bomber force and a counter-offensive strategy and gave priority to both over the Fleet Air Arm and all aircraft stationed overseas. In 1938, London’s peace-time increase in fighter aircraft production was possible due to government, labor (Trade Union Congress or TUC), and private sector cooperation, including diluting the skilled labor force, extensive sub-contracting, de-skilling, and night shift working to quickly narrow the gap in the air component of German power. The RAF was the first among the Services to break-out of the traditional peacetime restraints on production or business as usual and to enter into wartime conditions of supply. In prioritizing the RAF, London increased the quantity and quality aircraft production, including technological advances in a new generation of fighter planes, reserve air capacity, and the number of squadrons with modern Spitfires and Hurricanes. Additional advances included the advent of radar and the Chain Home radar system, which allowed fighters to find and confront an enemy's attacking bombers.

London ranked the naval element of German power behind the Luftwaffe. First, the RN was larger than any other fleet in capital ships, destroyers, and cruisers, had an equal number of aircraft carriers as Japan (both had six, while Germany had none), and was surpassed only in submarines by Germany and Japan. Moreover, Britain possessed the world’s largest naval building capacity. Second, Germany emphasized pocket battleships and commerce raiders which posed a lesser challenge to Britain’s capital ships. Finally, it was known that the pace of German naval expansion was limited by the lower capacity of its shipyards and a shortage in skilled labor.

London ranked the other components of military power of Germany, Japan, and Italy as secondary in terms of Britain’s rearmament priorities. In the immediate-term, the army and land capabilities of Germany, Japan, and Italy, and the air component of Japan did not challenge Britain’s survival. Until 1938 and the Munich Agreement, Britain passed the buck of balancing against the German army to France (and the Soviet Union), who had one of the best armies in Europe and the Maginot Line of defense. The land threat was viewed as secondary and the
British Army was viewed as a third line of defense, which had a lower priority than either air or naval power. London intentionally directed capital and labor away from rearmament for a British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Specifically, the training and arming of a Field Force would cause economic dislocation by diverting manpower from production for civilian industry (which was necessary to earn foreign exchange to pay for rearmament) and from production for the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. Thus, by directing capital, labor, and plant to aircraft production and its battle-fleet, and away from the army, London was able to narrow the gap and surpass Germany in these specific components of power of strategic importance.

**Conclusion:**
Neoclassical realism has a close relationship with international history, even more so with Type III Neoclassical Realism. First, it requires researchers to investigate the role of idiosyncratic intervening variables such as state institutions, leader images, state-society relations, and/or national culture on policy choices through careful, qualitative and historical case studies. Second, much of the research agenda, and in particular, the research puzzles are drawn from empirical/historical observations that depart from the conventional wisdom and expectations. Third, the standards of evidence and in particular the examination of the decision making processes means that it is necessary to determine why they did what they did and whether the researcher’s variables of interest were the cause. Finally, process-tracing analysis, which entails primary historical sources, is often employed by neoclassical realists to evaluate the causal impact of the specific variables.


Levy, Appeasement; Neville, Hitler and Appeasement.


See Gibbs (1976, Table 11, 432) and Overy (1989, 320) for a comparison of British Empire, France, German, Italian, Anglo-French, and German-Italian-Japanese fleet strengths in 1939.

Schroeder 1976.

The second fix for components of power theory is that capabilities are more fungible than power (Baldwin 1999; Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993, 54-69). The


Not crisis decision making = Policy making, therefore, consists of navigating the given power distribution, without opportunities to augment one’s own power through economic development, expansion of the military apparatus, or research and development of new military technologies—the essence of internal balancing. Nor is there time to initiate a full-scale alliance with another great power, with attendant joint military planning, training exercises, and strategic coordination. Instead, this is the realm of crisis decision-making


In the decision to bomb Iraq’s nuclear reactor in June 1981, for example, Begin required that the entire cabinet vote. However, the decision was essentially made in the Ministerial Committee and not in the larger Cabinet, given that many in the latter group turned to members of the Ministerial Committee, which had been deliberating on the matter for a long time, to guide their decision (Ben Meir 1986; Renshon, 2006, 41-58).

On the debate in the U.S. in the 1970s on the usefulness of nuclear superiority and in restoring it, see Rovner (2011, 121-133).


Freedman 1986, 132-137.

Terriff 1995.


Freedman 1986, 159-168.

Between 1905 and 1912, Germany and Britain engaged in a naval arms race. By 1913, Britain had completed thirty Dreadnoughts to Germany’s seventeen Dreadnoughts (Sumida 1989, table 21).

Marder 1940, 191.

Marder 1940, 143.

Marder 1940, 191.

The main reactor was called Osiraq by the French and Tammuz 1 by Iraq. The smaller reactor was called Osiris by the French and Tammuz 2 by Iraq. According to Warren Donnelly (1981, 69) 5 kg of plutonium were necessary for a sophisticated weapon and 15 kg for a simpler weapon


Yaari 2012.

In March, 1981, Syria moved surface-to-air missiles or SAMs into the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, challenging Israel’s aerial freedom of maneuver. Some foreign policy experts called for prioritizing an attack on the Syrian missiles over the agreed-on strike against Iraq’s nuclear reactor (Nakdimon 1987, 187-188).


Brom 2005, 141.

Levy 2006; Ripsman and Levy 2008; Self 2006.

Parker 1981; Smith 1980.

Gibbs 1976, 352.

Postan 1952, 471-473.

Greenwood 1994, 30-31; Peden 1979, 128-34; Smith 1978, 313-37, 315, 329-34.

Overy 1989, 320.


Marder 1940.

Peden 1979, 165.

Gibbs 1977.

Bond 1980, 206; Imlay 2003, 76-84.