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Power Transition Theory and the Peculiar Case of Weimarian Germany

Carsten Rauch

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ABSTRACT

For power transition theory (PTT) Germany offers a crucial case. Three wars initiated by Germany/Prussia (the War of 1870/71, World War I and World War II) are among the chief vindications of PTT's central insight, that power transitions are prone to great power wars. In all three instances, Germany/Prussia was not only a rising power but also dissatisfied with the prevalent international order just as PTT expects. However, between 1870 and 1939 there are two further periods in which Germany reached parity with the dominant power in the 1920s. Peace prevailed according to PTT because Germany was satisfied with the status quo of the international order at the time. In this working paper, I will inquire into the Weimar Republic's satisfaction status and show that PTT's standard argument claiming that Germany was satisfied is problematic. I argue that to bring the Weimar case in line with PTT it is necessary to adjust PTT in two ways: a) to discard the notion of satisfaction as a dichotomous variable and b) to correct PTT's tendency to approach complex power relations as if they were simple bilateral stand-offs. This finding has important ramifications for the interpretations of the current global power shifts and a possible future power transition.

INTRODUCTION

At a time in which enormous shifts in global power are taking place and the question is already beginning to change from whether to when China will overtake the United States as the most powerful country (at least as far as economic power is concerned), power transition theory (PTT) once again rises into prominence. Scholars in the US, in China and in other countries use PTT as a template to analyze future US-China relations (Cheng Gao 2011; Tammen/Kugler 2006; Wolf 2014).

Power transition theory, as originally established by A.F.K. Organski and Organski and Jacek Kugler, in essence claims that international politics resembles a hierarchy rather than an anarchy of realistic creed (Organski 1968; Organski/Kugler 1980). Atop the international power pyramid thrones a dominant power (often the winner of the last great power war) who once created and now safeguards the international order (Siverson/Miller 1996: 59).¹ Beneath the dominant power are different categories of smaller powers (great power, middle powers, lesser powers).

The goods² that the international order produces (may they be economic or security related in nature), benefit mainly the dominant power and its allies (Organski 1968: 358; Tammen et al. 2000: 6). But while the dominant power and its entourage can enjoy the benefits of the order, those states outside the inner circle receive less (or at least in their perception not enough) of the aforementioned goods and thus "consider the international system to be unfair, corrupt, biased, skewed, and dominated by hostile forces" (Tammen et al. 2000: 9).

Power, however, is in constant flux because of different growth rates; from time to time a great power starts to rise until it reaches parity and eventually overtakes the dominant power. As soon as

1 This can be done through sheer overwhelming force, but also through international organizations, in which the dominant power and its allies obtain disproportional voting powers and thus are enabled to enact their dominance directly and materially. In addition the normative fabric of the international order is also angled towards the dominant power (see Müller 2009: 5).

2 One problem of PTT is, however, that these profits are seldom defined: "[P]ower transition theory does not identify what benefits the international system provides to states and over which they may fight. It has merely been assumed that the dominant state is able to construct a system that provides it with the most benefits and its allies with greater benefits than other states receive" (Soysa et al. 1998: 518).

there is parity between the dominant power and the rising power, war becomes a possibility as both sides can reasonably expect a victory.³

PTT is most commonly associated with great power war, but as a matter of fact peaceful power transitions are also consistent with the theory (Rauch 2014). While PTT recognizes that situations of power parity and power transition have a high conflict potential as they open up windows of opportunities, it also stipulates that this conflict potential will only be realized if the rising power⁴ is dissatisfied with the status quo of the international order (Lemke/Kugler 1996: 12).⁵ Power development and satisfaction are in consequence the deciding elements in the standard PTT approach.⁶ Great power wars are thus compatible with PTT if the war is a) preceded by a period of power parity and b) the rising power is dissatisfied with the status quo of the international order. While the absence of parity before a war is unsettling but not necessarily problematic for PTT (the theory does not claim to explain all kinds of great power wars), a war in the absence of dissatisfaction – or vice versa, of peaceful parity during which the rising power is dissatisfied – strikes the heart of PTT.

In this article I engage the case of Weimarian Germany that is used by an influential PTT study to exemplify how the theory works. In the first part of this article I argue, in contrast to this account, that Weimarian Germany is incompatible with standard PTT. In the two phases during the 1920s in which Germany had – according to the study – reached parity with the dominant power Great Britain without challenging it, it was indeed not satisfied with the status quo of the international order. Weimarian Germany thus contradicts and potentially falsifies standard PTT. In the second part I suggest how PTT can overcome this problem by making two theoretical adjustments: a) using a scale of satisfaction instead of a simple dichotomy and b) acknowledging that the high noon duel situation in which it paints international politics is an ideal-type from which reality regularly diverges.

PTT'S TROUBLE WITH GERMANY

While PTT claims to have found support in many quantitative-statistical studies (Houweling/Siccama 1988; Organski/Kugler 1980), Germany seems to present a very crucial case for the theory. Two, or even three times (depending on the count), Germany/Prussia was the dissatisfied rising power that acted just as the theory predicted. And after World War II, Germany's peaceful rise within Europe could just as well be explained by PTT pointing to the change in the German satisfaction status towards relative satisfaction with the regional and international order (Tammen et al. 2000: 52). Some observers have as gone as far as to claim that PTT's central insight is not to have identified that power transition wars are common when "one contending power passes another in power" (Organski/Kugler 1980: 56), but rather when "one contending power passes another in power and one of them is Germany" (Rauch 2014: 92).⁷

Given this centrality of Germany, it is not surprising that Tammen and his colleagues use German-UK relations in order to illustrate the connection between power, satisfaction, war and peace

3 In times of non-parity or power preponderance, PTT expects peace to prevail, as the weaker side would not dare to attack the stronger and the stronger side can influence the weaker just by threatening with violence but without having to execute it.

4 In fact recent research claims that PTT should not only focus on the satisfaction status of the rising power but also take the declining power's satisfaction into account (see Chan 2008; Rauch 2014; Müller/Rauch 2015; Rauch/Wurm 2013). While I share this critique I shall remain inside standard PTT for the purpose of this article.

5 Even then PTT does not expect all of these attempts to be successful. Precisely because former and future dominant powers usually clash in a period of parity, the outcome of a war cannot be predicted. History knows many unsuccessful bids for power transition, where the declining major power was able to defend its position at least for a certain time.

6 It might be argued that PTT implicitly includes a third deciding factor, which captures the respective states' will to act as a dominant power. This will to power is related but not similar to the satisfaction factor (see Rauch 2015: 6–8).

7 Also see Stoll/Champion (1985: 73); Siverson/Miller (1996: 62).

(Tammen et al. 2000: 51–54). Using GDP as their indicator, they show the power development and ratio of the two countries for the period from 1900 to 1950 (see illustration 1).⁸ During this period there were two wars between the UK and Germany and both were – just as PTT predicts – preceded by a period of power parity (Tammen et al. 2000: 51).⁹ However, and here it gets tricky, their analyses point two further periods of parity in the early 1920s and the mid-1920s that did not lead to war. They solve this problem straightforwardly: the rising Germany, according to Tammen and his colleagues was dissatisfied before the two wars but satisfied in the two other periods of parity:

“Up until 1910, although Germany was dissatisfied and the United Kingdom satisfied, their cooperative and non-cooperative relations were approximately equal. The arms buildups that occurred between Germany and the United Kingdom prior to both world wars, one starting in 1906 and the other in 1930, demonstrate the non-cooperative nature of their relations. Both world wars are classic examples of two great powers at parity and with one dissatisfied, waging war for control of the international system” (Tammen et al. 2000: 51–52).

Illustration 1: German-UK relations 1900-1950 – Power and Satisfaction Status according to Tammen et. al¹⁰

Years	Power Relation	Satisfaction Status
1900–1903	Non-Parity (UK dominant)	Not specified
1904–1916	Parity	Dissatisfaction
1917–1920	Non-Parity (UK dominant)	Not specified
1921–1923	Parity	Satisfaction
1924	Non-Parity (UK dominant)	Not specified
1925–1932	Parity	Satisfaction
1933–1937	Parity	Dissatisfaction
1938–1940	Non-Parity (Germany dominant)	Not specified

It is worth noting that this is a case handpicked by scholars¹¹ of PTT in a work that represents PTT’s state of the art and that is intended to illustrate how useful PTT is. We should expect then, that – in the eyes of some of the most esteemed proponents of PTT – this is a case that a) supports PTT and b) does fall into PTT’s purview. In other words, presenting this case so prominently makes it a central case that PTT should be easily able to explain.

While the interpretation put forward by Tammen and his colleagues is theoretically consistent and appealing, it leaves – at least for the scholar of German foreign politics – a sour taste to identify Weimarian Germany as satisfied with the international order. This is even more so, as Tammen and his colleagues fail to provide compelling/any evidence for their classification. As they point to an arms buildup prior to both world wars that indicate dissatisfaction, we could assume that they take the absence of such buildups in the 1920s as an indicator of German satisfaction.¹² Otherwise it seems that they engaged in a simple post hoc logic: there was parity and no war, ergo Germany must have been satisfied.

8 Unfortunately they do not disclose their source, so I cannot work with the same data. I use historical GDP data gathered by Angus Maddison (2010).

9 Note that both instances not only entailed a situation of power parity but also an actual overtaking. This, in contrast to the differing satisfaction status is not marked as an important difference between the periods by Tammen and his colleagues.

10 Source: Tammen et al.(2000: 52). The data comes from a figure. Since the original source is not indicated by Tammen and his colleagues and it is not possible to discern the exact years from their figure, the years in my table rest upon my estimates. The greatest possible divergence, however, should not exceed one year.

11 The book it is taken from is co-written by eight authors that represent almost everybody who is anybody in PTT including the dean of PTT himself A.F.K. Organski.

12 Things get even more complicated as Tammen and his colleagues introduce another figure in which the U.K.-Germany relationship is coded satisfied/unsatisfied for the entire period between 1870 until 1945. Without analyzing this in detail in this article, I doubt that the German Empire in the direct aftermath of its establishment was a dissatisfied power. After all it just fulfilled the dream of national unity and Chancellor Bismarck made it clear that Germany was a satiated power. Revisionism and dissatisfaction grew only slowly and were held at bay as long as Bismarck was in control of the foreign policy (see Tammen et al. 2000: 53).

I believe this is not an acceptable *modus operandi* for PTT, therefore I will be taking a closer look at German international politics and satisfaction, in the following section.

THE PECULIAR SATISFACTION STATUS OF WEIMARIAN GERMANY IN THE 1920S

Satisfaction analysis is a crucial albeit problematic part of any work using power transition theory. The problem is that there is no commonly agreed-upon indicator that can help the researcher to discern satisfaction in the sense of PTT.¹³

Anything is an improvement, however, of the post-hoc approach which just codes rising powers as dissatisfied if their rise resulted in a war and satisfied if war could be avoided.¹⁴ Many scholars have used either an indicator based on extraordinary military buildups or on alliance portfolios.¹⁵ A different approach is used by Tammen and Kugler in an article about China's Rise; they refrain from using a single unified (dis-)satisfaction measure and instead look at five dimensions – territorial disputes, arms races, international rules of the road, ideological disputes and patterns of trade and cooperation – of the relations between dominant and rising power (Tammen/Kugler 2006). In this article I use a similar approach by looking at German (dis-)satisfaction with different aspects of the international order. But before I demonstrate, how the Weimar Republic was and felt treated by the Versailles order after World War I and in how far it was ready to integrate in this order or choose to prefer a revision, let me start by taking a closer look at the results the more traditional indicators would yield.

Dissatisfaction in Military Buildups

The armament indicator starts from the reasonable assumption that a power which has dedicated itself to radical and violent revision of the international order needs appropriate instruments of force. It thus looks for extraordinary military buildups, hypothesizing that dissatisfied rising powers need a strong military to mount their challenge in earnest. When we find such military buildups in which the rising power adds much more military capabilities than the dominant power, we would code this rising power as dissatisfied.¹⁶

According to this indicator Weimarian Germany indeed was not dissatisfied throughout the 1920s (see illustration 2, 3 and 4). German military personnel remained low (and well below already meager British numbers), the same holds true for military expenditure which actually decreased in five of the ten years between 1920-1930 and in the years it rose, it rose only incrementally.¹⁷ Even more German

13 This lacuna has been lamented by many observers of PTT and even by proponents of PTT itself. See for example Soysa et al. (1998); Danilovic (1996); Kim (1996); Lemke/Kugler (1996); Siverson/Miller (1996); Vasquez (1996).

14 For reasons of convenience and in absence of an agreed upon indicator for status-quo-satisfaction many scholars just assume rising powers to be dissatisfied by default and only investigate the actual degree of (dis-)satisfaction in the unexpected event of a peaceful power transition. This approach, however, actually weakens the creed of PTT on at least two grounds: First, it overlooks that power and satisfaction are *pari passu* in the causal logic of PTT; there is no reason in the writings of Organski and other PTT pioneers that would allow for the relegation of satisfaction to the place of a secondary or, even worse, an ad-hoc variable. Second, forgoing satisfaction analysis bears the risk of creating false expectations, as the satisfaction variable actually works in two ways: while dissatisfaction increases the risk of war, satisfaction decreases it. Hence, a war following a power transition cannot be coded as fulfilling PTT's prediction without the correct "satisfaction rating".

15 For military buildups see Werner/Kugler (1996: 191–192); for alliance portfolios see Kim (1992) and Kim (1991). The buildups-logic is straightforward: to challenge the existing international order and the dominant power a dissatisfied rising power needs the appropriate military means. The argument regarding the alliance portfolios is that a dissatisfied power, most likely searches for allies that are dissatisfied as well and share the former's interest of challenging the status quo. Those states in turn can hardly be expected to be found among the allies of the dominant power which has created the international order and is bound to defend it. Hence, to complete the line of thought, the satisfaction of a power can be deduced from its preferred allies.

16 This also means that – for this indicator – satisfaction always depends on the actions of both rising and dominant power. A rising power can launch an enormous military build-up and still will not be coded as dissatisfied if the dominant power spends even more on its own armaments.

17 The year 1923 is a curious exception. It is not clear why German military expenditure did rise so enormously this year before returning to the more modest numbers in the following years. 1923 was, however, the year of the hyper-inflation.

military spending rose over 1/3 of British military spending in only two years in the 1920s. This situation changed only when Hitler came to power in Germany: In 1933 there was a sharp increase in military expenditure from 45,8% (1932) to 135,7% of UK military expenditure; one year later the military personnel ratio rose from 37,3% to 99,1% of the UK military personnel.

Illustration 2: UK-Germany: Military Expenditure 1920–1935¹⁸

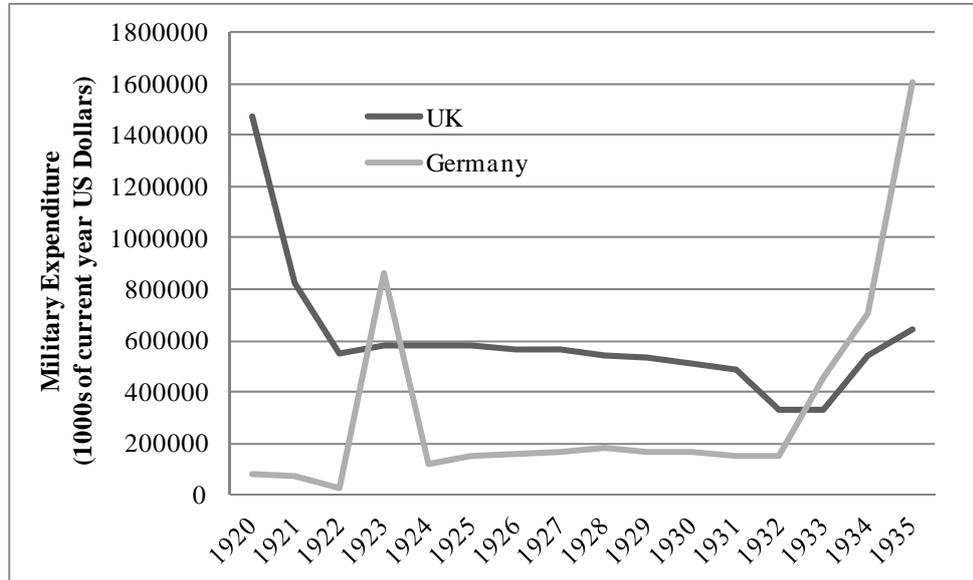
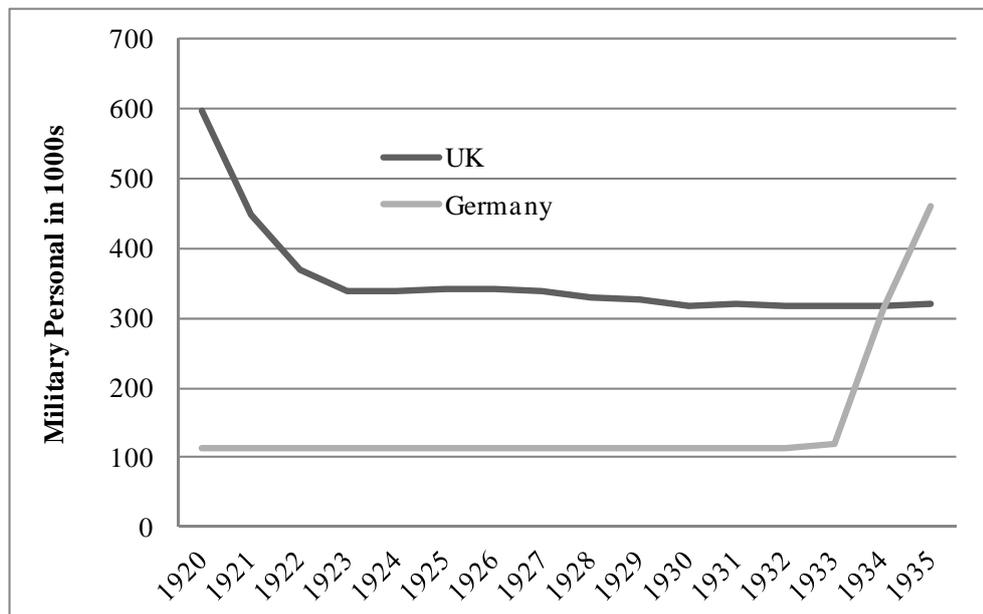


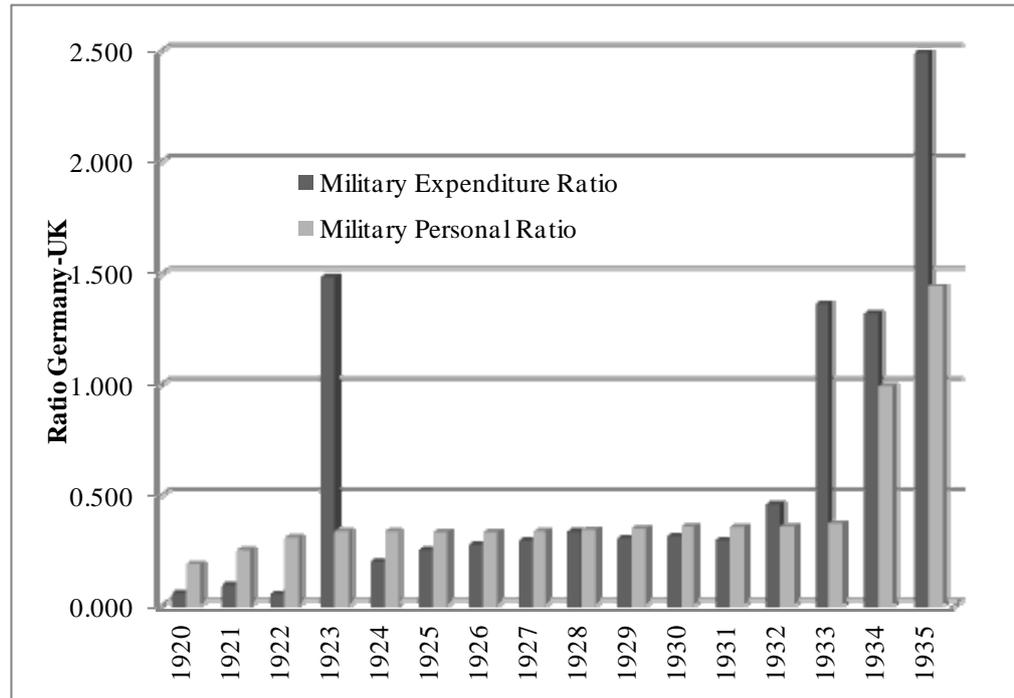
Illustration 3: UK-Germany Military Personal 1920–1935¹⁹



Maybe this distorted the data. The codebook explicitly mentions this possibility with regard to early Weimarian Germany. In any case, if the data is accurate Germany, should have been coded dissatisfied according to the armament indicator.

18 Source: Correlates of War – National Material Capabilities Dataset, <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities> [04.08.2015].

19 Source: Correlates of War.

Illustration 4: UK-Germany Military Expenditure and Military Personal Ratio 1920–1935²⁰

However, while this seems to support the interpretation of Tammen and his colleagues, it must be noted that this German armament reluctance during the 1920s was anything but voluntary. It was the Versailles Treaty that demanded German disarmament and the allied powers cautiously controlled and enforced German disarmament measures.²¹ As early as 1921, the German disarmament had mostly been completed (Krüger 1985: 137). Germany, especially the Reichswehr, was not happy about these restrictions and tried to circumvent them by training German troops secretly in Russia (Mommsen 2009: 159).²² Using the absence of a German military buildup to detect German satisfaction thus turns the reality upside down.

Dissatisfaction and Alliance Portfolios

The second indicator commonly applied by scholars of PTT looks for concurrence in alliance portfolios between the rising and the dominant power. The idea is that a dissatisfied power most likely searches for allies that are dissatisfied as well and share its own interest in challenging the status quo. Such states, in turn, can hardly be expected to be found among the allies of the dominant power which has created the international order and is bound to defend it. Hence, to complete the line of thought, the smaller the overlap with the dominant power in preferred allies, the higher the dissatisfaction of a rising power.

Regarding our empirical case this is quite easy to call: Germany and Great Britain were the respective leaders of the opposing alliances in World War I. After that – even in the absence of a formal alliance – Britain stayed close to its world war allies. Germany for its part remained isolated in the early years of the Weimar Republic. While the Rapallo Treaty with the Soviet Union was not strictly a military alliance, it certainly indicates a different alliance pattern than the one followed by the United Kingdom. Following this indicator we should probably code Germany dissatisfied until it joined NATO in 1955 and certainly for the entire period of the Weimar Republic.

²⁰ Source: Correlates of War.

²¹ In fact that treaty called for general disarmament for which the German disarmament should be just a prelude but that came not to be.

²² While not always being informed about all details, the general governments usually covered these breaches of the Versailles Treaty (Krüger 1985: 150).

It should be noted, however, that both indicators are problem-ridden (DiCicco/Levy 2003: 131; Rauch/Wurm 2013: 56–57; Soysa et al. 1998). For both of them, the relation to (dis-)satisfaction remains indirect at best. A causal relation between satisfaction and armament is difficult to deduce. At most, one may assume purely statistical covariance.²³ But this covariance ignores that there may be ample reasons for increased military spending, other than dissatisfaction with the status quo. One has to look no further than the literature on the security dilemma, to find that even states merely wanting to maintain their position and preventing a downgrade of their position can tumble into an unintended arms dynamic or even an arms race (Herz 1950; Shiping Tang 2010). The alliance indicator is plagued by similar shortcomings. It also measures satisfaction indirectly. At the same time it opens the floodgates for spurious correlations and non-correlations. Should, for example, the missing alliance between Japan and Norway (which is allied with the United States through the NATO) indicate Japanese dissatisfaction with the status quo (Siverson/Miller 1996: 70)? Obviously there are other factors at work here, probably geographic proximity. It can, however, not even be taken for granted that proper dissatisfied states eschew allying with the dominant power (or its allies) at all times. Imperial Japan, for example, remained allied to the (then dominant) United Kingdom long after its revisionist intentions became obvious and even Nazi-Germany sought (in vain) an alliance with Great Britain (as did Imperial Germany before). Hence, the alliance indicator overlooks potentially dissatisfied states while at the same time wrongly assigning dissatisfaction to others.²⁴ The one big advantage of both of these indicators and the reason that they are regularly used is that they are relatively easily assessable and quantifiable and thus lend themselves to large-n statistical studies, which many proponents of PTT prefer. This advantage, however, is bought dearly, too dearly.

Thus, irrespective of their results (which as a matter of fact do not unequivocally support standard PTT either), these indicators are deeply flawed. None of them substantially tackles what PTT is really interested in, that is the (dis-)satisfaction with the status quo of the international order. Therefore, let us, in the following section, look more qualitatively at the interrelation between Weimarian Germany and the international order in the 1920s.

Dissatisfaction with the International Order

The Weimar Republic was effectively ‘born dissatisfied’. After the German Empire lost World War I – a war, mind you, that it fought according to standard PTT because it was dissatisfied with the international order – the democratic republic led by the Social Democrats, Catholics and left liberals did not receive the benefit of the doubt by the allies. While the new leaders of Germany hoped for a clean slate, the allies did not see much of a difference between the Kaiser and the new republicans (Kolb 1988: 269; Steiner 2007: 9).

Thus the peace treaty of Versailles was a harsh one: Germany lost a seventh of its territory and a tenth of its population, was excluded from the new League of Nations, had to demobilize most of its troops, had to pay reparations and had to take moral responsibility for the outbreak of World War I.²⁵ Germany’s ally from the world war, Austria-Hungary was dismantled but the German speaking Austrians were forbidden to join the German Empire despite the “Anschluss” desire on

23 By contrast there is a clearer correlation between the variables armament and war, see for example van Evera (1999: 145–147), although it may run both ways. As de Soysa and his colleagues point out: “An arms race is a symptom of conflict as well as a contributing factor to its escalation” (Soysa et al. 1998: 518). Hence, this indicator is also in danger of tautology: If wars get triggered by previous arms races, then every participant automatically becomes a dissatisfied power.

24 The alliance indicator is also in danger of tapping into the same tautology trap that threatens the armament indicator: “States often form alliances against others precisely because they are in conflict”. The hazard is again that “the dimensions along which [satisfaction- / author] status is assessed [...] be inherently related to the behavior to be explained” (Soysa et al. 1998: 518).

25 In addition Germany had to give up its properties in the victor states, had to relinquish patents and trademarks, had to accept the unilaterally declared internationalization of the waterways and had to grant most favored nations status in its trade to the allied powers (Mommensen 2009: 130–131).

both sides (Klein 1998). Even though some historians suggest that – given the circumstances – it could have been much harder, that was certainly not the feeling of the contemporary Germans. In the Reichstag, Social Democratic Chancellor Philip Scheidemann²⁶ emphatically exclaimed: “Which hand would not have to wither, that would put itself and us in these iron-chains” and true to his word his government resigned rather than accepting the Versailles Treaty” (Scheidemann is quoted in Gellinek 2006: 42, author’s translation). This was, however, largely symbolic. Shortly thereafter, a new government under chancellor Gustav Bauer (SPD) was formed that accepted the treaty conditions. Germany was in no shape to offer meaningful resistance.

Germany was forced to sign the Treaty, the German delegation was not allowed to be part of the negotiations. Instead Clemenceau famously greeted the German delegation with: “The day of reckoning has arrived. You pleaded for peace. We are inclined to grant you this plea” (cited in Möller 1998: 24–25, author’s translation). He went on to tell the Germans that the victors were in unison determined to use all means necessary to make Germany pay for the costs of the war. Accordingly the Treaty entailed a clause that read: “The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.” While integrated in the treaty as a means of justifying the reparations demanded from Germany, Germans – many of whom believed until the end to have fought a defensive war – saw this as a form of unfair humiliation (Krüger 1985: 74; Möller 1998: 28).

In the years immediately after the war, German politics were notoriously unstable and often on the brink of civil war but the opposition to Versailles and the international order that was established there united all German parties.²⁷ Whether the strategy was populist opposition or tactical cooperation (“Erfüllungspolitik”), the aim was to overcome the shackles of Versailles, while the aim of the other powers, most eminently France, was to stabilize and solidify the Versailles order (Krüger 1985).

Every German government since the establishment of the Weimar Republic had dedicated itself to the revision of the Versailles Treaty. Even when British Prime Minister Lloyd George sought to ease the ongoing tensions in Europe and bring the pariah states Germany and the Soviet Union into the fold through his conference diplomacy, the German leadership preferred entering into a treaty with Moscow in Rapallo, thus angering France and Great Britain (Mommsen 2009: 159–162; Schmidt et al. 2007: 28).²⁸

In 1923 the Ruhr Crisis broke out: after Germany was late with some reparation deliveries²⁹, French and Belgium occupied the Ruhrgebiet and took over some important coal mines as “productive deposits”. Germany reacted with passive resistance and came to the brink of war with France (Layne 1996). The strain of passive resistance, which was financed by the German government, increased the already ongoing inflation and the hyper inflation started, which nearly destroyed the German economy.

Furthermore, while some became virulent only in the 1930s, Germany held territorial claims against Belgium (Eupen-Malmedy), Lithuania (Memel), Czechoslovakia (Sudetenland) and most

26 It is worth noting that Scheidemann was not known for militaristic, monarchist or nationalist tendencies; in the contrary he was vilified by the nationalistic right for calling for what became known as a Scheidemann-Peace (peace without contributions and annexations) during the war (Elz 2008: 32).

27 See Böckenförde (1988); Grupp (1988: 288); Krüger (1985: 14–15); Meyer (1988: 330); Möller (1998: 26); Schmidt et al. (2007: 27). Even renowned pacifists like Walter Schücking and the later Nobel Peace Prize winner Ludwig Quide protested passionately against the harsh peace conditions (Mommsen 2009: 120–121).

28 Krüger notes that the cooperation with Moscow was also directly directed against Poland (Krüger 1985: 149).

29 Whether this was deliberative on the part of Germany or really, as Berlin claimed, inadvertent is debated among historians (Krüger 1985: 132ff).

importantly Poland (Western Poland, Danzig Corridor, Upper Silesia).³⁰ Germany also mourned the loss of its colonies and demanded compensation for having to give them up (Schmidt et al. 2007: 28). Thus, all in all, Germany was most clearly dissatisfied with the international order during this time.

Things changed a little bit after 1923 when Gustav Stresemann rose to power, first a chancellor in the wake of the Ruhr Crisis and after that, until his death in 1929, as foreign minister and conducted a policy of *détente* (see below). However even Stresemann was not content with the German position in the long run and even he was frustrated by the lacking results of his politics by the end of the 1920s (Mommsen 2009: 264–265). Furthermore, other important actors in German foreign policy were even less enthusiastic about the prospect of his *détente* policy: the Reichswehr, the Reichspräsident (since 1925 former world war general Paul von Hindenburg) and right-wing political parties such as the DNVP which was the second strongest party in the Reichstag from 1924 until 1930 (Mommsen 2009: 252–253). Besides, even a cooperation-minded foreign minister like Stresemann always had to take into account the sentiment of the streets and the ‘*Stammtische*’ which were often more revisionist than the government itself (Broszat 1994: 76; Krüger 1985: 80). Even in the “Stresemann years” then Germany was most certainly not a satisfied status quo power.³¹

While a historical case study undoubtedly leaves room for interpretation, it seems clear that Germany in the mid-1920s cannot be regarded as an unequivocally satisfied status quo power and even less so in the early 1920s. Standard PTT’s interpretation of German satisfaction, as exemplified by Tammen and his colleagues, thus cannot hold. If, however, Germany was in a situation of parity as well as dissatisfied, it should – according to PTT – have challenged the UK much earlier than 1939. In other words, while Tammen and his colleagues intended to use the British-German relations – the two wars following parity/dissatisfaction periods and the peaceful sequence of the two alleged parity/satisfaction periods – to prove the adequacy of standard PTT, quite the contrary standard PTT now seems to have been falsified by the absence of a great power war in the 1920s.

ADJUSTING PTT: SATISFACTION AND POWER CONSTELLATIONS

In this section, I suggest two adjustments of PTT that might remedy this situation. I focus on the conceptualization of the satisfaction variable and the broadening of power transition constellations beyond bilateral stand-offs. After introducing the theoretical adjustment, I apply it to the empirical case to show how our interpretation might be affected by the adjusted (power transition) theoretical lens.

Theoretical Adjustments: Continuous Satisfaction and the Constellation beyond the Duel

Satisfaction is one of the central – one could even argue the most central – variables in the entire PTT framework. At the same time it remains underdeveloped from a theoretical, conceptual and methodological point of view. The fact that a consensual indicator is lacking and that one has to get by with different indicators which are all problematic in their own right, as has been pointed out above, is a case in point.

But there is another troubling aspect about this variable. In whichever way it is measured, PTT has tended to use satisfaction as a purely dichotomous variable. Thus a state is either dissatisfied (indicating a power transition war) or satisfied (indicating the chance of a peaceful power transition).

30 All of these German claims are coded as being of high salience by the ICOW Territorial Claims Dataset (see Hensel/Mitchell 2007).

31 This is even more true for the years following Stresemann’s death; the presidential cabinets of Brüning, von Papen, von Schleicher and the Hitler government were decidedly more revisionist and dissatisfied than the preceding cabinet (see Möller 1998: 56–57 and Hildebrand 1999: 599). Note that the period of parity and satisfaction marked by Tammen and his colleagues extends well into the 1930s that is into the tenure of these very revisionist cabinets. (Tammen et al. 2000: 52).

While the focus on these two categories is understandable as it is the threshold between them that interests PTT scholars, this dichotomy veils the fact that the concept of satisfaction is clearly continuous (Lupton 2011: 7).

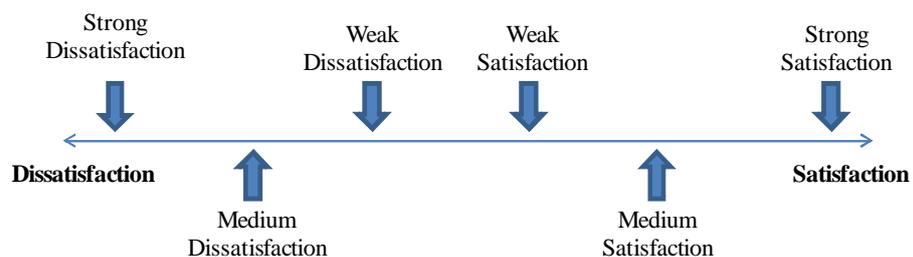
Not surprisingly we find already A.F.K. Organski claiming:

„Degree of power and degree of satisfaction, then, become important national characteristics to be considered when trying to locate the nations that are most likely to disturb world peace” (Organski 1968: 364, italics added).

We should expect then some variance within the main categories. It is not plausible at all that all “satisfied” states have the exact same degree of satisfaction, much more we should expect some to be very, a little and barely satisfied actors (see illustration 5).³² While very satisfied rising powers should indeed lead us to expect a peaceful power transition from a PTT perspective, it gets more complicated with the other two types. Elsewhere I have proposed has proposed two requirements any concept of satisfaction has to fulfill in order to be compatible with PTT (Rauch 2014: 209–215). The requirement of disassociation (satisfaction must not be a simple function of the power variable) and the requirement of variance (the conceptualization must allow for variation of the satisfaction status). This second requirement demands that satisfaction is not and cannot be permanently fixed (neither between actors nor for a single actor), otherwise it would contradict the core of PTT as it would not allow for the existence of either peaceful power transitions (if all actors are invariably dissatisfied) or power transition wars (if all actors invariably are satisfied). For this reason satisfied actors (especially those that are closer to barely satisfied than very satisfied) may always skid down towards the camp of the dissatisfied actors. Satisfaction (and especially weak satisfaction) at one point in time can thus give us no assurance that the respective power stays satisfied in the long run.

Likewise we should expect the camp of “dissatisfied” powers to be quite heterogeneous being populated with very, a little and barely dissatisfied actors. Again, PTT would be very clear in predicting a problematic situation if a very dissatisfied power starts to rise and a power transition becomes possible, while the rise of a little or barely dissatisfied power leaves room for political maneuvering or management.³³ Whereas the continuous nature of satisfaction cautions us that satisfied actors may become dissatisfied, it also gives us hope that dissatisfied actors may become satisfied.

Illustration 5: Satisfaction as continuous variable³⁴



³² Of course these categories are artificial as well and could be differentiated ever further.

³³ Once one accepts this continuous character of satisfaction, the necessity to use some terminological non-starters can be dropped. For example, instead of calling China a “dissatisfied responsible great power” an oxymoron Shaun Breslin uses to denote that it is on the one hand dissatisfied in the sense that it is trapped in a world order in the establishment of which it had no say and which primarily serves Western interests, but that it – at the same time – does not at all intend to challenge the international order and has become a rule taker more than a breaker or challenger of existing rules, one can simply understand China as a power, that – on the satisfaction continuum – tends towards dissatisfaction but has not yet crossed the threshold (see Breslin 2010).

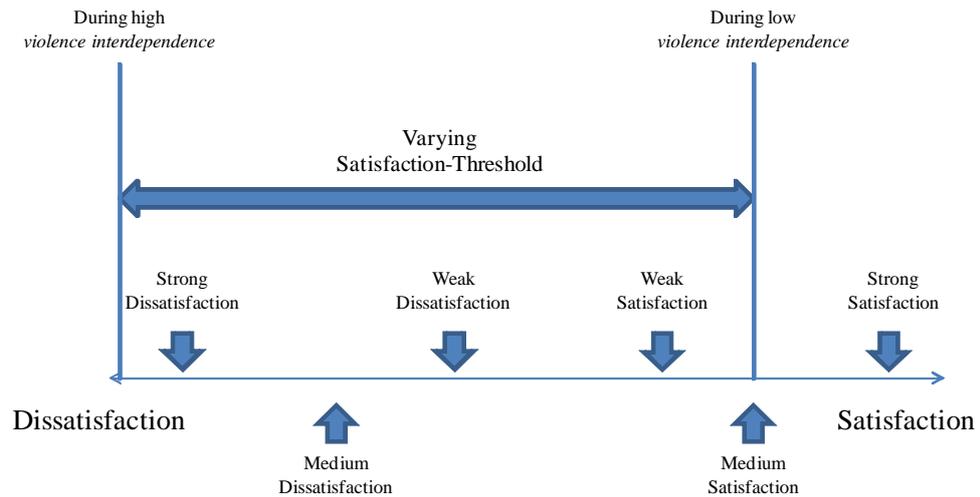
³⁴ Author’s illustration.

The crucial question then is, where exactly on the satisfaction continuum is the tipping point located, where satisfaction turns into dissatisfaction and vice versa. As Lupton asks:

„As state satisfaction is a dynamic variable, scholars must also seek to understand how much dissatisfaction is necessary for states to engage in militarized conflict. How strong [...] must a state be dissatisfied enough to actually challenge the status quo“ (Lupton 2011: 32).

That is, the tipping point is most probably not located in the absolute middle between the ideal-types total satisfaction and total dissatisfaction. Rather, states will probably be ready to accept a certain amount of dissatisfaction, before they decide that their grievances justify the risk of war.³⁵

Illustration 6: Satisfaction and variable threshold point³⁶



As I have pointed out elsewhere satisfaction has always a very subjective character (Rauch 2014: 248). From this we can deduce that the location of the threshold point may vary from actor to actor. But we can also ask whether the sum of all imaginable subjective tipping points across time and space move towards the one or the other direction, for example if wars become more costly for all sides involved and there is a high ability of actors to harm each other.³⁷ For PTT this could mean, as long as this ability is rather low, low levels of dissatisfaction are sufficient to motivate an actor to risk war to achieve the desired changes of the international order.³⁸ As the ability becomes more intensive, however, we could expect a certain moderation. While this does not influence the degree of (dis-)satisfaction itself, it could be instrumental to move the tipping point between satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the direction of the latter (see illustration 6).³⁹ In other words and considering an extreme case: An actor that knows that a power transition war will probably be a nuclear war, might be inclined to accept non-satisfaction with the international order longer or accept more non-satisfaction in sum, before it is ready to consider challenging the international status quo violently.

35 After all, power transition war is fought in times of parity. That means both sides have the potential to win the war. These are not wars in which the victor is clear before the fighting starts (as for example wars of great powers vs minor powers). If defeat is a real possibility, however, it makes sense that the rising power feels more than just a tad dissatisfied before they risk it all (Tammen et al. 2000: 22).

36 Author's illustration.

37 Deudney calls this concept "violence interdependence". His point is that such a violence interdependence, much more than a balance of power based on aggregation of capabilities frames and influences the security problem in an anarchic international system (Deudney 2007: 34–35; also see Deudney 2009).

38 In fact, in cases of a very low violence interdependence, even states that are somewhat satisfied with the international order but are at the same time opportunistic actors looking for the spoils of conquest might start a war.

39 That is, under the conditions of an intense violence interdependence and considering the ramifications of a great power war, more non-satisfaction has to be piled up until an actor becomes dissatisfied for the purpose of PTT. This is also in line with prospect theory, which assumes that actors are more likely to accept risks in order to avoid losses than in order to pursue gains (see Kahnemann/Tversky 1979; Levy 1997).

The second theoretical adjustment is about the relevant conflict constellation. Even if it has sometimes been called systemic, PTT at its core has always been a dyadic theory. True, the international order and the hierarchy pyramid populated by different kinds of powers figure prominently in the theory. But when push comes to shove, PTT has always been about the standoff between a declining dominant power defending the international order and a rising power challenging the said order (Abdollahian/Kang 2008: 333–334; Lemke 1997: 24; Thompson 1996: 163). There has been not much place for other actors in this high-noon like drama.⁴⁰

This modeling, however, seldom mirrors the empirical realities. Even if we grant the controversial assumptions that the strongest power acts as a dominant power that to some extent controls and defends the international order,⁴¹ and that the primary rising power – if dissatisfied – strives to become the new dominant power in order to remake the said order, the absolute refusal to even consider the impact that other actors which might be just below the two strongest ones could have is quite puzzling (Müller/Rauch 2015).

Such an impact is possible in many ways: just think of a dominant power that has assembled a large coalition of powers which support the international order. While it might seem odd from a (neo-)realist perspective that states would join the stronger side (which is the dominant power) instead of balancing power by siding with the challenger, PTT is actually more open to this thought: Most of the dissatisfied nations are – according to PTT – to be found at the lower end of the power echelon (Tammen et al. 2000: 10). Great powers (and even more, rising great powers), as a rule of thumb, do benefit from the international order (that is why they are great and/or rising). This is underscored by satisfaction scholars from sociology as well as some proponents of PTT who agree that satisfaction is – *ceteris paribus* – not normally distributed, and that satisfaction should be regarded as the rule rather than the exception. Note the claim made by Kugler and Organski: „As a rule, most great powers are satisfied with the way the international order is run.” (Kugler/Organski 1989: 175, italics in original). Great powers that are satisfied with the international order, however, are likely to support the dominant power – *contra* balance of power logics – if the alternative is a new, uncertain international order to be constructed by the dissatisfied challenger.⁴² In this case apparent power parity could in reality turn out to be feigned, if the rising power closes the gap between itself and the dominant power but is still far away from reaching the combined power of the dominant coalition. Conversely a rising challenger that manages to gather an aggressive jackal-coalition that looks for spoils of conquest might reach effective parity well below the bilateral 80% threshold (Schweller 1994). Thus one can think of other powers in terms of resources that can add the one or the other side in a power transition conflict.⁴³

Other powers (let alone great powers) are thus important. Even if they are not powerful enough to be a contender for the spot of the dominant power themselves, their capacity might make a decisive difference in the comprehensive analysis of a power transition situation, with the more satisfied powers possibly aiding the dominant power protect its status quo. We should assume that rising powers are well aware of this when they calculate their chances. Dissatisfied powers on the other hand might be candidates that aid the rising power, only if their dissatisfaction has similar roots. In other cases they might dislike the estimated international order of the rising power just as much as the existing international order and prefer to distance themselves from conflict altogether. This, of course, does not mean that there are no situations in which primarily (or only) the duel between the two strongest powers matters. Just think of the Cold War, where clearly the (power)

40 An exception to this rule is Kim (1991). Otherwise, alliances only come to play in one of the common satisfaction indicators discussed above.

41 For a critique of this point see Bussmann/Oneal (2007).

42 If the challenger is dissatisfied with the current order and he desires to change it, the changes it makes are likely to contradict the wishes of any power that is satisfied with the current order.

43 This becomes even more apparent when taking into account that despite its bilateral focus, PTT expects big system-wide wars as a result of non-peaceful power transitions.

relation between the United States and the Soviet Union was decisive, as they both overshadowed their respective allies. In any case it is an empirical question to be unraveled rather than a theoretical constant to be defined, whether the international power constellation calls for a focus on the two premier powers or whether other players have to be taken into account as well.

Application to the Weimar Case: Scaling Satisfaction and the Real Power Constellation of the 1920s

Can these two theoretical adjustments be helpful in the Weimarian case that seems to be at odds with traditional PTT? Let us begin with scaling satisfaction. As has been elaborated above, in the first parity period in the early 20s, Germany was strongly dissatisfied. The international order that had been created in Versailles was created without and largely against Germany with the explicit or at least implicit goal to keep Germany contained. Germany was in constant conflict with its former enemies over reparations, disarmament and other clauses of the Versailles Treaty. It was neither invited to nor interested in joining the League of Nations. At every instance, German leaders sought how best to obstruct and revise the Versailles Treaty as a whole. Clearly the Weimar Republic not only had transgressed the satisfaction tipping point (it actually came to being on the dissatisfied side of this point) but was much nearer to the dissatisfied end of the scale than towards this point.

The mid 1920s were a different story as things changed a little bit. Stresemann, who had been a monarchist and annexationist in the early days of World War I, had become a “republican by reason” (‘Vernunftrepublikaner’; see Wirsching/Eder 2008) and a proponent of international détente – probably also by reason (Mommsen 2009: 251; Niedhart 2012: 23; Wright 1995: 119). He championed increasing cooperation with France, the Locarno Treaty by which Germany accepted the new borders in Western Europe, Germany’s accession to the League of Nations and he was even instrumental in turning the Briand-Kellogg-Pact, which was originally meant to be only a bilateral affair between France and the United States, into an international treaty banning war (Hildebrand 1999; Krüger 1985; Möller 1998). However, Stresemann always remained revisionist in that he also sought to revise and ultimately overcome the Versailles Treaty and the order it had produced (Wright 1995: 112; Schmidt et al. 2007: 28–29). He just realized, from the vain German attempts to revise Versailles in the early 1920s, that Germany’s best chance to fight Versailles was from inside the system. He hoped that making Germany an economic powerhouse would make changes in the international order more easily than taking the military route, at the same time he hoped that by making concessions and being cooperative the Spirit of Locarno might be brought to life, making the former enemies of the world war more amicable to German demands (Wright 1995: 114). Thus while still dissatisfied and seeking to revise the Versailles Treaty, Germany was now trying to embrace the international order in order to change it. Diplomacy and cooperation with the erstwhile enemies became the instruments of German Foreign Policy and Germany might have adapted itself to life and work inside of the international order, albeit reluctantly. Clearly this was a difference compared to the furious and resolved dissatisfaction in the direct aftermath of the Versailles Treaty in the early 1920s. We could say Germany was – slowly – moving towards the satisfaction tipping point and under different circumstances (if Stresemann had lived longer, if the economic crises had not hit Germany so hard etc.) might have crossed to truly become a stabilizing power in the international order despite its desire to revise parts of it.⁴⁴ As any war – and especially a great power war – is very dangerous, Germany might have been dissatisfied but just not dissatisfied enough to renew the Great War of just a decade earlier.

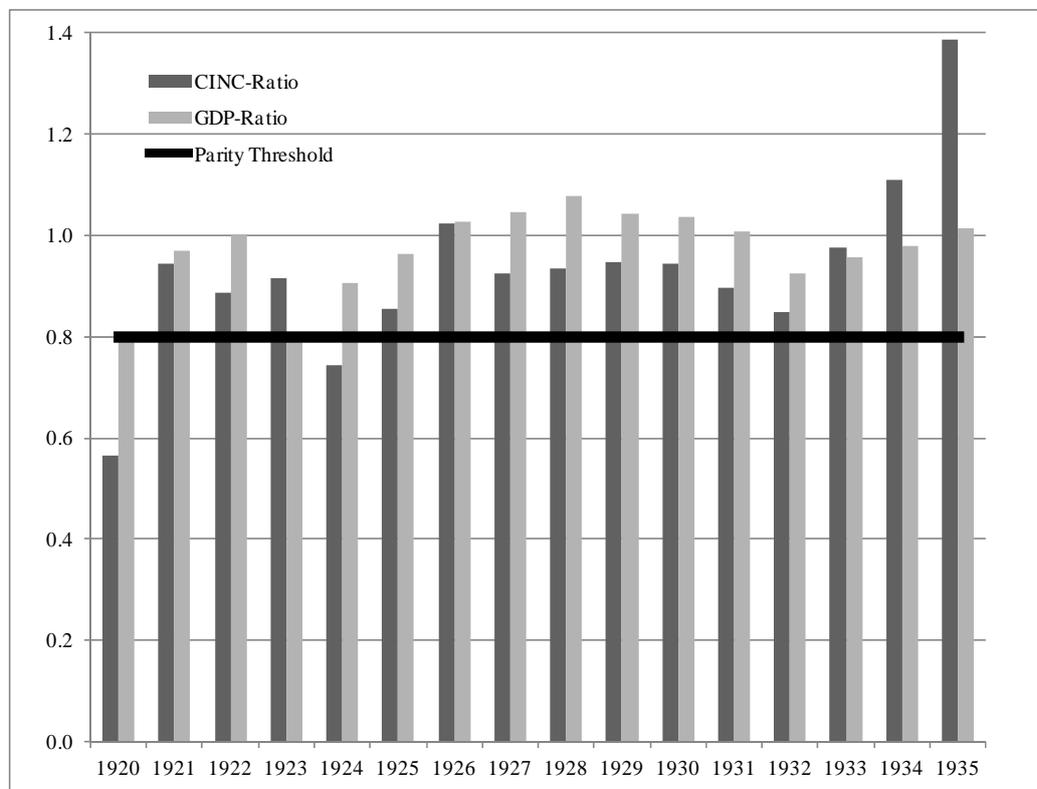
Thus while it indeed seems wrong to call Weimarian Germany satisfied with the international order at any point during its existence; it is also true that it was less dissatisfied during the mid-1920s than during the early or late 1920s. The crucial nuance is entirely lost, when one restricts the satisfaction variable to a simple dichotomy. Once we accept the idea of a satisfaction threshold that

⁴⁴ As Jaschob and her colleagues point out, pure status quo orientation is more an ideal type than some to be found in real life politics. A certain measure of revisionism, that is the wish to change the status quo, is neither morally wrong nor necessarily destabilizing if it remains opposition within the framework of the international rules (Jaschob et al. 2015).

lies somewhere – but not necessarily in the middle – on the satisfaction continuum between maximum dissatisfaction and maximum satisfaction, we can also accept the idea that a Weimarian Germany that was dissatisfied but not quite dissatisfied enough (i.e. not crossing the satisfaction threshold) not being at odds with PTT. This is underlined by the fact that under the conditions of the Versailles Treaty, Germany was very vulnerable and the ability of its prospective opponents to inflict harm (for example by occupying the demilitarized Rhineland – as happened in 1923) was quite high. Under such conditions German dissatisfaction may have existed but was not high enough to cross the threshold.

Regarding the relevant power constellation I have suggested that PTT has to move beyond its traditional view of only regarding the dyad of one dominant power and one rising power and instead take into account a more complex international constellation. Let us start by constructing a power indicator.⁴⁵ In order to capture different aspects of power I will rely on two different sources, the historical GDP data assembled by Maddison (2010) and the CINC power index of the Correlates of War project (see illustration 7).

Illustration 7: Germany vs. United Kingdom 1920-1935 – CINC and GDP Ratio⁴⁶



According to both indicators, bilateral parity between Germany and the United Kingdom was actually even more pronounced than Tammen and his colleagues claim (Tammen et al. 2000: 52). In only two years according to CINC (1920 and 1924) or even only one year according to GDP (1920) is this dyad not in a status of parity.⁴⁷ This makes it even more puzzling from a standard

⁴⁵ It would be advisable to use the same data that Tammen and his colleagues used, but unfortunately they do not provide a source for their GDP-based power indicator (see Tammen et al. 2000: 52).

⁴⁶ Author's illustration based on data of Maddison, "Historical Statistics" and the Correlates of War – National Material Capabilities Dataset, <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities> [4.8.2015].

⁴⁷ Even more, according to CINC, Germany overtook the United Kingdom for one year in 1926 creating a power transition; according to Maddison there were two German overtakings, one in 1922 that lasted only one year and another one in 1926 that lasted until 1932 when London took the lead again.

PTT viewpoint, why a dissatisfied Germany that was in a position of parity for so long did not seek a confrontation with the dominant power.

It becomes clear, however, when we discard the strictly dyadic focus and take the full international constellation into account: The military alliances of World War I might have been discontinued after the conclusion of the war, but that hardly means that all former ties were severed at once. While the United States returned to its pre-war isolationism, Bolshevik Russia became an outcast and Italy – even though on the side of the winners – felt deprived of its spoils of victory and embarked on a revisionist agenda itself, the core of the entente – the relationship between the United Kingdom and France – remained intact.⁴⁸ If Germany was to challenge the international order, it would surely have to deal with both of these powers. France in particular seemed even more determined to maintain the Versailles status quo than London. In addition, smaller anti-German powers were also present. Belgium was still outraged by the German attack on its neutrality in 1914 and by the atrocities during the war; thus, it partook in the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. Poland was (re-)created partly out of German territory that Berlin wanted to regain and was staunchly anti-German. In addition the little entente of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia, sponsored and supported by Paris, while primarily directed against Hungarian revisionism could also be counted among the opponents of Germany in the case of a war (Graml 2001: 16). Berlin on the other hand had no reliable allies. Austria-Hungary, its closest ally before and in World War I, was dismantled and the remaining Austria a *quantité négligeable*. The Soviet Union was sought as a partner to overcome isolation in the early 1920s, but with its tendency to sponsor world revolution in all capitalist countries – and especially in Germany that was seen as a key to the spread of communism – was hardly a reliable cohort. Fascist Italy only came to be a partner in crime when Hitler came into power.⁴⁹ Thus, at the very least, any German challenge to the international order would have had little support by important allies and would have had to deal with more defenders than just the United Kingdom.

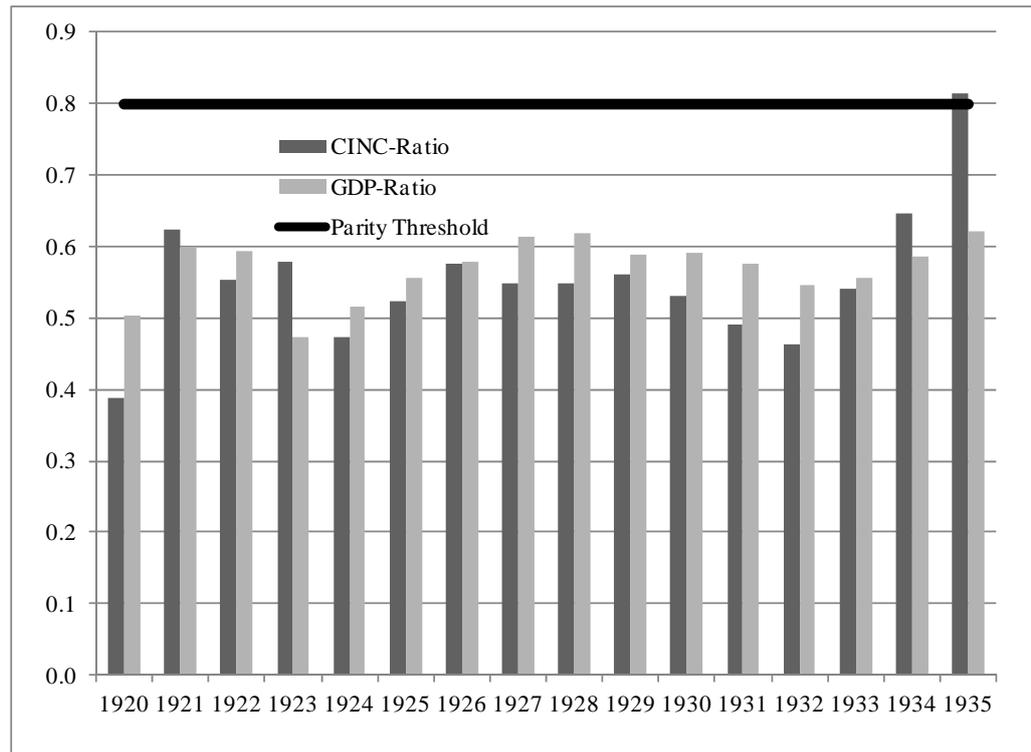
Taking this into account, it becomes questionable whether Germany really was in a position of parity in the early or mid-1920s (see Illustration 8). According to the CINC index of the Correlates of War project, Germany reached parity (defined as 80% of the power resources of the stronger side) with the United Kingdom and France combined not earlier than 1935. During the 1920s Germany's power never rose above 62% of the power of London and Paris combined.⁵⁰ Historical GDP data also supports this observation. According to the data gathered by Angus Madison, Germany was never even close to reach economic parity with the United Kingdom and France combined. Its ratio floated between 50% and 60% during the 1920s and came close to parity only in 1939 when it reached 75%. There is no stark difference in the two alleged periods of parity in this regard: in the first half of the 1920s Germany's power ratio in relation to French and British power combined was in average 52,3% (CINC) or 53,6% (GDP), in the second half of the 1920s it was 55,1% (CINC) or 59% (GDP). In both periods, then, parity was all but unachievable.⁵¹

48 This does not mean that there were no disagreements between Paris and London concerning their dealings with Germany. But there can be little doubt that the two would have stood united in case of clear military German aggression as 1939 shows.

49 Mussolini sought an anti-status quo partnership even earlier. But Germany dismissed such an offer citing the weakness of the revisionist powers. Bernhard von Bülow – a high official in the German Foreign Office and a strong revisionist himself who steered German foreign policy away from the more cooperative course after Stresemann's death – explicitly spoke out against aligning with Italy and its fellow revisionist states which he called a "club of the lame and blind" (Graml 2001: 44).

50 And keep in mind that this does not even count other anti-German powers, which were plenty.

51 Furthermore, the data mostly/exclusively (CINC/GDP) relies on economic numbers. It does not reflect the fact that after World War I Germany was forced to disarm (see above) and had much less military capability than either France or Britain before the Third Reich started its big military build-up.

Illustration 8: Germany vs. United Kingdom & France 1920-1935 – CINC and GDP Ratios⁵²

The Weimar Republic then, was never during the 1920s in a real position of parity with the defenders of the status quo and it could hope neither to add dissatisfied allies to its camp nor to apply a strategy of divide and conquer in fighting a war against France or Britain with the other power acting as idle bystander (Churchill 2003: 24; Tammen 2008: 322).⁵³ In contrast and in line with PTT, Germany reached (CINC) or at least approached (GDP) parity with Great Britain and France combined and added fellow dissatisfied powers (Japan, Italy and through the Hitler-Stalin Pact even the Soviet Union) to its camp in the late 1930s prior to World War II.

CONCLUSION

Before I start with the conclusions let me briefly consider a more parsimonious explanation for the deviant case of Weimarian Germany than the one presented here: could it be that the entire problem is not – as I argue – a deficiency of PTT but simply a coding error of Tammen and his colleagues that should not be remedied by reformulating PTT but simply by recoding Weimarian Germany as dissatisfied during its entire existence? While more parsimonious, this solution would open up other questions. Let us suppose we recode the Weimar Republic as ‘dissatisfied’. If indeed Weimarian Germany was dissatisfied since its establishment and had reached parity as early as 1924,⁵⁴ why then did it take more than a decade and a radical change of form of government before it acted? Even Organski/Kugler argued that the time lag between a power transition and a power transition war should not exceed ten years if PTT is meant to be meaningful (Organski/Kugler 1980). If PTT only tells us that a period of parity coupled with dissatisfaction will lead to war at some point in the far

52 Author’s illustration based on data of Maddison 2010 and the Correlates of War – National Material Capabilities Dataset, [4.8.2015].

53 What is more, the challenge, according to PTT, would have had to be directed against the United Kingdom – the dominant power. In reality, however, France was much more resolute in defending the Versailles order.

54 Indeed the data based on the CINC index and the historical statistics of Maddison suggest that the periods of parity regarding the dyad United Kingdom/Germany in the 1920s was even longer and more pronounced than Tammen and his colleagues claim (see Maddison 2010).

away future it does not, in fact, tell us very much. Therefore I believe it is necessary to adapt PTT in the way this article does.

For PTT this study yields important results. Standard PTT is a seasoned and acclaimed theory. However, even proponents of PTT have long lamented the way the theory treats the satisfaction variable. Without a doubt a more thorough theorizing, conceptualizing and operationalizing of the satisfaction variable remains the most important task for scholars of PTT in the years to come. Given that satisfaction is of prime importance for PTT, it is not surprising that there are many aspects of the variable that should be dealt with; this article has engaged only one of several issues in depth, namely the tendency of standard PTT to dichotomize satisfaction, failing to recognize that it would be much more proper to speak of a continual satisfaction scale with a varying satisfaction threshold.

Two additional issues should at least be addressed briefly: The sources of (dis)satisfaction and the appropriate level of analysis. First, regarding the sources of (dis-)satisfaction, some might be more severe, more war-triggering than others. For Weimarian Germany for example the sources of dissatisfaction stem directly from the post-WWI international order; the loss of territory as well as of economic capacity were major sources of dissatisfaction but at the same time ideational factors like deprivation of status played an important role as well. In order to fully address this matter PTT needs to tell us, how different sources of (dis)satisfaction relate to one another and whether this relation is stable or dependent on time, space, and actors involved. Second, regarding the level of analysis, the moderating effects of Stresemann – in contrast to other domestic actors (including but not limited to Hitler and the Nazi party) – on Weimarian revisionism shows that it is shortsighted of PTT to focus on the degree of dissatisfaction of the state as a unitary actor based on some “objective” measurement of structural dissatisfaction.⁵⁵ Rather – or at least in addition – it would be important to scrutinize the (dis)satisfaction of the individual leadership and the dominant ideology in a given state and thus bring in the first and second image into satisfaction analysis. More energy should be devoted in future PTT research to conceptualize, theorize and operationalize satisfaction and engage the problems raised above. These are tasks, however, that go well beyond the scope of this article.

While calling for improved satisfaction analysis within PTT is like carrying coal to Newcastle, the second consequence for PTT could be more controversial. PTT has long resisted including other states besides the dominant and prime rising powers in its framework. In fact this bilateral focus makes the theory unique. Nonetheless it clouds PTT analytical power. International relations, even at the top of the international power pyramid, do not take place in vacuo. There might be situations in which only the bilateral relations between dominant power and challenger matter, because all other powers are preoccupied, uninterested or too weak to make an impact on any side. But whether this is the case, or whether there are other major powers interested in keeping the international order as it is (or changing it), is an empirical question that should be answered case by case and not be set theoretically a priori.

Weimarian Germany can be brought in line with PTT after all. It is now possible to explain both of the curious instances in the 1920s, as a closer look reveals that the Weimar Republic was not only in a position of (bilateral) parity but also not satisfied with the status quo of the international order and yet remained peaceful, without contradicting PTT. Not by simply asserting that Germany was satisfied with the order of Versailles (which it was not) but by understanding the non-dichotomous character of satisfaction and the importance of international constellations.

However, the adjustments of PTT offered in this article would be of little use if they just helped us to explain away anomalies of the theory with regard to one historical case. If that was the case, it would be much easier to either dismiss the Weimar Republic as an extreme outlier case (for proponents of PTT) or to dismiss PTT as an appropriate theoretical approach (for critics of PTT). In fact, the adjustments of PTT are also helpful to reevaluate modern or future cases of power transitions. In fact,

55 This is all the more important as these indicators, as has been argued above, are themselves lacking in validity and reliability.

applying these adjustments we can find some solace concerning the allegedly impending power transition involving the U.S. and China. First of all, we have to raise the question if this power transition is so impending after all. True, China's GDP is rising faster – much faster – than that of the United States. Following current estimations, China could overtake the United States in economic terms as early as 2021 (The Economist 2014).⁵⁶ But taking into account that the international order will not be decided upon in high noon duel style between just two players, a Chinese bid for dominance seems less likely. The most important allies of the US can be found among the G7 powers, thus even if China could muster a 'coalition of the dissatisfied' including states like Russia, Iran or Venezuela, it would still be far behind the former for several decades. Even adding the rising powers of India and Brazil to the Chinese camp would not be enough to even the odds and reach parity.⁵⁷ A real power transition/power parity constellation might thus be farther away than economic figures and trends would have us believe.

Still, might not a dissatisfied China pose a challenge for international stability at any rate and are there not many signs that China is indeed not satisfied with the international order right now?⁵⁸ According to standard PTT, our research instruments would only allow us to code China as satisfied or as dissatisfied. Evidence suggests that – given only this choice – there is a good possibility we would affix China to the dissatisfied stamp. Having identified China as dissatisfied, decision makers in the United States could then decide to gear the US up for the “coming conflict with china” (Bernstein/Munro 1998).⁵⁹ If, on the other hand, we agree that dissatisfaction is a diverse category, we can accept that a certain amount of Chinese dissatisfaction will not necessarily lead China to mount a challenge against the current international order. This is underlined by the fact that the violence interdependence is – due to the existence of nuclear weapons – higher today than in any other time of history. To be sure, this should not be misconstrued as an argument claiming that dissatisfaction does not matter and should not be managed. The opposite is true, the best strategy for ensuring international peace and stability is to maximize the satisfaction of dominant, rising and other great powers.

That PTT is lacking in certain regards does not mean it has nothing to tell us about coming power transitions. To discard it entirely because of its weaknesses would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. What the episode of Weimarian Germany, shows, however, is that PTT should be applied with caution. As has been outlined in the introduction, even standard PTT is more diverse than to allow for statements such as “rising powers usually provoke war” or “power transitions lead to war” that could all too quickly turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy if taken for granted by the decision-makers.⁶⁰ A broadened PTT, however, that is more self-conscious about its satisfaction variable and moves beyond the dyadic high noon situation still has much to tell us about the peculiar relationship between power, satisfaction, war and peace that will remain important in the 21st century.

56 This, however, depends on using GDP as a power indicator. Taking a look at military indicators as well, the gap between the United States and China appears to be much wider (Müller/Rauch 2015: 40).

57 Indeed, while Brazil and India might be dissatisfied with some aspects of the international order itself, it seems unconvivable that they would join a Chinese-led alliance directed against the West given the tendency of democracies to not fight each other and – in the Indian case – the unresolved conflicts between New Delhi and China.

58 The jury is still out regarding this question. Accounts that see China as quite dissatisfied include Tammen et al. (2000: 180–181) and Medeiros/Fravel (2003), while Chan (2004) and Larson/Shevchenko (2014) recognize less dissatisfaction in China's behavior.

59 Even though of course, even standard PTT suggests that a strategy of increasing satisfaction by status accommodation or other means is much more effective than pure resistance.

60 As examples of such simplified PTT-based predictions, one can quote: “History teaches us that rising powers are likely to provoke war” and “[t]hroughout the history of the modern international state system, ascending powers have always challenged the position of the dominant (hegemonic) power in the international system - and these challenges have usually culminated in war”. The first quote is from Shirk (2007: 4); the second quote is from Layne (2008: 16), italics have been added. Critics of PTT often make the same mistake. Lebow for example claims that the present policy of the US vis-à-vis China “is based on the assumption of power transition theory that rising powers are never satisfied with the existing status quo and willing to go to war to change it” (Lebow 2014: 248, italics added).

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