

Unwilling Foes: Russia's and China's Reaction to the Challenge of the American Ballistic Missile Defence Programme

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June 2005

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in Political Science.

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ISBN: 978-0-494-22586-8

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
Résumé/Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of abbreviations	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter I – the Puzzle	6
A) The Origins of the Missile Defence Debate	7
B) The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty	10
C) First Breach: The Strategic Defence Initiative	12
D) The Rumsfeld Commission	15
E) Towards the Abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty	19
F) Russian and Chinese Diverging Responses after the December Decisions	23
G) The Challenge of Ballistic Missile Defence	28
H) Conclusion	33
Chapter II – The Theoretical Framework	35
A) Balance of Power Theories	36
B) Deterrence Theory	42
C) Hegemonic Theories	45
D) Complex Interdependence	47
E) The Debate on China's Rise	49

F) The Neoclassical Approach	51
G) Conclusion	59
 Chapter III – Explaining the Puzzle	 61
A) The Position of Russia and China in the Distribution of Power	61
B) The Power of the State Apparatus	70
C) Past interactions	77
D) The Perception of Threat	84
E) Conclusion	90
 Conclusion and Implications	 93
 Bibliography	 101

Résumé

La réaction officielle de la Fédération de Russie et de la République populaire de Chine à l'annonce faite par les États-Unis en décembre 2001 de l'abrogation subséquente du Traité sur les missiles antimissile fut remarquablement faible, considérant leur opposition soutenue et coordonnée au déploiement d'un système de défense stratégique antimissile. Étant donné que la littérature scientifique n'a que peu traité de cette question et ne fournit pas d'explication satisfaisante à ce problème d'ordre théorique, un modèle de type réaliste néoclassique mobilisant des variables structurelles et domestiques est proposé pour y remédier. En tant que grande puissance en période de stagnation éprouvant des difficultés à l'interne, la Russie se range du côté des États-Unis dans la mesure où elle fait fi de la menace que constitue le bouclier antimissile à moyen et à long terme. La Chine, un État en développement qui monte en puissance, tente modérément de rétablir un équilibre de la puissance parce qu'elle est consciente de la menace que pose ce projet abhorré à sa sécurité. Elle n'emploie pas les grands moyens pour atteindre cet objectif dans la mesure où agir de la sorte pourrait mettre en péril les bases de sa montée en puissance, tel que l'a montré l'exemple évocateur de l'effondrement de l'URSS.

Abstract

The official reaction of the Russian Federation and of the People's Republic of China to the announcement made by the United States in December 2001 to abrogate the almost thirty years old Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty has been remarkably weak, given their sustained and coordinated opposition to the deployment of strategic defences against ballistic missiles (BMD). Because the existing literature, particularly balance of power theory, under-explored this puzzle and fails to provide a satisfactory explanation to it, a neoclassical realist model building on structural and unit-level variables is proposed to supplement this caveat. It is argued that Russia, as a stagnant great power experiencing trouble at the domestic level, bandwagons with the United States because it discounts the medium- and long-term threat posed by BMD. China, a rising developmental state, is soft balancing because it resents the project and the threat it poses to its security. It has not hard balanced so far because there is an acknowledgement that this could jeopardize its power base, as the telling example of the USSR collapse illustrated.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to express my thanks to Professor T.V. Paul for his supervision and advice throughout the various stages of the research process. I also want to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for the support provided through its Master's scholarship, part of the Canada Graduate Scholarships Program.

Obviously, I am grateful to my parents, Denyse Laurin and Jacques Beaupré, for their constant and unwavering, emotional and material support. Special thanks to Simon-W. Bessette and Pierre Lafrance for their editing efforts, which I am sure was a time-consuming and painful task. However, if errors can still be found in this thesis, the responsibility for these falls solely on my shoulders.

I thank Professors Mark Brawley and Brian Rathbun for their comments on my thesis proposal. A number of graduate student colleagues in POLI 679 (Fall 2003) and 778 (Fall 2004) helped me in my work with their comments on various versions of this project. That includes Hiba Agha, Bahar Akman, Omar Ashour, Scott Boorne, Patrick Curran, Sumon Dantiki, Jessica Fortin, Edwin Kobucki, David Lehman, Imad Mansour, Lukas Nelville, Jennifer Salahub and David Schulman. I also want to thank Mostafa Asadi and Chris Rodgers for the incentives they provided me with in terms of improving my debating skills.

Finally, I thank Helen Wilicka for her precious help with various administrative requirements, as well as Susan Czarnocki and Nicole Baerg for their help at the Data Library.

List of Abbreviations

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972
AEGIS	Warship equipped with this surface launched missile system
ASAT	Anti-Satellite weapons
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defence system (US)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDI	Centre for Defence Information
DoD	Department of Defence (US)
DPG	Defence Planning Guidance (US)
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (aka North Korea)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation (US)
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPALS	Global Protection Against Limited Strikes
G7	Group of Seven most advanced industrial powers
G8	Group of Eight most advanced industrial powers
HTKC	Hard Target Kill Capability
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IR	International Relations (the academic field of)
MAD	Mutually Assured Destruction (nuclear doctrine of)
MIRV	Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles
MRBL	Mid-Range Ballistic Missile
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NMD	National Missile Defence (US)
NPR	Nuclear Posture Review (US)
OSCE	Organisation for the Security and Co-operation in Europe
PLA	People's Liberation Army (China)
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRC	People's Republic of China
QDR	Quadrennial Defence Review (US)

R&D	Research and Development
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitations Talks
SDI	Strategic Defence Initiative (US)
SIOP	Single Integrated Operation Plan (US)
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLBM	Submarine-launched ballistic missile
SORT	Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty of 2003 (aka Moscow Treaty)
SSBN	Nuclear-Powered Submarines Armed With Long-Range Strategic Missiles.
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Talks
TMD	Theatre Missile Defence
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WMEAT	World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers (US State Department report on)
WTO	World Trade Organisation
4GW	Fourth Generation Warfare

Introduction

What explains Russia's and China's weak reaction to the announcement by the United States to deploy a ballistic missile defence system? This question comes to mind when one considers the puzzling behaviour of these two potential rivals to American hegemony. The issue of the near-unipolarity that characterizes today's international system under US dominance is widely scrutinized and subject to intellectual and policy debates. The case of triangular relations between the United States, Russia and China has also been taken on by many scholars. However, when it comes to the intersection of these issues – with regards to missile defence – the literature substantially dries up.

Designated as the “cornerstone of strategic stability and international security” by its advocates,¹ the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) was the main legal obstacle the American government had to overcome before it could proceed with its reformulated security agenda. More specifically, the United States intended to set up a nationwide ballistic missile defence system (BMD) “capable of protecting not only the United States and [its] deployed forces, but also [its] friends and allies” from the threat of “hostile states or terrorist groups armed with weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them.”² The United States was firmly committed to this project after the first election of George W. Bush in 2000, a commitment that was confirmed by its re-election in 2004.

¹ As one instance among many others, see the *Joint Statement by the Presidents of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Anti-Missile Defence*, 18 July 2000. Other states, notably European ones such as Germany and France, also expressed concerns about BMD and adopted the same kind of discourse, although the tone differed. Still others embraced it, such as Japan and the United Kingdom.

² See www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/20021217.html for the official statement made by President Bush on BMD, 17 December 2002.

Moscow and Beijing were quite vocal in stating their opposition to that agenda, suggesting that, at best, it could indirectly endanger the credibility of their nuclear deterrent; and, at worst, that it was precisely the purpose of the American scheme. Even if one could claim that the actual plans do not threaten their nuclear deterrent, this may change in the future once the basis on the system is laid down. The US administration even alluded to that possibility in a statement made in December 2002: “While modest, these capabilities will add to America's security and serve as *a starting point for improved and expanded capabilities later*, as further progress is made in researching and developing missile defence technologies and *in light of changes in the threat*. »³ [emphasis added]. This kind of reasoning can certainly fuel worst-case scenarios from military planners and policymakers who already resent American hegemony. This situation is also, in essence, an example of a security dilemma: one state is trying to increase its security, in this case emphatically at the expense of the so-called rogue states, but this ends up threatening the security of others, even if that result is unintended by the first mover.

Despite their common opposition to the abrogation of ABM Treaty and thus the eventual deployment of a BMD, Russia and China's muted reaction to the announcements made by the George W. Bush on these issues, in December 2001 and December 2002, came as a surprise to most observers and analysts. Indeed, it can even be bewildering from a realist perspective; one would have expected at least some indications of balancing behaviour from Russia and China, either softly, mainly discursively or, more harshly, approaching what some balance of power theorists call “hard balancing”. However, it was surprising to note that nothing substantial was written on the topic after some initial fuss in the media when the aforementioned events first occurred.

³ *Idem.*

Particularly understudied in that regard are Russia's bandwagoning with the US and China's lack of overt balancing against it. Indeed, there is evidence that Russia has been quietly cooperating on a number of key issues with the US, *including* missile defence, since the abrogation of the ABM treaty. On the other hand, China, which has more to lose but is also in many ways in a more difficult position, is neither bandwagoning – as Russia has chosen – nor overtly balancing on the issue of missile defence as balance of power theory predicts. Thus, these two great powers are taking diverging paths to face the challenge of BMD. This counterintuitive behaviour from the part of the two main candidates for balancing or at least try to challenge US dominance, particularly in an area as sensible as strategic armaments, should have elicited more scholarly attention than it has. Their perplexing reaction to BMD can aptly be described as a balance of power puzzle. This theory is so prevalent in the field, reflecting its realist characteristics, that expectations are often based on its premises or predictions, even if it may be on an implicit basis. However, it apparently cannot deal satisfactorily with the research question by which this thesis begins, both theoretically and literally. Without question, it is possible that predictions based on balance of power theory need some time to materialize as real world outcomes. The events at hand are relatively new (even though they take place in an historical trend that is not) and a systemic theory such as balance of power may have some difficulties at grasping the dynamics at hand. Nevertheless, even with these reservations in mind, it should be possible to find preliminary evidence tending to confirm or disprove these predictions.

Even though balance of power theory is the main focus, other approaches could be mobilized to explain the puzzle at hand. Unfortunately, most of these approaches,

such as deterrence, power transition and complex interdependence theories, fail to provide a decisive solution to the puzzle as it will be characterized and consequently provide a helpful alternative to balance of power theory. For all these reasons, it is necessary and justified to propose an alternative model that is not as broad as balance of power theory while remaining parsimonious and inspired by the realist tradition.

I propose to use a model derived from the neoclassical realist approach to provide a systematic explanation to the research question and its underlying puzzle. As privileged by neoclassical realists, the methodology used is a theoretically informed narrative taking the form of a controlled comparison of the cases within this model. This choice allows the usage of the basic structural framework that is the backbone of balance of power theory while adding a layer of domestic-level variables that offer more variance and thus more flexibility when it comes to explain the diverging paths taken by Russia and China. In this model, state power and past interactions inform the main dependent variable, perception of threat, which mediates the effect of the distribution of power, the main independent variable. This will help to emphasize the differences and commonalities between the Russian and Chinese cases and highlight how they impact on the outcome. The proposed configuration of these variables constitutes a contribution to the literature as it cannot be found in other neoclassical realist works and certainly not in research on issues related to the research question.

The argument is that Russia, as a stagnant great power experiencing difficulties at the domestic level, discounts threats emanating from BMD as well as some other unilateral American initiatives. This tendency is supported by past interactions that have highlighted the potential for common understanding between them. The three variables

align themselves so that Russia is not reacting the way balance of power theory predicts. On the other hand, China, as a rising great power, should be balancing with more vigour to the project. It is not doing so because even though its state power is in better shape than Russia's, it still faces significant challenges due to the unequal development schemes throughout the territory as well as legitimacy contestation. Past interactions involving China with other great powers offer mixed evidence, but the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) precedent constitutes a hint about what China should not do in the short run because Beijing recognizes that its power base may be damaged or even jeopardized altogether by an early policy of balancing against the hegemon.

The first chapter will be devoted to the characterization of the puzzle under investigation. A brief history of the US ballistic missile defence, the events that led to the abrogation of the ABM treaty, and the announcement to deploy a BMD by 2004 will be examined. This will enlighten why these developments were such a surprise for students of international security. It will also provide an opportunity to develop the theme of the BMD as a *challenge* for Russia and China. The second chapter is a theoretical one: after reviewing and assessing other approaches to the research question, I will present the model that will offer a satisfying explanation to the said question. The third chapter is analytical: it will scrutinize the effect of the model's variables on the two states in a systematic fashion by comparing them with regards to the distribution of power, the power of their state apparatus, their past interactions, and their perception of threats. The last chapter will discuss the implications of the findings for International Relations theory and discuss how the situation might evolve over the short term and long term.

Chapter I - The Puzzle

In order to address the research question and its implications on great power relations, strategic stability and nuclear politics, it is important to present how and why the issue under investigation can be described as a puzzle. This requires a brief overview of the origins and nature of the debate on BMD. The roots of this debate go back as far as the debate on nuclear weapons, as decision-makers have always been looking for ways to defend their countries against weapons of mass destruction (WMD), regardless of their delivery systems. The argument was temporarily settled by the conclusion and ratification of the ABM treaty, which was a benchmark for arms control. The dispute over this issue resumed in the 1980s when the Reagan administration put forward the SDI. This was an important historical step as it has been argued that the rhetoric around this project drew the USSR into a new arms race and prompted it to spend scarce resources on military research and development, thus contributing to the eventual collapse of the Eastern Bloc.¹

This historical overview will serve as the background for the latest round of interstate interactions with regard to BMD. The catalyst for this third wave of renewed efforts to prop up the case for BMD was the Rumsfeld report released in 1998 which dealt with a threat assessment with regards to ballistic missiles. The Bush administration then made the strategic decision to test and deploy BMD, a decision that led to the announcement of the ABM treaty abrogation in December 2001. In this context, it will be possible to portray how dramatic the change in Russian and Chinese policies was with

¹ Frances FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000): 473-477.

regards to the challenge of the American initiative and thus provide key data for the ensuing analysis.

A) The Origins of the Missile Defence Debate

As stated earlier, the BMD debate is almost as old as nuclear weapons. Military planners and political leaders have always wanted to find some way out of the deadlock of offensive equilibrium in nuclear affairs. Military strategists in particular have been quite unwilling to accept the claim made as early as 1946 that the mastery of nuclear fission and then fusion had led to the production of the “absolute weapon”.²

That expression conveys the notion that such weapons trump any weapons system designed before the nuclear age, at both tactical and strategic levels, quantitatively and particularly qualitatively. The reason why it is absolute is that its power cannot be countered; it is a weapon that goes beyond traditional warfare because its employment on the battlefield is pointless. In a way, it is the “deterrence dream” becoming true as the very existence of such a weapon is supposed to prevent the initiation of major wars – the numbers and quantity of hardware do not really matter within that logic. This existential deterrence has been one of the roles allocated to most decisive weapon systems or formidable defences, a role they have not been able to fulfil because of the uncertainty of warfare. According to that line of argument, atomic weapons dissipate the so-called “fog of war” or the veil of uncertainty by making very clear the consequences and hence fruitlessness of all-out wars between nuclear powers.³

² The seminal reference on the subject is Bernard Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon*, (New York: Harcourt, 1946).

Nevertheless, this rationale does not fit conventional military mindsets; for centuries, they have developed doctrines and strategies running against the logic of this argument. Indeed, the military is trained to think in terms that are irreconcilable with it. For instance, the quantity of manpower and hardware that a nation can muster and put onto the field makes a difference; in other words, numbers matter.⁴ When nuclear weapons had to be loaded onto conventional bombers to be delivered, as was the case with each of atomic bombs used against Japan in 1945, it was easier to neglect this revolutionary point of view as it merely meant that such bombers had to be intercepted before they could deliver their payload. It was not an easy task, but it was one the air forces and air defence forces were trained to carry out. However, the advent of the ballistic missile technology brought nuclear weapons closer to their absolute status by making them more difficult to intercept and impossible to recall once launched.

The debate over strategic defence intensified when there was a realization that if deterrence was not automatic,⁵ it was much more stable if a retaliatory capability survived a pre-emptive nuclear first strike. Given the catastrophic consequences that would result from the detonation of even one nuclear device in retaliation to such an attack, the benefits that a country could rationally expect from this first attack would always be

³ For a discussion of this issue, see Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁴ As an illustration of this impossibility to reconcile Brodie's idea to conventional military thinking, the former had to leave the Strategic Air Command in 1951 while his doctrine was dismissed as "civilian" in nature.

⁵ The Cuban missile crisis crystallized that position by demonstrating how easy it was to come very close, and numerous times, to nuclear war, even though nuclear deterrence proponents can argue that the shadow of nuclear annihilation prevented war initiation. For the groundbreaking work on the different levels of analysis of this crisis, see Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). For its revised and updated edition, see Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed., (New York: Longman, 1999).

dwarfed by the expected costs of the retaliatory strike.⁶ To ensure that deterrence is effective, a state has to display a commitment to respond to any attempt to disarm it, which leads to the concept of mutually assured destruction, aptly coined as MAD, in which the mutual vulnerability of both sides' population is the foundation of the "balance of terror". The only thing needed is the assurance that some nuclear forces will survive a disarming first strike.

The theoretical impossibility of protecting oneself from the certainty of nuclear annihilation derived from MAD did not prevent strategists, assiduous problem solvers, from designing ways to get around the problem. Faithful to the aphorism that offence is often the best defence, they came out with the idea of counterforce: disarming strikes aimed at destroying – by surprise – all WMDs on the opposing side. This operation requires hard target kill capability (HTKC), impressive quantities of hardware and some willingness to suffer damages inflicted on its population, infrastructure and production capability. The doctrine detailing the simultaneous use of multiple weapon systems (bombers, ICBM missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles or SLBM) was contained in the Single Integrated Operation Plan (SIOP) of 1962. That rested on the assumption that it is possible to win a nuclear war by taking less casualties and suffering less infrastructure destruction than the opponent does, even if that means the assured negation for all of the objective or goal at stake in the conflict. Apparently, the dogma that "numbers matter" again influenced the doctrine of the use of nuclear weapons. Of

⁶ Robert A. Levine, "Deterrence and the ABM: Retreading the Old Calculus," *World Policy Journal* 28 (no3, 2001): 23-4.

course, this conception of warfare was no longer within the realm of Clausewitzian thinking as it leaves no room for the continuation of politics by whatever means.⁷

On the defensive side of the coin, the idea was to develop weapons systems that would shield the homeland from, and offer some protection against, nuclear-armed ballistic missiles.⁸ Due to the technological and logistical challenges posed, actual projects did not go very far during this early period, even though some initiatives were indeed put forward: *Nike X* in 1962, *Sentinel* in 1967, the latter being renamed *Safeguard* in 1969. More often than not, these systems were designed to provide a “thin” shield against accidental Soviet launch or a limited long-range Chinese attack.⁹ They implied the use of nuclear-tipped interceptors or, more properly, missiles that had to blast incoming missiles before they reached their target without physically intercepting them. Nevertheless, the simply thinking about such a weapon led American and Soviet policymakers to realize that it could quickly endanger the fragile equilibrium they thought they had managed to establish. There were growing concerns that the modest technological developments in the field of missile defence could trigger another kind of arms race more destabilizing than the previous, mainly offensive one.

B) The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty

This sense that the arms race, underway for close to two decades with its ups and downs, was getting out of control led both parties to make efforts in order to address both

⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: Routledge, 1966).

⁸ The Soviet Union also had its own reflection on this issue, starting in the 1950s, and there were systems being tested and deployed during the 1960s onward. For a short overview of these efforts from a Russian perspective, see www.aviation.ru/PVO/PRO/.

problems. A dialogue started between Washington and Moscow regarding the need to stabilize their relationship and provide an equilibrium to their strategic environment. The result was contained in two 1972 Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I) documents: an Interim Agreement to limit the deployment of strategic arms and a treaty limiting strategic defence systems (the ABM Treaty).¹⁰ According to the terms of the ABM treaty, the deployment of nationwide BMD was prohibited. In spite of this general rule, each superpower could choose to protect either their capital city or intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) silo sites, respectively to face countervalue or counterforce strikes, with up to 200 interceptors on two sites.¹¹ The cap was meant to prevent the establishment of a basis on which a nationwide system could be built.

This clause proved to be superfluous. The United States decided to protect some ICBMs in North Dakota in 1975 but dismantled the program only a year after it became operational because of its poor performance and high costs. The Soviet Union preferred to protect Moscow with a system called A-135, which was for a long time the only one to be effectively deployed.¹² Notwithstanding their potential technological capabilities, which were debated, these systems were considered almost useless. Given their very limited scope, they would simply attract more warheads on the site they were supposed to shield in the event of a major nuclear exchange.

⁹ Robert Sherman, "Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty Chronology," The Federation of American Scientists, [cited 6 February 2005] Available online from www.fas.org/nuke/control/abmt/chron.htm.

¹⁰ The full text of the treaty can be found from www.state.gov/t/np/trty/16332.htm.

¹¹ A 1974 Protocol to the ABM Treaty reduced the number of sites from two to one and the number of interceptors from 200 to 100.

¹² This has changed at the end of 2004 with the deployment of the first phase of BMD in the US. For more information on this Soviet program, see The Claremont Institute, "System A-135," Claremont (CA). 24 November 2004. [Cited 20 March 2005] Available online from www.missilethreat.com/systems/a-135.html. This has changed at the end of 2004 with the deployment of the first phase of BMD in the US.

Taken in conjunction, the two arms control agreements fostered a decade of *détente* between the signatories and served as the bedrock of other arms control negotiations, notably the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) process. For more than a decade, the issue of missile defence was no longer a hot one. Even though both sides continued to pursue research in this area, nothing was as dramatic as President Reagan's "Star Wars" project.

C) First Breach: The Strategic Defence Initiative

During the 1980s, the idea of American decline vis-à-vis the rest of the world, a notion that has been developing since the early 1970s – not coincidentally after the breakdown of the Bretton Woods System and the Vietnam debacle – became prevalent.¹³ The Federal Republic of Germany was the success story of the 1970s, and Japan was on its way to becoming the 1980s model of success. Even the USSR, later depicted as an "evil empire", was thought to be almighty – retrospectively, there was an obvious proclivity to emphasize Soviet strengths and overlook its many weaknesses.¹⁴ In order to shake things up and take back the leadership of world politics, the Reagan administration decided in a pre-electoral year to launch the idea of an ultimate defence in response to the absolute weapon: the SDI, also remembered as the "Star Wars" project.

¹³ On the working and collapse of the Bretton Wood System, see Robert Gilpin. *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Among the many references on the Vietnam war and its multiple aspects, see Henry A. Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication From the Vietnam War*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

¹⁴ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "Getting it Right, Getting it Wrong: The Soviet Collapse Revisited," *International Affairs* 75 (April 1999): 369-75.

The project started two years after a 1983 speech made by President Reagan, with an initial budget of 33 billion (current) dollars for six years. It was described as the single largest R&D program ever launched. Its aim was to find ways to deploy ground- and space-based new generation weapons systems, originally meant to shield the entire American homeland against Soviet missiles or, in the words of the president, render these WMD “impotent and obsolete” for the sake of world peace.¹⁵ Obviously, in the midst of the last revival of Cold War tensions, there were few talks of sharing this technology with the rest of the world other than close US allies, at least at the beginning. Already concerned by the agitation Washington had been displaying for some time (Poland crisis in 1981, the Pershing II missiles crisis in 1983), Gorbachev’s USSR opposed the idea, criticized intensive research on space-based weapons, called for the observation of the ABM treaty’s spirit and tried to tie the issue of SDI to strategic offensive arms reductions.¹⁶ These concerns were certainly heightened after the publication in 1985 of a new, broader interpretation of the ABM treaty by the US that clearly loosened the parties’ obligations.

A few years later, after notable resources had been spent and consultations carried out, the proposed project was downsized when it became clear that water-tight protection – aimed at ensuring the survival of nearly all American cities in the occurrence of an all-out Soviet nuclear strike – was close to impossible. The US government put a smaller plan forward that was designed to protect only the main US missiles sites.

¹⁵ For an analysis of the technological and economic aspects of SDI as they were conceived at that time, see the chapter on SDI in Mario Pianta, *New technologies across the Atlantic: US Leadership or European Autonomy?* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire : Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1988).

¹⁶ FitzGerald, *op.cit.*

Expertise was to be acquired in technological areas such as surveillance, acquisition, tracking and kill assessment, kinetic energy weapons, and so on.

SDI was, again, a departure from the idea of the impossibility to escape the wrath of nuclear weapons once they are unleashed. Apart from the military mindset previously described, this process can also be traced back to the emergence of the Schlesinger doctrine in 1974. Generated at the instigation of Henry Kissinger, its objective was to provide more options to the American leadership than Armageddon or nothing: escalation either in preventive or retaliatory strikes, non-targeting of taboo sites like large population centres, decapitating command and control chokepoints, targeting industrial facilities to hinder recovery, and so on. The doctrine did not survive long, at least not entirely as some ideas were kept and others left aside. Thus, while Reagan's United States was looking for a way to evade Soviet missiles, its main operational plan, SIOP6, stated that 8000 warheads would fall on the USSR 30 minutes after a presidential order to do so.¹⁷

Reagan's leaving the White House, the fall of the Berlin wall and ultimately the demise of the USSR had significant impacts on SDI. It must be said that since its inception, it was planned that a decision about SDI deployment had to be taken in the early 1990s. The government cut SDI budgets drastically, although there would be money spent on R&D for the next decade thanks to some bureaucratic inertia and probably the military-industrial complex's appetite. Newly elected President George H. W. Bush more or less scuttled the project despite his previous commitment to pursue SDI. That did not occur without some tergiversations, including the "brilliant pebbles", mini-

¹⁷ For a discussion of SIOP, see Stephen J. Cimbala, "The SIOP: What Kind of War Plan," *Air & Space Aerospace Chronicles*, Summer 1988 [Cited 17 February 2005] Available online from www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj88/cimbala.html.

robot interceptors gravitating around the world at an altitude of 400 km.¹⁸ Apart from theatre missile defence (TMD), which came to prominence during the Kuwait Crisis of 1990-91, interest in missile defence decreased for the first years of the post-Cold War period, but it would soon resume.

D) The Rumsfeld Commission

The early 1990s were a period of renewal and hope for change. Even if there were more than fifty *thousand* nuclear warheads deployed in the world, no one outside certain specific circles paid attention to WMD issues including the smuggling of Soviet and then Russian nuclear waste or unguarded fissile material stockpiles, proliferation risks emanating from unemployed Soviet scientists, actual purpose of atomic armaments, etc.

Despite the lack of momentum for the erection of a ballistic missile shield to protect the United States against a threat that no longer appeared relevant, BMD advocates did not quit. The last phase of the BMD debate was launched when they managed to have an ad hoc, congressional commission convened to assess the threat posed by the proliferation of ballistic missiles worldwide. It was chaired by former and future Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and included Paul Wolfowitz among its members. It is worth mentioning that the chairman had already been associated with missile defence programmes during the 1970s as the head of DoD.¹⁹ The Commission's objective intersected with the kind of work that intelligence agencies, part of the Executive branch of government but subject to legislative oversight, routinely carry out.

¹⁸ For more details on this project, see The Claremont Institute, "Brilliant Pebbles," Claremont (CA). 24 January 2005. [Cited 20 March 2005] Available online from www.missilethreat.com/systems/bp_usa.html.

¹⁹ Ian Brodie, "Bush's nominee could start arms race in space," *The Times* (London), 1 January 2001, p.13.

However, the methodology used was substantially different from what the intelligence community usually employs. The commissioners chose an approach privileging possibilities over probabilities.

The consequences of that choice did not take long to materialize. The report produced by the Rumsfeld Commission presented a pessimistic assessment of threats that the US faced, would face or might have to face with regard to the proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles in conjunction with WMD.²⁰ Contrary to what is common in threat assessment reports, forecasts were not based on probabilities but on possibilities, which produced a different picture from what previous reports had shown. According to the report, Iran and North Korea, among others, could deploy WMD-armed ballistic missiles that could reach the US five years after a deployment decision had been made. Not only did it stress increasing efforts from potentially hostile states to acquire technologies that were a source of concern, but it also underscored the eroding capability of the intelligence community to provide estimates in a timely fashion on such capabilities.²¹ The report's underlying assumption, in accordance with views held by a number of scholars and policymakers, was that accidents and deterrence failures may occur and they had to be addressed.

In the past, some armament programmes have been constructed on inadequate assessments of threats that have fuelled fears. Thus, one may say that after the "bomber gap" in 1956 and the "missile gap" in 1957, there was a new gap to face, namely a

²⁰ For an overview of the conclusions derived from the report, see "Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States," [cited 15 November 2003] Available online from www.fas.org/irp/threat/missile/rumsfeld/execsum.htm.

²¹ *Idem*.

“craziness gap”, meaning that there is a fear that rogue states will not be bound by the rationality of deterrence and will be “crazy enough” to choose national suicide just for the pleasure of inflicting damage on the hegemon. In this rationale, nothing is left of Joseph Nye’s idea of nuclear learning in which interactions lead to the reduction of suspicion, because the enemy is denied any kind of rationality that would be consistent with commonly held assumptions and expectations on behaviour.²²

An event that occurred shortly after the release of the report, on August 31st 1998, seemed to confirm those fears: North Korea conducted a Taep’o-Dong I medium-range, multistage missile test. This exercise caused quite a commotion worldwide as the missile flew over Japan before diving into the Pacific Ocean. Even though this missile cannot reach American territory with its range of 2000 km, some believe it is part of a larger program towards the construction of an ICBM that could do just that in the form of the Taep’o-Dong II.²³ This missile test surprised observers of the international scene and fuelled fears of further proliferation.

Taken in conjunction with the Rumsfeld Report, this event had a tremendous effect on Washington and created enough momentum to encourage new efforts towards a nationwide missile defence system. This issue was a partisan one in the United States. In their efforts to keep this issue alive after the cancellation of SDI, Republican proponents of BMD included it in the now famous “Contract with America”, the 1994 electoral platform that led to the Gingrich revolution in US politics.²⁴ The Clinton

²² Joseph S. Nye, “Nuclear Learning and U.S.-Soviet Security Regimes,” *International Organization* 41 (Summer 1987): 371-402.

²³ The Claremont Institute, “Taip’o Dong I,” Claremont (CA), 31 August 2004 [cited 20 March 2005] Available online at www.missilethreat.com/missiles/taep-o-dong-1_north_korea.html.

²⁴ Actually, it was one of the few foreign policy items of this mostly domestic oriented agenda.

government had made clear its reluctance to co-operated with Republican initiatives on missile defence: termination of president Bush's recast of SDI (the Global Protection Against Limited Strikes or GPALS) in 1993, rejection of Reagan's broad interpretation of this treaty in favour of the narrow one during the same year, publication of joint Russo-American statements supporting the ABM Treaty in 1994 and 1997, and so on.²⁵

However, the aforementioned developments of 1998 made it politically impossible for President Clinton to preserve his low-key, "3 plus 3" plan for missile defence.²⁶ His administration had to sign in 1999 a bill already introduced in Congress by Republicans two years earlier, the *National Missile Defence Act*, which stated that:

It is the policy of the United States to deploy as soon as is technologically possible an effective National Missile Defence system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack (whether accidental, unauthorized, or deliberate) with funding subject to the annual authorization of appropriations and the annual appropriation of funds for National Missile Defence.²⁷

The implementation of this piece of legislation, described as historic by its sponsors because they saw it as the revival of a long-awaited project that had been stalled by Democratic foot-dragging, was nonetheless slowed down by President Clinton's unwillingness to take decisive steps towards deployment. For instance, only days after

²⁵ For further evidence on this pro-ABM Treaty stance of the Clinton administration by an organization denouncing it, see [www.heritage.org/Research/MissileDefense/BG1396.cfm].

²⁶ Announced in 1996, this minimal approach consisted in conducting R&D on BMD technologies for three years to support an eventual decision to deploy so that deployment could be effective three years after such a decision (2003 at the earliest).

²⁷ See the press release that accompanied the bill when it was introduced in the US Senate for the last time at [<http://cochran.senate.gov/press/pr012199.html>.] Because of the numerous changes in the terminology referring to ballistic missile defence (from SDI to NMD to BMD and more recently to GMD...), BMD will be used as the generic term for projects aiming to shoot down long-range ballistic missiles in their boost-phase, mid-course phase or terminal phase. When substantive differences are involved, they will be addressed specifically.

the presidential sanction, he reminded the American people that no deployment decision had been made. This can be seen as a signal sent to Russia, which considered any unilateral action by the United States in the field of strategic defences as a threat to the ABM Treaty. Indeed, in September 2000, the Clinton administration announced that it would be up to the next administration to decide whether or not the US would proceed with the deployment of BMD.

E) Towards the Abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty

As a presidential candidate in 2000, George W. Bush campaigned on the issue of missile defence, promising he would deploy a BMD during his first mandate. Once it was in place, the new government made it very clear that this issue would be a key foreign policy goal. This commitment that was evident in the nomination of Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, both members of the commission that produced the widely publicized 1998 report on ballistic missile threat assessment, as the number one and two in the Pentagon.²⁸ On May 1st 2001, the President delivered a speech in which he argued that the United States had to go beyond the limitations of a 30 years-old treaty in order to face the rising threat posed by the proliferation of ballistic missile technology in the hands of rogue states. Standing in the way of the deployment of BMD, the ABM Treaty was then depicted as a Cold War relic that was no longer relevant.²⁹

²⁸ The former was appointed secretary of Defence and the latter, deputy secretary of Defence. Martin Kettle, "Return of the Reaganites: Bush fills foreign and defence ranks with Cold War veterans," *The Guardian*, Wednesday, February 14th, 2001. [www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,437676,00.html]

²⁹ As we can see, despite the impression that everything changed after September 11th, this kind of rhetoric was present before this nonetheless terrible and far-reaching event.

At that point, Russian and Chinese governments had been opposing the initiative for a while in the context of tense relations with the United States. Elected in March 2000 after he was surprisingly designated as Boris Yeltsin political heir on December 31st 1999, Vladimir Putin set a tone for Russia's diplomacy that was consistent with the last years of Yeltsin presidency: a much less pro-American stance compared to the one adopted in 1992.³⁰ For the first time since 1956, a Russian president visited North Korea, an event which took place during the first year of Putin's presidency. He also went to Cuba and Iran, other states holding eminent positions on Washington's blacklist. In June 2000, President Putin toured Europe in an attempt to bolster support for the ABM Treaty and therefore make it difficult for the US to include European radar stations within a future BMD.

Russia's position was that a multipolar world, in which it would see some of its past glory restored, would be in the interests of most countries. In that light, Moscow increased its cooperation with a number of potential allies and partners. For instance, it signed a joint statement with China about the ABM Treaty on July 2000 and a Declaration of strategic friendship with India in October 2000. As another illustration of the relatively poor state of US-Russia relations during these times, an espionage affair within the FBI led to the expulsion in March 2001 of 50 Russian diplomats, echoed by Moscow shortly thereafter.³¹ In the midst of this affair, the Kremlin accused the White House of resurrecting the "Cold War spirit" with its inflammatory rhetoric, blaming elements of the US administration of trying to undermine Russo-American relations,

³⁰ Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, 2nd ed., (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2002): 331.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 333-338.

reviving the image of enemy and Cold War morals in the hope of easing NATO expansion.³²

China cooperated with Russia on the issue of BMD and the preservation of the ABM Treaty on more occasions than the July 2000 joint statement. In November 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted by large majorities a resolution sponsored by China and Russia calling for the preservation of and the compliance with the ABM treaty.³³ The UNGA passed a similar resolution a year later, which was described as major diplomatic victories. The Chinese ambassador clarified Beijing's position in March 2001: "China will not allow its legitimate means of self-defence to be weakened or even taken away by anyone in anyway (...) the U.S. NMD program will hamper the international arms control and disarmament process and even trigger a new round of arms race."³⁴

Paralleling Russo-American relations, relations between the United States and China also deteriorated in the first months of the Bush presidency after the EP3 surveillance plane incident occurred in April 2001. China's stiff reaction reminded observers and analysts of its dealing with the bombardment of its Belgrade embassy in 1999 during the Kosovo campaign. On April 24th, President Bush declared that the US would do "whatever it took" to help Taiwan defend itself against a Chinese attack, thus

³² Patrick E. Tyler, "Moscow Says Remarks by U.S. Resurrect 'Spirit of Cold War,'" *New York Times*, Wednesday, 21 March 2001, A4. See also "Statement by Russia Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov in Connection with Washington's Decision to Expel Russian Diplomats" whose translation is available online from www.fas.org/irp/news/2001/03/ru032201.html.

³³ "General Assembly Resolutions (33/B) on 20 November 2000" 55th General Assembly (UN), 12 January 2001 [cited 2 December 2003] Available online from www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/r55.htm. There were 88 in favour, 5 against and 66 abstentions. Almost the same pattern for the 29 November 2001 resolution.

³⁴ China's envoy on disarmament issues, Ambassador Sha Zukang, quoted in M.V. Rappai, "China's Nuclear Arsenal and Missile Defence," *Strategic Analysis* 36 (January/March 2002): 46.

removing uncertainties about America's likely involvement in a conflict across the Formosa Strait.³⁵ Washington did not change its "One China" policy and did not formally support Taiwanese independence, but this statement constituted the most explicit expression of commitment towards Taiwan's security to date. Needless to say, China did not appreciate this kind of statement. Beijing also resented Washington's reversal of a 20 years old policy when it accepted to sell eight conventional submarines to the Nationalist island as part of a major arms sales package; American arms sales in 2001 were at their highest level since 1992.³⁶

Russo-Chinese cooperation went on and was formalized when the two powers signed on July 16th 2001 a treaty of "Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation."³⁷ Although it would be too much of a stretch to label the public version of this agreement as an anti-American alliance, it is certainly part of coordinated efforts to form a united front to face issues of concern with regards to the US. It is noteworthy that up to this point and for the following months, Beijing and especially Moscow stuck to their position against the abrogation of the ABM treaty.³⁸ President Putin said in June that if the U.S.

³⁵ Alan D. Romberg and Michael McDevitt, eds., "China and Missile Defence: Managing of U.S.-PRC Strategic Relations," (Washington, D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003): 7-8; [cited 6 November 2003] Available online from www.stimson.org/pubs.cfm?ID=73.

³⁶ Robert S. Ross, "Navigating the Strait: Deterrence, Escalation Dominance, and U.S.-China Relations," *International Security* 27 (Fall 2002): 82.

³⁷ See the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, [www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t15771.htm]. This can be conceived within a larger cooperative framework that has been shaped by increased Sino-Russian relations during the 1990s. After the historic meeting of Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev in May 1989 (the first between the Soviet and Chinese chief executive since the 1950s), president Yeltsin visited China in December 1992, April 1996 and October 1997, while president Jiang went to Russia in September 1994 and April 1997. During those summits, Russia and the PRC developed a "Strategic Co-operative Partnership of Equality and Trust" (April 1996) settled border disputes. Russel Ong, *China's Security Interests in the Post-Cold War Era*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002): 34.

³⁸ For examples, see Michael Wines, "Russia Says It Continues to Oppose Scrapping ABM Treaty," *New York Times*, Tuesday, 29 May 2001, A3.; James Dao, "Russian Reiterates Stand in Favor of ABM Pact," *New York Times*, Saturday, 9 June 2001, A4.; Xinhua General News Service, "China Cautions US on

were to proceed unilaterally with BMD, Russia would upgrade its nuclear arsenal and massively use MIRVed warheads to be able to overwhelm it, implicitly putting START II in jeopardy given that multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRV) are banned within that framework.³⁹

Then came the attacks of September 11th 2001. The aftermath of this event will not be discussed at length, but it should be noted that Russia and China cooperated with the U.S. in the so-called war against terrorism, even if the former got more involved than the latter. Despite this cooperation on this narrow issue, they persisted in their opposition to BMD and Washington's attempts to couch its agenda for missile defence in terms consistent with the new motto, the "war on terrorism."⁴⁰ This staunch stance remained up in the air until Washington announced on December 13th that the ABM Treaty would be abrogated after this official notification as requested by the treaty's provisions.

F) Russian and Chinese Diverging Responses after the December Decisions

One of the most striking features of the post-abrogation decision period was the muted official reactions from China and Russia. It was much calmer if not weaker than one would have expected considering their well-advertised opposition to such a unilateral

MDS," Beijing, 7 September 2001; Patrick E. Tyler, "Russian Defense Chief Stresses Opposition to Antimissile Plans," *New York Times*, Tuesday, 11 September 2001, A14.

³⁹ Patrick E. Tyler, "Putin Says Russia Would Add Arms to Counter Shield," *New York Times*, 19 June 2001, A14.

⁴⁰ Xinhua General News Service, "Chinese Envoy Calls for New Concept of Security," United Nations, 9 October 2001.

decision. They registered their “displeasure” in diplomatic terms, but were far from taking their opposition to the next stage, even rhetorically, as they had implied before.⁴¹

Shortly after the announcement, Washington issued reassuring statements to Moscow and Beijing, promising strategic dialogue with both of them and even partnership to Russia within NATO.⁴² However, Beijing was not so easily reassured. Early 2002, leaks from the *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) report indicated that China was considered as one among seven potential or likely candidates for nuclear strikes if the US had to use its strategic arsenal in the foreseeable future.⁴³ As if that was not enough, the *Quadrennial Defence Review* (QDR), released in September 2001, emphasized the emergence of “a military competitor with a formidable resource base” in Asia, which made clear that People’s Republic of China (PRC) was a growing source of concern for American military planners.⁴⁴ Later on, in March 2002, a senior defence official from Taiwan was allowed to visit the US for the first time since 1979, a move that was seen as part of increased US-Taiwanese cooperation on security issues, with obvious repercussions on cross-strait relations.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Elizabeth Rosenthal, “China Voices Muted Distress At U.S. Blow To ABM Pact,” *New York Times*, 14 December 2001, A15.

⁴² Thom Shanker, “Rumsfeld Sees More Involvement for Russia in NATO,” *New York Times*, 18 December 2001, A15.; David E. Sanger, “Bush Offers Arms Talks to China As U.S. Pulls Out of ABM Treaty,” *New York Times*, 14 December 2001, A1.

⁴³ Excerpts from the NPR are available online from www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm.

⁴⁴ Michael McDevitt, “The Quadrennial Defence Review and East Asia,” CSIS, 26 October 2001 [cited 3 December 2003] Available online from www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0143.htm.

⁴⁵ The purpose of the visit was a U.S.-Taiwan Business Council Meeting. Tian Jingmei, “The Bush Administration’s Nuclear Strategy and its Implications for China’s Security,” CISAC, March 2003 [cited 10 February 2005] Available online from www.ciaonet.org/wps/jit01/jit01.pdf.

Meanwhile, Russia and the United States were negotiating the agreement on the reduction of strategic arms that Moscow had been advocating for a long time. The Russian government wanted binding, irreversible cuts, to supplement the unilateral ones the US had already announced in 2001, but the three-page Treaty of Moscow, signed in May 2002, permits the storage of surplus warheads.⁴⁶ The Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (SORT), as it is also known, stipulates that arsenals must be reduced to levels between 1700 and 2200 deployed warheads by 2012. President Putin described the treaty by saying that it as had the virtue of bringing Russia and the West closer.⁴⁷ In the same vein, Moscow was included shortly after within the NATO framework through the creation of the Russia-NATO Council, allowing Russian participation in NATO discussions on various policies and projects as virtually an equal partner.⁴⁸ Russia also gained access to an enlarged version of the G7 (the G8), in June 2002, while China was allowed to attend meetings two years later for the first time.

In the months after the December 2001 announcement, Russian and Chinese opposition to BMD continued on, but something had changed in their stance. When US plans to deploy a rudimentary BMD system by 2004 were officially announced in December 2002, Moscow and Beijing condemned them, but there was a difference in the tone employed. Russia's opposition was already less stiff than China's. As an example of

⁴⁶ For a discussion on this treaty in relation to the ABM and START II treaties, see Maxime Beaupré and Michel Fortmann, "Le contrôle des armements en transition: Pour le meilleur ou pour le pire?" in Albert Legault, Michel Fortmann et Gérard Hervouet, eds., *Les Conflits dans le monde/Conflicts Around the World*, (Québec: IQHÉI, 2002): 45-61.

⁴⁷ Michael Wines, "Nuclear Arms Treaty: Moscow; Russia Sees Pact's Virtue as Closer Ties With the West," *New York Times*, 14 May 2002, A9. Putin even called the end of the Cold War...

⁴⁸ David E. Sanger, "NATO Formally Welcomes Russia as a Partner," *New York Times*, 29 May 2002, A1.

this perceived difference, it was reported that “China [hit] out at U.S. Missile Plans” and that “Russia [Regretted] Bush Missile Plans”.⁴⁹

China’s bitterness toward BMD persisted afterwards even in the post September 11th context,⁵⁰ although it was usually couched in diplomatic terms. The PRC is moving forward with its modernization programme for the PLA and its strategic forces. While this cannot be labelled as hard balancing, because there is no apparent rush to conduct a massive arms build-up, or a direct reaction to BMD, because it has been going on for a while, it cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. It includes the development of a new class of submarines to improve its forward defences.⁵¹ Such a policy is not the default policy of all governments, as many countries, including Canada, have not been especially keen on such an endeavour. It is a consistent and sustained effort to counter or at least provide tools to eventually counter US dominance in international politics. Chinese efforts to enter the sphere of space powers by conducting a costly space programme are both prestige-related and designed to enhance China’s capabilities to meet the challenge of US technological advantage, as it is visible in the BMD context.⁵² China used strong words

⁴⁹ This example comes from the same media source, offering less sourcing variance: “China Hits Out at U.S. Missile Plans” <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/east/12/19/China.missiles/> and “Russia ‘Regrets’ Bush Missile Plans” <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/12/18/missile.requests/index.html>

⁵⁰ Alan D. Romberg and Michael McDevitt, eds., “China and Missile Defence: Managing of U.S.-PRC Strategic Relations,” Washington, D.C.: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003, p.12, [cited 6 November 2003] Available online from www.stimson.org/pubs.cfm?ID=73.

⁵¹ This new submarine, a Kilo-inspired, indigenously produced platform whose development surprised observers, has been code-named Yuan by NATO. Bill Gertz, “Chinese Produce New Sub; Discovery Seen as a ‘Surprise’,” *The Washington Times*, 16 July 2004, A1. China Defence Today, “Yuan Class Diesel-Electric Submarine,” 9 February 2005, [Cited 4 March 2005] Available online from www.sinodefence.com/navy/sub/yuan.asp.

⁵² John Pomfret, “China Launched its First Manned Space Mission,” *The Washington Post*, 15 October 2003, A1.

from time to time to denounce American policies in the December decisions, notably on the issue of Taiwan.⁵³

Meanwhile, there were talks about cooperation between Russia and the United States in the field of missile defence. In May 2003, Moscow displayed “cautious optimism” towards the prospects of cooperation with Washington on missile defence, despite its opposition to the war in Iraq.⁵⁴ During the same month, Russia also ratified the Arms control treaty signed one year earlier. There were plans to hold joint TMD exercises in Russia with NATO observers to assess the compatibility between Russia’s and the United States’ TMD systems, in the context of the abolition by the Bush administration of the conceptual and technical distinction between TMD and BMD, a distinction formalized in 1996 by president Clinton in order to appease BMD opponents.⁵⁵ Cooperation would begin with terminal phase programs, because Russia has expertise in that field, but it could be expanded to boost-phase, airborne laser systems.⁵⁶ Since Washington adopted a multilayered approach blurring the distinction between theatre and nationwide missile defence, this cooperation is likely to have a substantial impact on BMD, on which Moscow and Beijing now have different views.

⁵³ Jim Yardley and Keith Bradsher, “China Accuses US and Japan of Interfering on Taiwan,” *The New York Times*, 21 February 2005, A1; Dan Blumenthal, “Unhelpful China,” *The Washington Post*, 6 December 2004, A21; Hannah K. Strange, “China Delivers Blunt Warning to the US,” *United Press International*, 13 July 2004.

⁵⁴ David Sands, “Envoy Hints at Moscow Cooperation on Missile Defence,” *Washington Times*, 23 May 2003, A12.

⁵⁵ The distinction is called “artificial” by U.S. officials, even though it has been maintained for years both conceptually and within the research projects. David E. Sanger, “Aftereffects: Strategic Arms; Bush Issues Directive Describing Policy on Antimissile Defences,” *New York Times*, 21 May 2003, A21.

⁵⁶ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: 2002-2003*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 87; Ted Whiteside (Director, NATO WMD Centre), “Responses to Proliferation,” Presentation made at McGill University, 4 November 2003.

G) The Challenge of Ballistic Missile Defence

As it has been illustrated by the chronology of events leading to the abrogation of the ABM Treaty and the subsequent announcement to go ahead with BMD deployment, there was a sharp contrast between Russia's and China's position on BMD before the United States made its decision and their stance after it decided to proceed. Indeed, their initial reaction to the announcements was surprisingly frail when it is compared to the sometimes strong language used in and the consistency of their opposition to nationwide missile defence. But for this to be really surprising, BMD has to be considered as a challenge.

The rationale explaining why BMD is a challenge for Russia and China's interests is multi-faceted. First of all, the very fact that the United States decided to abrogate the ABM Treaty and unilaterally go forward with the deployment of BMD in spite of the vehement opposition of the principal stakeholder (Russia as the successor of the USSR) and the other major non allied nuclear power (China), is in itself a challenge, at the very least in terms of prestige and status. Both countries put a lot of effort, both politically and diplomatically, in their opposition and suffered a major setback when their various attempts failed to alter the American course of action. President Putin had to say on December 2001 that the first abrogation of an arms control agreement did not threaten Russia's security in an attempt to avoid losing face. To be sure, the programme cannot directly hurt Russia's security in the short term. That statement, however, does not fit the comprehensive security portrait that the Kremlin has stressed since Putin's arrival, as well as what previous Russian and Soviet governments had stated before him.

The project is currently in its first stage and its capacities are neither proven nor definitive,⁵⁷ but that is precisely a reason to be concerned. Anarchy at the international level means that uncertainty is prevalent – capabilities are difficult to monitor and intentions even more so. There is no central authority with the ability to effectively restrain the use of force between states, both in terms of legitimacy and actual capabilities. The result is a struggle between states for power and security.⁵⁸ For the sake of caution, states are more likely to give credit to worst-case scenarios, particularly when it comes to highly sensible matters such as national security, strategic deterrent and international status. As potential rivals to American hegemony, Russia and China are more likely to adopt that kind of perspective. To reinforce this point, it is worth noting that even some of the United States's closest allies can doubt its commitments. For example, Canada justified its refusal to join BMD by saying, among other reasons, that it was not convinced that the future developments of BMD would not lead to the weaponization of space, *despite* the explicit pledge of American policymakers and specialists that the current project does not include this dimension.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Results of tests on various components of BMD are mitigated. Out of around 20 tests for the Ground-based components, there were five successful interceptions, three interception failures, many cancellations due to technical problems and malfunctions on the ground. However, the performance of the sea-based system (on AEGIS cruisers) proves to be more satisfactory and plays an important role in the multilayered aspect of BMD, given that it could intercept missiles in their midcourse but also boost-phase if the AEGIS cruiser is close enough to the launching site. Victoria Samson, "Flight Test for Ground-Based Midcourse Missile Defence," Centre for Defence Information, 17 February 2005, [cited 15 March 2005] Available online from www.cdi.org/missile-defense/tests-gmd.cfm.

⁵⁸ Christopher Layne, "The War on Terror and the Balance of Power: The Paradoxes of American Hegemony," in T.V. Paul, James Wirtz and Michel Fortmann, eds, *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004): 104.

⁵⁹ Alec Castonguay, "Bouclier antimissile: Martin se méfiait des Américains," [Ballistic Missile Defence: Martin did not trust the Americans] *Le Devoir*, 7 March 2005, A1.

Moreover, the United States will have greater foreign intervention capabilities under the umbrella of BMD. One of the admitted reasons to deploy BMD is that it will prevent nuclear blackmail from rogue states against the US. The ability of Pyongyang to make fun of American threats and sanctions, compared to the fate of Saddam Hussein's regime in Baghdad, offers an interesting example of what the US can and cannot do when it can be free from the threat of WMD. The increase in power projection capabilities resulting from the sheltering effect of BMD constitutes a challenge to Chinese and Russian interests. Indeed this can be described as a security dilemma example: "Even if self-defence is the motive for building up its military forces, a state's upgrading of its capacities may be regarded by others as a threat to their security."⁶⁰ Their power projection capabilities are already no match for America's, and they are generally wary of interventionist intentions. Each of these states has its own reasons to stand firmly by the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity, mainly movements for autonomy or independence in these continent-states.

Furthermore, there are other specific reasons as to why the American initiative constitutes a challenge to each of the two states under investigation. For China, BMD can represent a direct threat to its nuclear deterrent, given its policy favouring minimal deterrence by having only a few warheads put on fixed, long-to-refuel ICBMs.⁶¹ Albeit under review, its current nuclear posture is already relatively vulnerable to a disarming first strike, notwithstanding missile defence. *Uncertainty* with regard to how successful

⁶⁰ Layne, *op.cit.*: 105.

⁶¹ Centre for Nonproliferation Studies, "China's Nuclear Doctrine," Monterey Institute for International Studies, 25 September 2003, [Cited 22 November 2004] Available online from www.nti.org/db/china/doctrine.htm.

such an attack could be is the basis of this deterrence posture, compared to maximal deterrence that relies on the *assurance* that a disarming first strike cannot be perfect. However, the prospect of an efficient BMD that could take out a few ICBMs reduces the perceived effectiveness of China's deterrent on both sides of the Pacific.

Moreover, there is evidence other than BMD itself showing that the PRC is considered as the primary strategic competitor of the US.⁶² This has important implications for the very sensitive issue of Taiwan, given that the American administration has reinforced its military collaboration with the Nationalist island, which according to Beijing is a mere "renegade province" that needs to be annexed and brought back into China proper. As an aspiring great power, China also values the symbolic importance of its nuclear deterrent, which is hampered by the unilateral project to deploy a BMD that is emphatically targeting Northeast Asia.

For Russia, the challenge is of a different nature. Opposition to BMD stemmed from the fact that it required the abrogation or at least major revisions to the ABM treaty, which was dear to the heart of Russian policymakers as a reminder of their country's superpower status. Indeed, Russia, as the heir of the USSR, was on par with the US in the historical treaty. Furthermore, its removal meant that Russia would have to consider the possibility of a new offensive-defensive arms race, which the country simply cannot afford at this point. Given the considerable technological gap that separates the two former Cold War giants, an American BMD could prove to be a substantial challenge to Russia's deterrent in the future.

⁶² Only for official US policy documents that put this quite bluntly, see the QDR published in September 2001 and the NPR released in January 2002.

This technological gap also has implications with regard to the possible weaponization of space, already evoked. There is no doubt that the outer-space is already used for military purposes, mainly to the advantage of the United States in the context of Fourth Generation Warfare, information-based combat and manoeuvre operations and real-time battlefield management.⁶³ The US has become aware of the vulnerability of its space assets, upon which rest so many aspects of its economic prosperity and military potency; it is a matter of time before Washington takes measures to address that perceived weakness. The installation of weapons in orbit around Earth, may it be as part of BMD or Anti-Satellite weapons (ASAT), would trigger a new kind of arms race as many countries, including Russia and China, could not let the United States establish a monopoly in space weaponry. Such a monopoly would then be difficult to offset and would hamper their efforts to stop the growth of the technological gap. In the same vein, variations on the theme of BMD development include airborne lasers weapons capable of striking down ballistic missiles in their boost-phase, which would give the US an edge in the field of missile defence that could also be transferable to other areas of power.⁶⁴ The rationale for worst-case analysis applies to these issues as well.

⁶³ For an overview of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) as an emerging phenomenon in today's conflict, see Maxime Beaupré and Michel Fortmann, "Les conflits dans le monde en 2001; Si la tendance se maintient..." [Conflicts Around the World in 2001; If The Trend Continues On...] in Legault, Fortmann and Hervouet, eds., *op.cit.*: 5-12.

⁶⁴ The ABL would be made of a set of sensors, computers, chemicals and mirrors aboard a modified Boeing 747-400F. The goal is to be able to destroy a ballistic missile during the boost phase of flight by heating it with a High Energy Laser (HEL), which is supposed to cause an explosion after the missile's skin crack. If this becomes a reality, it would offset the easy defence against BMD, which is to multiply the number of decoys, may they be smart or not. For now, the ABL project is plagued with engineering challenges. Michael Clark and Victoria Samson, "A Look at the Troubled Development of Airborne

H) Conclusion

The debate on missile defence has roots as deep as the history of nuclear weapons goes. Sceptical about nuclear deterrence, early proponents did not believe in the revolutionary nature of the advent of the atomic bomb and conventionalized it as just a bigger bomb. The proposed countermeasures to strategic arsenals led to fears of unbridled offence-defence arms race, coupled with important costs and dubious efficiency, and were for these reasons abandoned after the conclusion of the ABM Treaty. BMD projects were resurrected during the 1980s and 1990s. While the second phase did not survive long after the presidency of its chief proponent, the third phase occurred in a context of changing strategic environment that helped gather the political momentum necessary to overcome obstacles that had been there for decades.

Republicans in the US Congress had pushed the issue of BMD before but after the publication of the pessimistic Rumsfeld Report and the discovery of a North Korean missile test during the Summer of 1998 the idea gained traction. These two events were the catalyst that launched the process that led to the announcements by Washington of the abrogation of the ABM Treaty in December 2001 (coming into effect on June 2002) and the deployment of BMD in December 2002.

Russia and China, both of whom had been highly critical about the consequences of scrapping the “cornerstone of strategic stability and international security” and deploying a system that would trigger a new arms race, were surprisingly soft in their immediate reaction to these announcements as well as the course of action they chose afterwards. Despite the challenge BMD can represent for them, China does not seem to

be balancing against the US, while Russia is actually bandwagoning on a number of issues, including missile defence.

In a nutshell, this is why the case of Russia and China's reactions to the deployment of BMD is a puzzle that is worth investigating. The next chapter looks at the literature on the topic and proposes the theoretical model to supplement its caveats.

Chapter II - The Theoretical Framework

Apart from the sufficient reasons already explained, another dimension of this thesis's *raison d'être* is the lack of attention paid to the puzzle itself and more generally, the theoretical considerations it unveils. The commotion that followed the December decisions was not followed by a systematic look at the relationship between China, Russia, and BMD. For sure, there are plenty of contributions on China, Russia, and BMD, but the literature seldom, if ever, deals with two, let alone three, of these subjects at the same time.

On the other hand, there is an apparent inability from existing approaches to deal satisfactorily with the challenge at hand, namely the somewhat weak reaction of Russia and China to the United States' BMD project. "The Cold War system was based on 'balance of power' and 'balance of terror', and both were perceived to be essential for international stability. However, in an altered system, both factors become less significant."¹ Indeed, it is relevant to ponder how well those two important perspectives on the security dilemma explain the recent developments in the field of missile defence. However, it seems that deterrence theory and balance of power theory do not explain satisfactorily the puzzle at hand. Other approaches, like hegemonic stability or leadership theories, the complex interdependence approach and constructivism, offer inconclusive results, even though they can provide some insight as well. The neoclassical realist approach, which is on the rise in IR, has not yet been applied to this fertile ground and could benefit from these elements.

Therefore, this chapter will provide a review of the relevant literature, that is to say, the literature addressing the theoretical implications of the research question and the one focussing on the countries under investigation along dimensions that are consistent with the research project. It will be followed by the presentation of the theoretical framework that is the core of this thesis.

A) Balance of Power Theories

To analyze the kind of interactions at play in the puzzle exposed in the first chapter, the first approach that comes to mind is balance of power theory or more appropriately, theories as there are many variants of this approach built on similar premises. Indeed, balance of power theory is the most obvious candidate to explain balancing and bandwagoning patterns of behaviour in the context of Russo-Sino-American relations. Despite the multitude of such theories, depending on whether one considers balance of power as a policy, a possible outcome, an automatic equilibrium or an ideal, none of them accurately taps the dynamic at play in the cases at hand.

Most if not all balance of power theories share assumptions that together constitute the core of the realist paradigm. According to Morgenthau, the effects of the balance of power explain why the fundamental structure of the international system has remained stable for centuries. All states are engaged in a continuous struggle to expand their own power, but none is able to establish itself as a dominant political hegemon, thus the system remains anarchical and comprised of independent, sovereign states.² The

¹ T.V. Paul, "Power, Influence and Nuclear Weapons: A Reassessment," in T.V. Paul, Richard Harknett and James Wirtz, eds, *The Absolute Weapon Revisited*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998): 38.

² Michael Sheenan, *Balance of Power: History and Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 1996): 77-8.

anarchical nature of the international system is one of those shared assumptions, meaning that there is no supreme authority, or monopoly of the legitimate use of violence, other than states, both legally and in practice. That does not mean chaos but simply self-regulation by the units of the system (states) rather than by some sort of world government or hegemonic power. Indeed, the avoidance of hegemony is the paramount objective of states, as rational power or security maximizers, because it is the rational way to ensure their survival.³ The general formulation of the theory asserts that actors balance against power through military build up or alliances with weaker powers or both because they consider this course of action the more likely to prevent the establishment of a hegemonic system in which their survival would be at risk.

The most structuralist of these approaches views the balance of power as “an objective backdrop to international relations, conditioning the outcome of state interaction irrespective of the intentions, desires, or perceptions of statesmen.”⁴ This means that a balance between powers will emerge no matter what those powers actually intend to do, whether they care about such a balance or not, because it is the key to the continued existence of a multi-state international system and ultimately the survival of independent states. As one of its foremost proponents puts it, the system induces balancing, not bandwagoning, thereby ruling out the occurrence of the latter behaviour.⁵ The theory of balance of power “leads one to expect that states, if they are free to do so, will flock to the weaker side. The stronger, not the weaker side threatens them, if only by pressing its

³ Jack S. Levy, “Do Great Powers Balance Against and When?” in Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann, eds., *op.cit.*: 31.

⁴ Referring to Rousseau’s, Hume’s, Toynbee’s Aron’s or Waltz’s versions. William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 5-7.

⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

preferred policies on other states.”⁶ This offers a powerful and parsimonious tool to analyze great powers interactions under the structuring condition of anarchy, particularly over long spans of time.⁷

However, it may not capture more subtle outcomes than overt balancing, which is a key prediction of the classical theory. Because it is so broad and indeterminate, it is not equipped to deal with situations such as the one highlighted by the research question. It may also be unable to tap short-term reactions to the challenges it should explain. Indeed, the parsimony that characterizes this version of balance of power theory leaves little room for the full spectrum of possible threats and reactions to threats that can occur in the real world. Even if this theory, as any theory, is a construction aiming to explain, rather than mirror, important empirical phenomenon, it must offer an explanatory range large enough to offer satisfying implications.⁸

A somewhat different approach to balance of power theory is based on offensive realism, as opposed to Waltzian neorealism. Even though it does not share some of the assumptions of Waltz’s theory, the offensive realist version of balance of power theory also excludes the possibility that great powers might bandwagon.⁹ Such an occurrence would boil down to forfeit one’s great power status. Given that Mearsheimer, the most vibrant advocate of this approach, easily grants Russia its great power status, it is then

⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security* 18 (Fall 1993): 74.

⁷ For a formal modelling of balance of power theory, see Roselyn Simonwitz, *The Logical Consistency and Soundness of the Balance of Power Theory*, (Denver: University of Denver, 1983).

⁸ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997): 17-21.

⁹ For the influential reference on Offensive Realism, see John J. Mersheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2001).

puzzling this state nevertheless bandwagons with the US on missile defence. He also portrays China as eagerly on its way to a peer strategic competitor status with the US, calling for more balancing than what we currently witness. Offensive realism claims that states are dying to become the hegemon of the international system, the only way to ensure their survival. This leaves open the question of how rational actors pursue irrational goals, given that each great power also fears the emergence of such a hegemon and therefore is ready to do everything it can, including overt balancing as the theory predicts, to prevent that occurrence.¹⁰

Waltzian and Mersheimer's balance of power theories are at a loss to explain the absence of a balancing coalition against US hegemony, particularly when the United States acts in not so benevolent a manner as the Iraq war of 2003 seems to indicate. In the post-Cold War era, it is difficult to recognize overt balancing in interstate relations. Contrary to the prediction, it seems that most states are in fact bandwagoning with the United States.¹¹ Facing American hegemony, "other great powers have not yet responded in a way anticipated by balance of power theory."¹² What balance of power theory can do is to predict that balancing will occur in the future, which is indeed almost certain, provided that

¹⁰ Among many other contradictions of this theory, one notes the stipulation that large expenses of war are a major hindrance, if not the ultimate obstacle to the establishment of global hegemony. *Ibid*: 84. This gives another reason to question the designation of world hegemony as the fundamental state goal if everyone realizes that it is impossible.

¹¹ Douglas Lemke, "Great Powers in the Post-Cold War World: A Power Transition Perspective," in Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann, eds., *op.cit.*: 73-7.

¹² G. John Ikenberry, "Introduction," in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002): 3.

the ordering principle of the international system is not permanently altered.¹³ However, it is not very illuminating when it comes to explain the current state of affairs.

To be sure, some challenge the very concept of an automatic balance occurring independently of the will of states that, as in the economic market, the equilibrium results from unintended consequences of the action of units. As one critic puts it, “the idea of states operating automatically, without ‘constant vigilance’ and deliberate policy choice is not really plausible.”¹⁴ More generally, these critics do not like the erection of balance of power as a natural law of international politics, which would otherwise compete with democratic peace theory as the sole such law. This line of argument opens up the framework for more theorization of the behaviour of actors as well as their driving forces.

A common problem of these approaches is that they focus almost exclusively on structural or third image variables to explain international phenomena. The point here is not to disregard their importance but rather to emphasize their lack of sensibility to unit-level variables. Attempts to reconcile balance of power theory with the current situation sometimes generate interesting variations. A nice example of that is the distinction between continental and maritime hegemonies as a way to explain why the former attracts more balancing than the latter.¹⁵ The reason would be that a continental great power, because its military might is concentrated on land assets, represents a more formidable threat to the security of territorial states than a maritime hegemon, whose power projection capacities are limited by their composition. In other words, the former is a

¹³ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism After the Cold War,” *International Security* 25 (Summer 2000): 5-41.

¹⁴ Levy, *loc.cit.*: 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 45.

threat because of what it is while the latter can be a threat depending on what it does. In this story, balancing is a matter of threshold, which is lower when the threat comes from a major land power. Then again, the problem in the present case is that the US's BMD project has global consequences by its very nature, altering dynamics that are also global. Furthermore, because BMD can also be used in an offensive manner by enhancing the power projection capabilities of its maritime proponent, this circumvents, to some extent, the thrust of this hypothesis. It is the shield-allows-the-use-of-sword argument.¹⁶

Another attempt to fix the caveats of classic balance of power theory can be found in Walt's work on the origins of alliances. This book looks at the behaviour of states by emphasizing their reaction not so much to the most powerful state but to the greatest threat they see in the system.¹⁷ These may or may not overlap. Thus, this approach allows for great powers bandwagoning because Walt argues that they balance against threat rather than simply against power. If a great power considers that a rising power is more threatening than the greatest power, which could be the case if the former is a revisionist state, it will balance against the former and may even bandwagon with the latter. By doing so, Walt takes side in the debate around the relative importance of material capabilities and the perception of their effect by introducing the notion of perception of threat as a function of intentions. Even though this approach does not deal exactly with the question of BMD and may be too restricted in the scope and the nature of

¹⁶ Karel Koster, "The Offensive Use of Anti-Ballistic Missile Shield," Landau Center – Forum on The Missile Threat and Plans for Ballistic Missiles Defence held on 18-19 January 2001, [cited 28 October 2003] Available from www.mi.infn.it/~landnet/NMD/koster.pdf.

¹⁷ Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

threats included in the analysis, it provides some interesting insights that will be factored in the model proposed below.

B) Deterrence Theory

Given that the research question deals with strategic armaments and security competition, and that this framework was so prevalent during the Cold War, the analysis of deterrence theory could offer some interesting insights. It is difficult to dismiss the theoretical success of this theoretical framework. It is the main systematic approach to nuclear weapons and remains the focus of academic criticisms despite their substantial accumulation over time. Notwithstanding its theoretical depth, the robustness of its construction and the multiplicity of generalizations that it can produce, this approach fails to account for the dynamic at play in the BMD affair. To its credit, deterrence theory was not meant to explain that kind of pattern of interaction for the simple reason that its assumptions do not take into account the possibility of strategic.

The main problem with this theoretical approach is that there has always been a gap between the logic it proposes and what policymakers decide or are forced to adopt. Among others, American military planners and some civilian scholars never came to terms with the concept of MAD and still consider their nuclear arsenals only as powerful conventional, neither unique nor absolute, weapons.¹⁸ A contrario, others, even in military circles, have accepted or at least claim to have accepted principles that follow closely some interpretations of deterrence theory. For instance, the French Army's Chief of Staff recently asserted that:

¹⁸ Eric Mlyn, "U.S. Nuclear Policy and the End of the Cold War," in Paul, Harknett and Wirtz, eds., *loc.cit.*: 189-212.

“The American understanding, contrary to our own, is that nuclear weapons are not essentially different from conventional weapons, but for us, their destructive power is so enormous that we cannot consider using them on the battlefield. We do not have changed our conception: it is not a readily usable weapon, but a weapon that would be used only in case of deterrence failure.”¹⁹

The underlying and fundamental tenet of nuclear deterrence is the existence of a secure retaliatory capability that may comprise just one nuclear warhead, because what *automatically* flows from that is the ineluctability of harsh negative consequences that will always offset the benefits of a nuclear attack. To be credible, such a threat has to be associated to the costs and risks the threatening side is willing to accept.²⁰ If each side has reasons to believe that a small portion of its arsenal will survive a pre-emptive attack, it will be confident that its deterrent will prevent the other side from risking the costs using these weapons would entail. These costs include the loss of civilians and military lives, decreasing regime support, the disruption of economic activities, the breakdown of regulated social interactions and the collapse of vital infrastructure, provided that the nuclear exchange in question does not simply result in the complete vaporisation of the nation.

The mutual vulnerability brought about by nuclear weapons is the cement of strategic stability and what brings caution in states' behaviour, because they cannot know when and how fast a crisis may begin and escalate.²¹ The underlying assumption is that there is no defence that may undermine deterrence, which is based on punishment rather

¹⁹ Laurent Zecchini (Le Monde), “Face à la prolifération, la meilleure réponse est la dissuasion” Entretien avec Henri Bentégeat, chef d'état-major des armées françaises,” [Deterrence is the Best Answer to Proliferation: Interview with Henri Bentégeat, French Armies Chief of Staff] *Le Devoir*, 12 and 13 March 2005, A9.

²⁰ Thomas C. Schelling. *The Strategy of Conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960): 4.

²¹ On that issue, see Allison and Zelikow, *op.cit.*

than on denial. However, the inherent risk associated with nuclear weapons, which in principle is the driving force behind more cautious state behaviour, actually motivates the deployment of BMD, which might reduce caution. This impulse is under-theorized because rational actors are supposed to trust the deterrent power of their strategic arsenal. Efforts to deploy BMD are meant to escape the mutual vulnerability problem in certain circumstances, BMD may then have an effect similar to the effect of insurance on behaviour: lessening the incentives to be cautious. If that were the case, foreign intervention and adventurism may follow, maybe at the expense of official nuclear states but certainly against proliferating regimes.

In fact, BMD advocates claim that it could prevent nuclear blackmail from “rogue states” or “states of concern” that could jeopardize intervention; the recourse to BMD to intervene against the interests of nuclear-armed states can merely be viewed as cautious. American policymakers even claim that BMD might deter states from acquiring nuclear weapons altogether because of the uncertainties surrounding their utilization in a BMD context, even if its efficacy is not perfect.²² This explicit move from a threat-based to a capability-based deterrent may represent the last blow to the credibility of deterrence theory as a guide to policymaking. Coupled with the reflection on the so-called “mini-nukes”, BMD deployment means that deterrence theory in its classical form cannot account for

²² According to Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld, quoted in Kenneth N. Waltz, “Missile Defences and the Multiplication of Nuclear Weapons,” in Robert J. Art and Kenneth Waltz, eds., *The Use of Force 6th ed.*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004): 348. Waltz correctly observes that according to this line of reasoning, rogue states are smart enough to calculate the potential effect of missile defence on their crazy plans but too fool to realize the risk of self-destruction inherent to deterrence theory.

what is going on, because what is at stake is the actual use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield, something that is unthinkable in the context of an absolute weapon.²³

Deterrence theory fails to explain why states tried and keep on trying to deploy BMD rather than trust their nuclear deterrent. Deterrence theorists even admit that if defences were possible, the analysis based on the nuclear revolution argument would be negated.²⁴ Consequently, they assume that effective strategic defences are inconceivable. That is a satisfying and comforting assumption, but like all assumptions, it has to be reconsidered in the light of new evidence. We have to move beyond this logic, or at least seriously re-examine it given that the United States is deploying BMD, an occurrence that is likely to be taken into account in the strategic calculations and perceptions of the relevant actors. Even if deterrence is reputedly stable in theory, actions taken by policymakers who do not believe it may be destabilizing.

C) Hegemonic Theories

There are other, more remote theories that could be applied to explain the dynamic at play in the BMD puzzle, namely leadership theories such as hegemonic stability theory. Even though they focus on political economy, they could offer some insight into the field of security regimes as well. Hegemonic stability stipulates that the international system functions best if there is a hegemon willing to pay disproportional costs related to the provision of common goods like the presence of a lender of last resort, the supply of a

²³ Robert W. Nelson, "Low-Yield Earth-Penetrating Nuclear Weapons," *Journal of the Federation of American Scientists* 54 (January/February 2001) Available online from www.fas.org/faspir/2001/v54n1/weapons.htm.

²⁴ Jervis, *op.cit.*: 10; Waltz, *op.cit.*: 347-352.

reserve currency or the provision of arms control regimes.²⁵ By oiling the mechanism of cooperation, the leading great power lessens incentives to free ride and gives smaller powers and even great powers more incentives to comply with a set of rules that makes the game worth playing for them as well. In this process, the leading power benefits from the observance of international regimes that are in its long term best interests and that may even outlast its actual supremacy.

One obvious problem with this perspective is that it is more interested in explaining the behaviour of the most important power, not the reactions of the others. It assumes that these other powers will follow the lead of the hegemon when it is able to shed a positive light on the changes it proposes. However, it fails to account for the general behaviour of the US in recent years and in particular with regard to BMD. Rather than consolidating or modifying at the margins the regimes it helped to erect in the past, the US is sharply remodelling some of them and destroying some others, the ABM Treaty and other related arms control agreements among them.

Indeed, other powers resent efforts made by the United States to free itself from the constraints of some international regimes it established during the Cold War. China, given that it did not enjoy any status within the ABM framework, should have been more likely to follow the lead of the US on that, while Russia should have had the resolve to resist more, given what it had to lose with the scrapping of the regime. Once it was done however, the opposite happened, as illustrated in the first chapter. One explanation for this may be that the theory is time-bound; restraint on the part of the hegemon during the

²⁵ For the first, mostly economic, exposition of this perspective, see Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929-1939*, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1973). For a more Political Economy spin to it, see Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1987).

Cold War was due to the bipolar structure of the international system and not entirely due to the regimes, while true restraint in the absence of a major rival is more difficult, or even impossible to sustain. This may paradoxically lead to the emergence of such a rival and the eventual restoration of the equilibrium.

D) Complex Interdependence

The effects of globalization have made this framework increasingly popular among students of IR and it could provide an explanation to the research question. It is possible to formulate a complex interdependence look at the puzzle, even though such an approach has not been used directly to address it.

Proponents of the complex interdependence framework²⁶ or variations thereof would suggest that thanks to Russia's and China's integration into economic and financial global networks, they will gradually consider their national interests in the light of the web of networks in which they have enmeshed, which in turn act as constraints on their behaviour.²⁷ Virtuous spillover effects across domains in which cooperation works will alter preferences and make it more difficult to stop cooperating. Both regimes care about economic development, so Putin's Russia and the PRC will be reluctant to endanger their economic growth by adopting revisionist foreign policy objectives: "from a broadened liberal interdependence perspective, [...] China and Russia are not vigorously pursuing a balancing coalition against U.S. power because they are intertwined economically with

²⁶ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).

²⁷ Christopher Findlay and Andrew Watson, "Economic Growth and Trade Dependency in China," in David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal, eds., *China Rising: Nationalism and Interdependence*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

the liberal economic order, and that any disruption of this order through balancing could upset the economic well-being of these countries.”²⁸

To some degree, this line of argument is a reincarnation of the old “commercial peace” hypothesis; high level of interactions characterized by trade and financial exchanges decreases the likelihood of militarized conflict because it would disrupt the basis of the prosperity. If one takes the example of China, a conflict with the US, be it militarized or simply characterized by tensions and non-military retaliations, over BMD or another issue of contention, would also involve some participation from Taiwan and Japan. These three countries are also the most important trading partners of China, thus reducing the probability of conflict between them.

Besides the obvious argument that this theory has been discredited by the outbreak of First World War between states that conducted significant trade with one another,²⁹ one may question the implications of this argument by emphasizing its *interdependence* dimension. If this commercial peace rationale holds true for China, why did it not also constrain the United States in its missile defence policy, given the American dependence vis-à-vis China in terms of cheap imports for consumption and production purposes, access to the appealing Chinese market and significant Chinese assets in American stocks and bonds? Indeed, the prosperity of the United States would be critically harmed if China were to restrict access to its market as both a consumption El Dorado and a

²⁸ T.V. Paul, “Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance,” In Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann, eds., *op.cit.*: 10.

²⁹ David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999): 155-7.

production platform and sell a sizeable portion of its holdings in the American financial markets.

In response to such observations, other students of interdependence have called to question a simplistic reading of how this phenomenon influences foreign policy. They claim China may be using interdependence as a tool to modernize its economy and state structure rather than an end in itself. This would rule out the adoption of radically different worldviews that are supposed to be part of the interdependence package.³⁰

As for Russia, there is evidence that a spillover effect may be at play between different domains, such as cooperation against terrorist organizations or economic interdependence. This should provide support for a complex interdependence analysis of the situation. However, other trends, such as the crack down on media independence and on electoral pluralism, suggest that there is something else going on than the adoption of a different set of worldviews thanks to the effects of globalization.

E) The Debate on China's Rise

One cannot review the literature touching on balancing and BMD without alluding to the debate on the rise of China and what it means for the international system. One camp in this debate has already been presented in the previous section: they are those who believe that globalization and economic liberalization will lead to the inclusion the PRC into webs of shared interests and dampen its potential revisionist inclinations. This could be

³⁰ Thomas G. Moore and Dixia Yang, "Empowered and Restrained: Chinese Foreign Policy in the Age of Economic Interdependence," in David M. Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001): 192-3, 229.

labelled the “peaceful development thesis”. Some even describe China as a “second rank middle power”, at best.³¹

On the flip side of that coin, there is a fairly large number of scholars who adopt the view that China, undoubtedly rising to prominence, is going to compete with the United States in a large array of domains. These areas include the production of sensitive technology,³² the establishment of a competitive economic powerhouse and the emergence as the principal regional power in East Asia and a peer global competitor.³³ Even before China became the economic dragon it is now, early proponents such as Napoleon Bonaparte have stated that eventually, the Middle Kingdom would strive to lead the world.³⁴ Because economic wealth constitutes the main source of military might over the long run, the current development trend of China’s economy will surely lead to its becoming one of the greatest powers. The underlying assumption of this proposition is that differences in the accumulation of wealth and productive capabilities lead to shifts in the distribution of power.³⁵

China’s capabilities are likely to pose a threat to the interests of the states that have shaped the international order as it is now, even if these capabilities do not increase as fast as we usually assume.³⁶ Depending on the context, Beijing may give up its soft

³¹ Gerald Segal, “China’s Changing Shape,” *Foreign Affairs* 73 (May/June 1994): 48.

³² William W. Keller and Louis W. Pauly, “China, Semiconductors, and Security.” Globalization and the National Security State Project, REGIS, Working paper 18, November 2004.

³³ Thomas J. Christensen, “Chinese Realpolitik,” *Foreign Affairs* 75 (September-October 1996): 37.

³⁴ The Corsican general famously said: “When China awakes, it will shake the world.”

³⁵ Paul Kennedy, *Naissance et déclin des grandes puissances*, (Paris: Éditions Payot, 1989); Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1981): 13.

³⁶ Thomas J. Christensen, “Posing Problems without Catching Up: China’s Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy,” *International Security* 25 (Spring 2001): 5-40.

policy towards the status quo and try to alter it, across the Taiwan straits for instance, if the situation there evolves beyond its tolerance threshold.³⁷ This has been summed up under the label of the “China Threat theory.”³⁸ But then the question is why China did not react more vigorously after it became clear that the US was poised to infringe on one of its key security interests.

The vibrant debate in the recent literature on China is quite insightful. Many interesting points can be drawn from both sides. The amount of data accumulated in the process of constructing these arguments is impressive and they contribute to this thesis. The problem is that there is no clear pattern or framework with which all scholars feel comfortable. The analyses are usually quite specific to the Chinese context and can merely be applied to another one, Russia’s for instance. The purpose of this thesis is to supplement this caveat and more generally to complement the broader literature on the subject.

F) The Neoclassical Approach

Gideon Rose first identified and labelled as such the neoclassical realist approach in a *World Politics* article.³⁹ He portrayed it as a fourth school in the debate on the factors influencing foreign policy, the three others being the primacy of domestic factors (*Innenpolitik*), primacy of systemic factors (aggressive realism) and conditionality of systemic factors (defensive realism). The common denominator tying together the various contributions he reviewed is that they all consider structural variables as a critical

³⁷ David Shambaugh, “A Matter of Time: Taiwan’s Eroding Military Advantage,” *The Washington Quarterly* 23 (Spring 2000): 119-133.

³⁸ Ong, *op.cit.*

determinant of foreign policy, even though their effect is filtered by at least one intervening, unit-level variable. This effort to organize these contributions under one category is a helpful one, despite the growing opposition to the idea of paradigms in the field of IR as well as the reluctance of some of these scholars to be labelled as neoclassical realists.

In spite of this, it is important to stress that these neoclassical realist scholars do not use the same recipe for theorizing. Indeed, neoclassical realism is not so much a cookbook to build explanatory and predictive models than a systematic attempt, which can take multiple forms, to link structural and unit-level variables within one framework.⁴⁰ This approach is a realist one because it takes into account the ordering effect of systemic anarchy, but it constitutes a new kind of classical realism because it underscores the impact of domestic-level variables on outcomes.⁴¹ These latter variables can either hinder or accentuate the effect of structural constraints and incentives. These can be perceptions of relative power, state power, the nature of national goals, leaders' personality, and so on.⁴²

The general pattern followed by explanations couched in neoclassical realist terms is considered an advantage over the approaches cited in the previous section; that is why it constitutes an interesting alternative. The combination of structural and unit-level

³⁹ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51 (October 1998): 144-72.

⁴⁰ Stephen M. Walt, "The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition," in Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner, eds., *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, (New York: Norton, 2002). Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Organizing the Inter-National: Neoclassical Realism and the Third Image Reversed," Paper presented at the Fifth Pan-European Meeting of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), The Hague, 9-11 September 2004.

⁴¹ Rose, *loc.cit.*: 146.

⁴² Wohlforth, *op.cit.*; Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25 (Spring 2001): 107-46.

variables helps to bridge IR and foreign policy theories, given that the extent of security behaviour varies depending on the particular situations of states”, even though systemic forces shape “the contours of world politics and state behaviour.”⁴³ Given the objective of comparing a few cases along the same parameters, it is important to keep the number of variables low enough to preserve the relative parsimony of the explanatory model.

Of course, outside the realm of theory, there are numerous factors influencing real-world phenomena. Theorizing involves slicing the complexity of reality into manageable parts in order to identify the most important causal relationships among the observable correlations.⁴⁴ The emphasis is put on the variables that seem to have the stronger effect on outcomes while other variables are left aside. This choice is made because even though rich, theoretically informed descriptions of single cases, typical in work produced by area specialists, are useful in their own right, it is also equally important to be able to devise more general frameworks that can fit more cases than those from which they emanate. Therefore, this model attempts to move away from specific cases idiosyncrasies in order to include both cases within a single framework.

In this light, the objectives of using a neoclassical realist approach are as follow. The main one is to provide a convincing explanation to both the initial and subsequent reactions of Russia and China to the American BMD project. This involves designing a model that goes beyond explaining a single case so that it will fit multiple cases. It also implies moving toward a more comprehensive model than what other approaches have to offer, particularly with regard to balance of power theory. Another objective is to draw

⁴³ T.V.Paul, “States, Security Functions, and the New Global Forces,” in T.V.Paul, G.John Ikenberry and John A. Hall, eds., *The Nation-State in Question*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003): 139.

inferences from the answer to the research question to discuss separately the broader issue of US hegemony and how states interact in a near-unipolar system. This will yield some generalizable statements amenable to predictions.

Figure 1. Explanatory Model

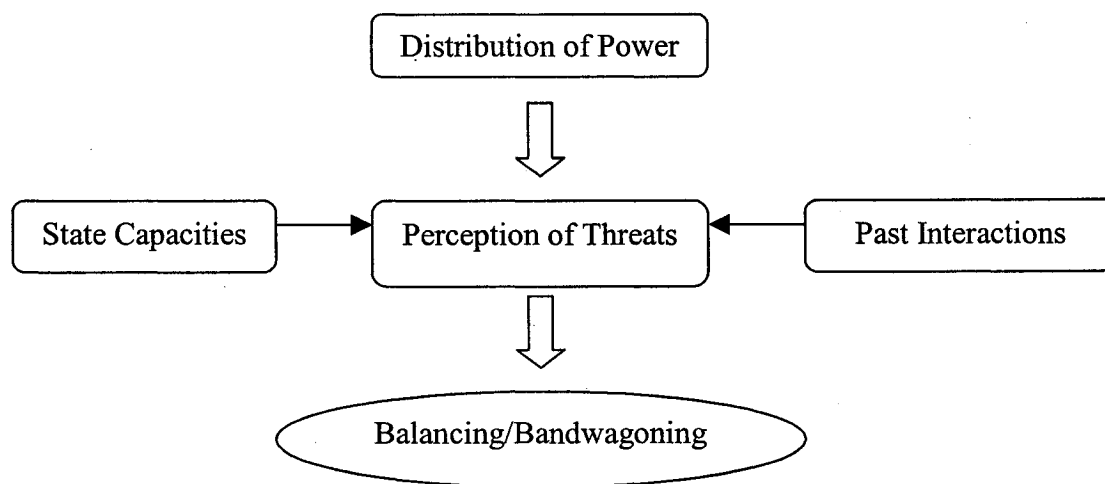


Figure 1 presents the model elaborated to provide an explanation for the theoretical puzzle at hand. It revolves around the notions of capabilities and intentions – the “distribution of power” and “state capacities” being the main material determinants while “past interactions” and “perception of threats” speak to the intentional component of the model. This is an improvement from traditional balance of power explanations, which too often rely solely on the distribution of capabilities, thus leaving aside important factors, as it will be demonstrated. The main causal relationship is the vertical one with the larger arrows, even though the two lateral variables have a mediating effect upon it.

The main independent variable of the model is the distribution of power. Here power is understood in terms of capabilities. Even though the relational definition of

⁴⁴ André-J. Bélanger and Vincent Lemieux, *Introduction à l'analyse politique*, (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1996).

power is more analytically challenging,⁴⁵ it is plagued with too many modelling, conceptual and measurement problems to be as fruitful as it could otherwise be. Therefore, power is the sum of material capabilities that a state disposes to influence the outcome of interactions with other states.⁴⁶ The distribution of power is consequently the distribution of capabilities between the states that are part of the international system. What matters in this distribution is how it affects the relative power of each unit. States care more about relative (and not absolute) increases or decreases of power because it is what impacts the most on their security.

An important facet of the distribution of power is its dynamic aspect. This means that attention must be paid to the trajectory of each state's position within the system, not simply the snapshot of their relative positions. Two states that objectively possess the same status in terms of their share of the distribution of power will have different interests and objectives depending on whether one of them is in decline and the other is on the rise. All states seek security, that is, they react to uncertainty due to anarchy by trying to shape and control their environment,⁴⁷ but the means at their disposal as well as how and when they consider themselves at risk depends on the evolution of their position in the system. A rising state has expanded interests, both spatially and temporally, is more concerned about future threats or threats that may materialize, and is more likely to take actions to alleviate them. A declining state has reduced interests, both spatially and temporally, is more likely to discount remote threats and takes action only for threats that are closer.

⁴⁵ Robert Dahl defined power as the ability of one actor to compel another one into doing something it would not do otherwise, or prevent this other actor from doing something it would otherwise do.

⁴⁶ Mersheimer, *op.cit.*: 57-60.

⁴⁷ Zakaria, *op.cit.*

The other component of the main causal relationship is the perception of threats. It acts as an intervening variable between the distribution of power and the dependent variable, balancing or bandwagoning behaviour. If power has anything to do with outcomes in IR, it is because it is filtered through perceptions of leaders.⁴⁸ The perception of threats variable taps what is a source of concern for policymakers in a given country. Indeed, a primary source of threat is the aggregate power of other states: all other things being equal, an increase of power for a state means an increase in potential threat to others. That is the security dilemma. States then balance against the most important threat to their security, even if that means not balancing against the most powerful competitor.⁴⁹ That is certainly true, but it is too simplistic to consider that the distribution of power is translated straightforwardly into policy outcomes without any interference at the unit-level, particularly in the short-run.

Two condition variables affect the main relationship. Assessments of threats by decision-makers at the state are informed by previous interactions. These have occurred in a certain context characterized by tensions, iteration of exchanges, institutional channels and the like. These past interactions have a substantial impact on how states assess other states' intentions because it informs them about how they behaved in similar circumstances. It also reminds them of the outcomes of such past interactions, particularly when these were perceived as shocks. It certainly operates when the same individuals are involved, but it does so afterwards as well because this experience can be passed on to the next generation of leaders as "lessons learned." These lessons need not to be appropriate ones though – this is by no means a perfect process. The phenomenon

⁴⁸ Wohlforth, *op.cit.*: 2.

labelled as socialization by Waltz also occurs at this level; that means past interactions involving other units can also be factored in the perception of threats if they were significantly important. This variable is chosen as a proxy for the assessment of intentions because of its relative simplicity – as opposed to in-depth psychological approaches for instance – and the possibility to use it in many different settings.

State power also shapes perceptions of threats. This variable refers to the capacity of the state to regulate activities on its territory, to extract resources and to channel them in order to meet foreign policy objectives. This is a measure of the extent to which the state apparatus controls its territory and population and can successfully claim the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within its borders. It is more difficult for a state to control its external environment when it does not control its own backyard. In that sense, state capacities influence the scope of interests, that is the extent to which it pays attention to what is going on outside its borders as well as the resources it can mobilize to protect those interests.

In the end, the arrangement of these variables shapes the behaviour of the state when confronted to an external event, which is the dependent variable of the model. It will either balance or bandwagon depending on the value of the intervening variable, perceptions of threats, which is influenced by the two condition variables (state capacities and past interactions) and the main independent variable (distribution of power). There is a need to extend what is understood as balancing and bandwagoning behaviour, because it is important to incorporate in the analysis the various means states adopt to fulfil the objectives achievable through the said behaviour. Balancing can be internal (military build-up) or external (alliances), with weaker variants such as buck-passing and soft

⁴⁹ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances...*

balancing. The former implies letting other powers bear the burden of deterring and even fighting a perceived threat.⁵⁰ Buck-passing boils down to free-riding in the Olsonian definition of a collective action problem in which the provision of a collective good is undermined by individual disincentives to contribute. The latter, soft balancing, “involves tacit balancing short of formal alliances”, including ententes, ad hoc cooperation and limited military build-up.⁵¹ It represents the beginning of a mobilization effort that could be speeded up in the presence of a greater threat or greater capabilities to face it.

Bandwagoning, which is technically easier to carry out because it is not as costly as balancing but potentially more dangerous, can be active or passive. The more active version of it takes place when a state decides to team up with a more powerful opponent, be it the hegemonic power or a powerful alliance. In doing so, the bandwagoning state tilts the balance of power even more in favour of the most powerful partner of the newly created coalition. While the bandwagoner may expect some benefits from this move, it is more likely to result in a lesser say on the resulting increase of power and influence.⁵² The more passive version of bandwagoning involves leaving a potential threat unanswered, something that could be labelled as acquiescence. It is possible to describe such behaviour as bandwagoning as long as it has consequences on the distribution of power. Of course, these are broad categories: most of the time, there will be elements of different options in a state's response to a given international challenge.

⁵⁰ Mersheimer, *op.cit.*: 157-9.; Paul, “Introduction: The Enduring Axioms...”: *Idem.*; Mark Brawley, “The Political Economy of Balance of Power Theory,” in Paul, Wirtz and Fortmann, eds., *op.cit.*: 83-4.

⁵¹ Paul, “Introduction: The Enduring Axioms...”, *op.cit.*: 3.

⁵² Mersheimer, *op.cit.*: 162-4

G) Conclusion

These variables make up the structure of this explanatory model based on the neoclassical realist approach. It will compare Russia and China's condition with regard to BMD to assess why their reaction to it differed, as exposed in the previous chapter. This explanation will allow the formulation of more general propositions about state interactions in the context of American hegemony. This model is proposed as an alternative to previous explanations. It capitalizes on their relevant contributions while it attempts to fix some of their limitations.

Balance of power theory in its classical form does not satisfactorily explain the puzzle as characterized in the first chapter. While its parsimony is usually seen as an asset, it undermines the capacity of the theory to account for behaviour unfolding over the short- and medium-run when specific factors are more significant and may interfere with the logic of balance of power. Generally speaking, approaches based on this framework do not help in understanding foreign policy decisions; indeed some balance of power scholars claim that they cannot predict these decisions. Furthermore, it usually underestimates the probability of non-balancing behaviour in international politics. Deterrence theory, albeit theoretically sound, proves to be a failure at the policy level given that it can neither account for the American urge (and Chinese reluctance) to deploy missile defence nor its actual deployment. Leadership theories such as hegemonic stability theory explain poorly why the dominant player undermines a security regime it built, the major stakeholder (Russia) bowing to this bold move while it is the outsider (China) who is the one displaying more reluctant behaviour. Liberal approaches such as complex interdependence fail to explain why institutional or even normative constraints,

for that matter, are at play in Russia's and China's reactions to BMD but apparently absent in the US decisions to abrogate ABM and deploy BMD.

Insights from balance of threat theory, contributions made by area-specialists and neoclassical realism are mobilized to elaborate a new model to explain the type of puzzle that is at the core of the research question. The explanation derived from this model as it is applied to the cases under investigation is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter III - Explaining the Puzzle

The presentation of the empirical evidence characterizing the puzzle coupled with the outline of the theoretical framework have set the table for an explanation addressing the research question: What explains Russia and China's weak reaction to the announcement by the United States to deploy BMD? The explanation follows the hierarchy of variables presented in the previous chapter. The Russian and Chinese cases will be presented by comparing them along the following dimensions: distribution of power, state power, past interactions and finally, the perception of threat.

A) The Position of Russia and China in the Distribution of Power

A neoclassical realist explanation starts with an analysis of relative power distribution in the international system, because it is the most powerful generalizable characteristic of states in IR that can serve as a variable.¹ One reason is that it frames states' actions in terms of material limits and opportunities. Another reason is that these structural incentives have a direct influence on states' perception of threats as indicated in the previous chapter, those perceptions being key to offer an explanation to the puzzle exposed in the first chapter.

Russia and China are both facing the challenges of American hegemony. This unique position that the United States enjoys makes the international system look more like a unipolar, than a multipolar or bipolar, world order; it is referred to as near-

¹ Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics," in Michael E. Brown et al., eds., *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995): 482.

unipolarity.² It has become a common place to say that the extent of the United States' lead over its potential competitors is unparalleled in modern history. The resulting American primacy is multifaceted because the US enjoys prominence in a large number of areas: military hardware, power projection capabilities, forward deployment, information technologies, military and civilian R&D, economic productivity, industrial base, domestic market, and so on. For example, American military expenditures in 1999-2000 (so shortly before the key events under investigation) represented slightly less than 46% of the total military budget of the 10 most powerful states and more than 38% of the top 25.³ In 2002 (during the year separating the two December decisions), these proportions were even higher: US military expenditures represented more than 52% of the top 10 and close to 47% of the top 25.⁴

Although some of these factors can also be seen as potential weaknesses (consumers' appetite for imported goods) or signs of overstretch (over-deployment of armed forces abroad), there is no doubt that the United States is in a predominant position and that it intends to retain it. Even before the *Project for a New American Century* gained influence in foreign policy circles, particularly after September 11th 2001,⁵

² T.V. Paul, "Balancing Under Near Unipolarity: American Power and the New Balance of Power Dynamics," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005) (forthcoming). Because this period of near-unipolarity covers the post Cold War era, data used in this section stretches from 1989 to present, with an emphasis on the 2001-2002 years because that is when the December decisions were made.

³ The United States Department of State Bureau of Arms Control, "World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers," February 6th, 2003, [cited 10 March 2005] Available online from www.state.gov/t/vc/rls/rpt/wmeat/1999_2000/.

⁴ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: 2003-2004*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁵ Among the proponents of this approach are Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Cheney, all prominent members of the Republican administration. For the statement of the credo of PNAC, see [www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm].

American policymakers realized that the collapse of their only strategic competitor meant that their country was in a unique and enviable position that should be protected. In 1992, the Defence Planning Guidance (DPG) underscored the need for the US to preserve its edge and prevent the emergence of any threat to its superpower role. This would be done by deterring potential challengers from even aiming for an important regional role, let alone a global one.⁶

Russia and China are evolving in this context since the end of the Cold War, and this is not without having repercussions on the way their leaders perceive their position within the international system as well as what is threatening them. Comparing one country to the other reveals important differences that condition their perception of threats based on their share of relative power and thus their position within the system. Taking into account the dynamic nature of the relative distribution of power, it is appropriate to describe the United States as the status quo power, for the objective reason that it is already at the top, Russia as the stagnant power and China as the rising power.⁷

This description of the US as a status quo power fits a structural definition of the concept, as it is probably the state most interested in the preservation of the current distribution of power. However, it would not fit an institutional or normative version of the same concept, given the course chosen by its government during the second half of the 1990s and resolutely implemented in recent years. This stance favours a redefinition of the rules of the game in many fields as well as reshaping or scrapping some of the

⁶ Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21 (Winter 1996/97): 33-34. For a discussion of primacy in international politics, see Robert Jervis, "International Primacy: Is the Game Worth the Candle," *International Security* 17 (Spring 1993): 52-67.

⁷ Paul, "State, Security Function..." in Paul, Ikenberry and Hall, eds., *op.cit.*: 148.

institutions that regulated them, having in sight the prolongation of US dominance in a hopefully friendlier environment. In this context, the “real” status quo powers are those allies of the US resenting American unilateralism in a number of areas in spite of US-established processes.

According to Waltz, there are a number of sources of power whose distribution constitutes a key element of the structure of the international system. These include the size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability and military strength.⁸ Having established that the United States is at the top of this distribution of power, it is time to compare Russia and the PRC to see why it is possible to label them respectively as a stagnant power and a rising power.

In terms of territory, both countries are among the largest in the world. Russia’s land territory of 16 995 800 square kilometres is the biggest, while the PRC’s 9 326 410 square kilometres make it the fourth largest state of the international system, after Canada and the United States. Their share of arable land is approximately equivalent: if China’s territory comprises 15.4% of arable land, Russia’s, with 7.3%, matches it given that it is two times larger. Both states possess impressive natural resource reserves (coal, oil, strategic minerals, etc.), but Russia faces more hindrances to their exploitation: rough environment, long distances and bad weather.⁹ Both states display geopolitical characteristics that could make them formidable challengers to the dominant position of

⁸ Waltz, “Emerging Structure...”, *loc.cit.*: 50. He also cites political stability and competence, but these are considered unit level variables included in the “state power” variable.

⁹ Serge Cordellier et Béatrice Didiot, eds., *L’État du monde: Annuaire économique et géopolitique mondial 2000*, (Montréal: Éditions du Boréal, 1999). Also *The CIA World Factbook*, available online from www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/.

the US: indeed one has once been a peer competitor to the US and the other was a great power before the US even existed.

Their respective position can be both a vector of and a restraint on the influence they can exercise. Russia and China are the two largest continental powers, compared to the United States, which is more or less an island. Both states share boundaries of more than 20 000 kilometres with 14 neighbouring states each.¹⁰ That means that they have access to the benefits of that many channels of influence. On the other hand, it is accordingly more challenging to shape and control their environment, a key goal for states in neoclassical realist thinking.¹¹ While Russia has a longer coastline than China (37 653 km versus 14 500 km), it is less exposed and has less access to open waters, a constant geopolitical challenge since the Tsarist times.

In terms of population, the two countries under investigation are among the most populous. The Russian and Chinese populations numbered 147.5 million and 1255.5 million respectively in 1999 (slightly before the first December decision).¹² Thus, while Russia is the largest country in the world, China is the most populous one; the US comes third but Russia is closer to the tenth rank in terms of population. The gap between China and Russia, close to 8 times in favour of the former, is increasing: while China's death rate is approximately half its birthrate, the opposite is true in the Russian case.¹³ Indeed, despite poorer sanitary conditions as reflected by a higher infantile mortality rate, life

¹⁰ *Idem.*

¹¹ Rose, *loc.cit.*: 152; Zakaria, *op.cit.*: 19.

¹² *L'État du monde... op.cit.*: 291, 571.

¹³ For 2004: China 12.98 births/1000 population and 6.92 deaths/1000 population; Russia 9.63 births/1000 population and 15.17 deaths/1000 population. Consequently, in 2004, Chinese population has increased to 1300 million and Russian population has declined to 143.5 million. *World Factbook, op.cit.*

expectancy is higher in China than in Russia, 72 years versus 66 years overall.¹⁴ Russia is clearly experiencing some serious social and demographic problems, which may affect its capacity to tap in its resource base. This broad outline of the population of these countries illustrates that even if both of them are great powers in terms of demographics, it is appropriate to label China as the rising great power and Russia as the stagnant one or even a declining one.

Having looked at these somewhat constant parameters affecting the relative share of power, we can look at the sources of influence in economic and military matters and compare the cases with those indicators. In terms of GDP by purchasing power parity (PPP), China is far ahead of Russia; recent figures are \$6449 billion for the former and \$1282 billion for the latter. Because China's population is almost ten times greater than Russia's, GDP per capita (PPP) shows the reverse picture: \$8900 for the Russian Federation and \$5000 for the PRC.¹⁵

On the other hand, the average annual growth of output for the 1990-2001 period helps to make the point of their respective status: while the Chinese economy increased at an average annual rate of 10% in the previous decade, the average annual growth rate of Russia's economy is minus 3.7%, even though Russia has been recovering in the past few years.¹⁶ Russia is recovering from a major financial crisis that occurred in the late 1990s

¹⁴ *Idem.* Literacy is also higher in Russian than in China. The infantile mortality rate is considered a good proxy to evaluate the quality of health services: babies, as one of the most vulnerable groups of a population, are more likely to be affected by the level of service than other groups. The rates for China is 25.28 deaths/1000 live births and for Russia, 16.96 deaths/1000 live births.

¹⁵ *Idem.* These are numbers for 2003.

¹⁶ The World Bank Group, *The World Development Indicators 2003*, available online from www.worldbank.org/data/wdi2003/tables/table4-1.pdf. Russia and China's average annual growth rates were respectively well below and well above the world average for that decade, which was 2.7%.

and culminated with the suspension of foreign debt payments and a devaluation of the ruble. Indeed, last year's growth was 7.3%, a high point in a series of six years of growth since 1998, even though inflation is a problem that undermines the benefits of such a growth. Compared to China's inflation rate under 3%, Russia's 13.7% is symptomatic of uncontrolled and potentially harmful economic growth.¹⁷ This growth is largely based on natural resources exports, which is a setback when one considers the large industrial and manufacturing base that was once the pride of the Soviet Union. From this point of view, Russia's position as the second but stagnant player and China's as the third but rising one are confirmed.

Looking at the figures from the military domain gives approximately the same image. Data on military spending for Russia and China alike is sketchy as one gets different pictures depending on the selected source.¹⁸ For instance, according to CDI, Russian military expenditures were around \$65 billion in 2001, compared to \$47 billion for their Chinese counterpart.¹⁹ Contrary to CDI, SIPRI estimates that for 2003, PRC military expenditure amounts to \$151 billion and Russia, \$63.2 billion.²⁰ The US State Department evaluated Chinese military spending at 88.9 billion in 1999 and the Russian

¹⁷ *World Factbook*, op.cit.

¹⁸ These numbers have to be considered with caution, because most analysts make projections about Chinese military expenditures due to the unreliability of official data. In the case of Russia, it is even worst since the concept of military budget and even of army is difficult to apply to the Russian case: personnel carrying out military purposes are dispersed in plenty of organizations, including non-defence ones. That is why what one often gets when searching Russian military expenditures in cross-national table is "N/A". The point here is to show relative expenditures, not their absolute level.

¹⁹ Centre for Defence Information, "World Military Spending in 2001," available online from www.cdi.org/budget/2004/world-military-spending.cfm.

²⁰ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *The SIPRI Yearbook 2004: World Armaments and Disarmament*, (New York: Humanities Press, 2004), Excerpts and Tables used available online from www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_major_spenders.pdf.

spendings at \$35 billion during the same year.²¹ Again, analyzing these features in a dynamic perspective helps to clarify the picture as it shows that Russian expenditures fell by 5 % yearly between 1995 and 1999 (to half its 1992 level of 73 billion), while the Chinese expenditures increased by 5.1% annually during the decade before 1999, with an acceleration to 10.1% during the second half of this decade.²² Consequently, these pieces of evidence make it possible to argue that, with regard to military expenditure, China is the rising power while Russia is the stagnant one, still recovering from the demise of the Soviet Union.

When it comes to the actual deployment of forces, Russia deserves its second rank when compared to the US and the PRC. Russian Armed Forces include around 960 000 soldiers, with close to 150 000 personnel in charge of strategic deterrent forces. The reduction of military personnel, down by close to one million since 1992, is part of a movement toward the professionalization of Russia's Armed Forces; conscription, however, is still enforced. The most important elements of its strategic triad, in relation to the topic of this analysis, comprise a dozen of operational SSBNs armed with a total of 216 warheads and 735 ICBM MIRVed with more than three thousands warheads.²³ Russia has its conventional forces deployed in a number of countries, mostly within the perimeter of the former Soviet Union territory: Georgia, Moldavia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Armenia, etc.

²¹ US Department of State, "WMEAT 1999-2000," *op.cit.*

²² *Idem.*

²³ Sources: US State Department, "WMEAT," *op.cit.*; Viktor Litovkin, "Are Russia's Armed Forces Ready to Cope With New Challenges?" RIA Novosti. Translation available online from www.cdi.org/russia/262-14.cfm; Eugene Yanko, "Comprehensive online database of Modern Russian Arms and Military Technology," Military Parade JSC - Omsk VTTV, [cited 20 February 2005] Available online from <http://warfare.ru/>.

In comparison, China has more than 2 400 000 soldiers in its armed forces, although this number is decreasing, down from close to four million in 1989, due to the ongoing PLA's modernization process. This program entails a transformation of more or less every aspects of the PLA, including weapons systems, "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA) strategies and philosophy, operational doctrine, personnel reforms, and so on. The main difference with Russia is the composition of its strategic deterrent forces, other than the 100 000 personnel attached to them: one *Xia*-class SSBN armed with twelve medium-range SLBM and approximately two dozens of ICBMs capable to reaching American cities. Around 100 Chinese ballistic missiles could also strike targets in Eurasia.²⁴ Nuclear weapons certainly enhance Russia's power and influence with China being the junior player in this respect.

This analysis of the relative distribution of power between Russia and China, considered in the light of American primacy, confirms the stagnant position of the former and the rising position of the latter. According to the prediction stated earlier, Russia's external interests seem to be contracting and consequently leading to a decrease in what it considers as threatening to its interests. Chinese interests and ambitions, on the other hand, are expected to be expanding, even though they are mostly regional at this point in time. Generally speaking, we should expect attempts from these two states to balance against the prospects of BMD as it could empower the already dominant actor, and that is what happened before December 2001. However, given that China is a rising state, it is more likely to take into account the uncertainties around the project once it was

²⁴ US State Department, "WMEAT," *op.cit.*; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "China's Nuclear Weapons." *Proliferation Brief* volume 5 (8), 1 May 2002 [cited 7 March 2005] Available online from www.ceip.org/files/nonprolif/templates/Publications.asp?p=8&PublicationID=971; US Department of

announced, while Russia, as a stagnant state, is more likely to discount these as the scope of its interests is narrowed.

It is time to examine how these incentives are filtered by unit level variables, thus explaining the divergence in their reactions to the announcement to deploy BMD. Apart from this structural variable, there are two condition variables that can mitigate or amplify its effect on the dependent variable, the perception of threat. As shown in the preceding chapter, these are the power of the state apparatus and past interactions of the state with its environment. They will be assessed in turn.

B) The Power of the State Apparatus

This unit-level variable taps the ability of the state apparatus, as opposed to the country it regulates, to enforce its rule on the territory and population for which it claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence. This entails the exercise of control over its society, the regulation or at least the provision of a legal framework for economic activities, the extraction of wealth and its redirection toward the fulfilment of foreign policy objectives. This variable influences outcomes as modelled in this neoclassical realist approach in two ways. First, a powerful state apparatus enjoying extensive control over its constituency is more likely to pay attention to external threats and challenges than one struggling with internal problems undermining its state capacities. It is important to note that the extent of this control has little if anything to do with regime type questions: authoritarian and democratic regimes alike can be at the head of a weak or strong state apparatus. The second way in which this variable influences perceptions of threat and

Defence, "Annual report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China," May 2004, [cited 10 February 2005] Available online from www.defenselink.mil/pubs/d20040528PRC.pdf.

ultimately outcomes is that it is a measure of its ability to use its national capabilities in the pursuit of its foreign policy objectives.

The comparison between Beijing and Moscow based on their respective ability to control their society, extract wealth and redirect it to carry out foreign policy enterprises is quite straightforward. They face different challenges at the absolute level: turning an agrarian, Third World economy into an efficient, state-controlled, capitalist economy in one case, and roughly speaking preventing the opposite transformation in the other. Their relative capacity to achieve their goals is also different.

When one looks at how events unfolded in the centre of Eurasia since the end of the 1980s, it is difficult to imagine how things could have gone worse for Russia. The transition from communism to capitalism went badly, even though it is fair to say that antecedent conditions were quite critical, mainly economic and governance problems within the former USSR before it collapsed. The state was in such bad shape that it could be described as the "Messy State."²⁵ Tax collection, perhaps one of the most reliable and telling indicators of state control over its people, went from 16.5% of the GDP in 1992 (that is, after the initial shock due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union) to 8.5% in 1996.²⁶ Customs as well as other types of taxes like value-added tax or income tax were not being paid, with devastating budgetary consequences. Growing debts and shrinking cash revenue brought government finances to a record low in 1998, incidentally the year

²⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, quoted in Paul. "State, Security Function..." in Paul, Ikenberry and Hall, eds., *op.cit.*: 157.

²⁶ Michael R. Gordon, "As Russia Fails to Collect Taxes, IMF May Suspend Further Loan Payments," *New York Times*, 25 October 1996, A11.

the financial crisis erupted, leading to debt payments default and a critical ruble devaluation.²⁷

The situation improved afterwards thanks to the introduction of elements of a tax reform in 1999 and more dramatic moves in 2001, for example the instauration of low flat tax rate in order to increase the tax compliance rate. This made budget conditions look better – they are estimated at \$84 billion in revenues for 2003, which are not extravagant for a country the size of Russia and facing so many challenges domestically.²⁸ However, it signals from how far the Russian government came and what still has to be done; in an era in which governments in developed countries collect revenues from different sources as never before, Russia does not set an example of state governance.

Within the Russian Federation, the 1990s were characterized by corruption at all levels of government, federal struggle to consolidate its control on local and regional organizations, emergence of huge conglomerates more or less autonomous from the reach of central government, high crime rate, unprotected property rights, thriving criminal organizations, etc.²⁹ Among other things, the rise of Vladimir Putin to the presidency, coupled to the recovery of oil prices, ameliorated the situation. However, much of the freedom of action gained has been directed toward tackling domestic problems:

²⁷ Brian Aitken, "Falling Tax Compliance and the Rise of the Virtual Budget in Russia," *IMF Staff Papers* 48 (4) 2001: 180-3 [cited 15 March 2005] Available online from www.imf.org/External/Pubs/FT/staffp/2001/04/pdf/aitken.pdf.

²⁸ *World Factbook*, *op.cit.*

²⁹ Of course, this was accompanied with deteriorated living conditions for the population. For example, as prices were skyrocketing thanks to the reforms introduced under Gorbachev, wages remained more or less at their 1990 level while welfare coverage was shrinking at the same pace as government budgets. See Minwoo Yun, "Understanding Russian Organized Crime: Its Causes, Present Situations, and Significance," Centre for Research and Doctoral Studies in Educational Leadership, Sam Houston State University, April 2003, [cited 23 March 2005] Available online from www.shsu.edu/~edu_elc/journal/research_online/54Russian_organized_crime_understanding_of_Russian_organiz.pdf.

reinforcing executive control over politics, economic and judiciary reforms, reduction of corruption, much needed investments in infrastructures, debt repayments, cope with the Chechen conflict, all of which are key priorities of the Russian government.³⁰

More particularly, the war in Chechnya is a drag on Russian resources. Even though some allege that “war makes the state”,³¹ the potential for state rebuilding resulting from this conflict is likely to unfold in the long-run, while the precarious balance between the burden it brings on state resources and the achievement of other national imperatives can break down in the short-run. If this occurrence were to happen, the efforts necessary to restore peace in this vital region for Moscow could damage Russian military capabilities and readiness.³² At the same time, the Kremlin wants to secure access to the Caucasian region and resources and avoid setting an example for other autonomy-seeking movements throughout such a diverse country. Moscow’s primary objective is to foster Russia’s internal development and recovery, and get as much as possible from foreign policy activities to fulfil this goal. At the same time, the Kremlin wants to sustain as much as possible Russia’s image as a great power.

However, the configuration of this variable seriously weighs down Russia’s ability to respond effectively to the structural incentives it faces. All these domestic concerns due to past deficiencies of the state apparatus to sufficiently control its immediate environment constitute diversions from international challenges in terms of both attention and capabilities. As a result, Russia is more likely to discount potential challenges to its

³⁰ Donaldson and Noguee, *op.cit.*: 340.

³¹ Charles Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

³² Mark Kramer, “The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia’s War in Chechnya,” *International Security* 29 (Winter 2004/05): 61-63.

long-term interests and bandwagon with the US because of its problems in terms of state power.

In comparison, China's record during the past decade offers a stark contrast. The conversion from a state-controlled, socialist economy to a market-based economy, today's euphemism for capitalism, is going relatively smoothly. On the flip side of the coin, social disruption looms as inequalities grow; that may become a serious problem, notably in terms of legitimacy, for the Chinese Communist Party. Beijing avoided the kind of *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies that revealed governance malfunction and economic deficiencies of the USSR, accentuating its weaknesses and contradictions and contributing to its breakdown.³³ Furthermore, the CCP still dominates the political system. It firmly repressed perceived threats to this predominant position, from student protests in 1989 to the Falun Gong movement more recently.³⁴

Nevertheless, the PRC is still a developing country, although it would be more accurate to describe it as an emerging one. Its revenues, at more than \$250 billion for 2003, do not compare very favourably to Russia's, apart from the fact that China's have been on the rise for a long time while Russia's have declined sharply in recent times.³⁵ Thus, while its GDP is five times that of Russia, China collects "only" three times more revenues. This means that there is plenty of room for state power expansion in China from a situation that is overall better than its Russian equivalent.

³³ Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash, "The Afghan War and the Breakdown of the Soviet Union," *Review of International Studies* 25 (October 1999): 693-708.

³⁴ This is in accordance with the "Four Cardinal Principles" announced in 1979 to limit the democracy movement, the said principles being: Keep the socialist road, uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat, uphold the leadership of the Communist Party and uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Ong, *op.cit.*: 46.

³⁵ *World Factbook*, *op.cit.*

The growth in prosperity and population has not been accompanied by major improvements in governance practices and regulation. Years of economic reforms have led to some erosion of the extractive and distributive capabilities of the state, partly compensated by a greatly increased economic growth leading to higher government revenues.³⁶ Nevertheless, there are many problems related to the question of governance that matter to Beijing. First, the CCP is worried about the creation of enough jobs for tens of million of workers laid off from state-owned enterprises and migrants from rural areas; massive unemployment under a communist regime is not good news for its legitimacy. Second, the reduction of corruption and other economic crimes constitutes a challenge for a highly bureaucratic state such as the China. Another issue is the profitability of those large state-owned enterprises that have been kept afloat mostly by subsidies; their lack of competitiveness due to this protection has made them unable to pay adequate wages and pensions to their employees, adding this weight to the government financial burden.³⁷

This condition makes Beijing more inclined to use a substantial proportion of its resources to invest massively in infrastructure, its economy and the modernization of the PLA.³⁸ For instance, the PRC has invested massively in grandiose projects such as the derivation of southern waters through a new Grand Canal, actually a network of multiple canals, towards thirsty northern lands. The project will unfold over the next decades and

³⁶ Bin Yu, "China and Its Asian Neighbours: Implications for Sino-US Relations," in Yong Deng and Fei-Ling Wang, eds., *In the Eyes of the Dragon: China Views the World*, (New York: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 1999): 193 (fn35).

³⁷ *Idem.*

³⁸ David M. Finkelstein, *China's National Military Strategy*, (Alexandria, Va.: CNA, 2000).

will cost tens of billion of dollars.³⁹ Another high profile project is the construction of a 2.3 kilometre long hydroelectric dam on the Yangtze River, the so-called Three Gorges Dam, producing around 10% of Chinese electricity. A further indication of the scale of this project is the fact that the construction of the world's largest dam and the resulting creation of a giant reservoir have necessitated the relocation of 1.2 million people.⁴⁰ Such long-term projects, that China has been able to conduct despite international opposition based mainly on ecological considerations, indicate that China's state power can be mustered towards the achievement of major objectives.

As hypothesized by neoclassical realist proponents such as Zakaria, given the current pace of development, the process of strengthening state power and control leads to an expansion of the PRC's interests abroad. Contrary to Russian policymakers' struggle to stabilize structural weaknesses and forestall internal chaos, Chinese leaders are building on previous achievements and are clearly dealing with an upward trend in terms of China's capabilities and the state's ability to direct it towards the fulfilment of foreign policy objectives. This may take some time though: if a state has "greater freedom to determine its interests and pursue them [...] when power is high and threat is low,"⁴¹ then greater threat is likely to be met in a timely manner in the presence of increased power.

³⁹ For the latest announcement on this project, see Xinhua General News Service, "400 000 to relocate for water diversion project," Beijing, 5 April 2005.

⁴⁰ Public Broadcasting Service, "Great Wall Across the Yangtze," [cited 6 April 2005] Available online from www.pbs.org/itvs/greatwall/dam1.html.

⁴¹ Zakaria, "From Wealth to Power..." *op.cit.*: 186.

C) Past Interactions

If perceptions of threat are based on both capabilities and intentions, measuring how states perceive intentions of other states constitutes an important part of the analysis. The variable “past interactions” taps elements that condition the assessment of threats by states based on relevant previous international interactions. It is possible to distinguish different patterns in the Russian and Chinese cases that are helpful when it comes to understanding the diverging paths followed by Russia and China after the December decisions.

The Cold war experience of Russia with regard to its relations with the United States, its main competitor during those years, was one of great tension. There were numerous clashes of interests between the two superpowers. Sometimes they took the form of major crises: the Berlin crisis in 1948, the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962, the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1973. Those crises were characterized by brinkmanship in a context of arms racing and ideological antagonism. In other circumstances, foreign interventions made by one side significantly upset the other either for strategic or ideological reasons, or both: the United States military support of South Vietnam from the early 1960s to 1972 or the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan started in 1979, for example. These periods of friction or even open hostility were separated by some episodes of *détente*: after the death of Stalin in 1953, after the Cuban crisis of 1962 and after the Nixon overture towards China in 1972.

The *détente* moments that occurred during the Cold war illustrated the possibility for the two world superpowers to slacken tension in their relationship and eventually cooperate despite their overarching geopolitical rivalry. They share experience in

constructive dialogue such as the SALT and the START processes. Indeed, even in the midst of the most troubled crisis, in 1962 over the shipment of MRBL to Cuba, each superpower was able to demonstrate that it could display restraint and consider the other's interests in the light of its own. As Schelling noted, pure conflict is a rare occurrence: most of the time, there are common as well as conflicting interests in any relationship.⁴² Unlike relatively low intensity conflicts such as civil wars in failed states or pre-Modern warfare, what was at stake in the USA-USSR rivalry was so important, and the consequences of a clash in the shadow of a nuclear Armageddon so dramatic, that it eased the realization of the existence of such common interests. For instance, the United States and the Soviet Union made sure to restrain the behaviour of their allies in 1956 during the Suez Crisis because they did not want the situation to get out of control and require their intervention thereby preventing a direct confrontation between them. It is important to note that there was never a militarized conflict directly involving both states.

Without altering the profound nature and tenets of their rivalry as cooperation spill-over proponents would argue, this dynamic certainly helped to grease the joints of cooperation when it was needed and possible. Since the dissolution of the Soviet empire and its replacement by the Russian Federation and several independent republics, there are a number of channels through which Russian and American policymakers exchange views and discuss matters of international relevance, either to their bilateral relation or more generally to world affairs. Apart from their previous and continuing dialogue on disarmament, both states belong to the OSCE, a security-related organization of which they have been the main participants for obvious reasons. Another channel of communication in security matters is the NATO-Russia Council, created in 2002 to

⁴² Schelling, *op.cit.*: 4.

replace the NATO-Russian Permanent Joint Council, within the broader NATO-Russia partnership dating back to 1997. Furthermore, we can also note the inclusion of Russia into the G7 summit structure with the creation of the G8. It is also important to underscore important security-related, bilateral interactions between the US and Russia in the field of nuclear weapons, and notably the American commitment to the security of fissile material stocks on the Russian territory.

These experiences and the existence of communication channels between Russia and the United States help to alleviate the impulse to buy into worst-case scenarios on the part of both countries. The perception of threat is based on an assessment of intentions, and having more first-hand evidence on past behaviour from direct interactions can help to dismiss worst-case scenarios when there is a lack of pressing signs pointing in that direction. Of course, the content of these interactions is relevant, not only their existence, for they can also confirm or reinforce pessimistic assessments of intentions. In the Russian case, there are many interactions with the United States. A significant share of them was conducted on the basis of parity and often involved some level of understanding in the sense that each side realized what was the line that could not be trespassed without infringing too much on the other's vital interests. The existence of open lines of communication, institutionalized at the bilateral level and in some forums of limited scope, offers reassurances and opportunities to reduce misunderstanding when there are mixed evidences about threats.

The experience of China differs from Russia's in many respects. Contrary to the superpower status that the latter enjoyed during the Cold War, the PRC was the underdog emerging from a bloody civil war, foreign occupation and domestic turmoil. Its relations

with other powers, particularly Western ones (including Japan), were affected by a “victimization psyche” coming from “a century of sufferings and humiliation” that changed how China saw itself in the world.⁴³ During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in its first encounter with the modern international system, China experienced domestic troubles, including revolts encouraged by foreign powers, a loss of customs autonomy, the payment of war indemnities, the seizure of territories, the constitution of spheres of influence *within* its territory and finally outright foreign invasions.⁴⁴ This has led the Chinese leadership to act cautiously throughout the second half the last century, despite its sometimes inflammatory rhetoric against “imperial powers” on both sides of the Iron Curtain. An indication that this victimization syndrome is still alive nowadays is the periodic outbursts of nationalist anger against Western powers, usually Japan when it comes to memories of WWII and the US as it was the case after the Belgrade embassy bombing in 1999 or the EP3 surveillance plane incident in 2001.

On the other hand, this sense of spoliation and being preyed upon coexisted with the experience of success, particularly with regards to the Korean War. When it started in 1950, the PRC was only one year old, which was the time elapsed since the victory of the CCP over the Kuomintang, whose leadership fled to Formosa (Taiwan). Evidently, it did not help to alleviate a sense of encirclement and foreign pressure that can be even more present today, given the presence of US allies on the East (South Korea, Japan and to a certain extent, Taiwan) and the West (American presence in Central Asia). Conversely,

⁴³ Peter Hays Gries, “Narratives to Live By: The ‘Century of Humiliation’ and Chinese National Identity Today,” Paper presented at the American Political Science Association (APSA) Annual Meeting, Chicago, 3 September 2004: 2-4.

⁴⁴ Yong Deng, “Escaping the Periphery: China’s National Identity in World Politics,” in Weixing Hu, Gerald Chan and Daojiong Zha, eds., *China’s international relations in the 21st century dynamics of paradigm shifts*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000): 46-7.

the fact that China intervened on Pyongyang's side, after the war was expanded to North Korea, managing to push back US-sponsored UN troops back to the 38th parallel line, had a significant impact on China's perception of itself and on how it was perceived abroad. Contrary to the victory over the US-backed Chinese Nationalists, a victory against the number one military power of the day (which was abusively dismissed as a "paper tiger" by Mao Zedong) gave strength to the regime and confidence to the people. Despite its cost, the Korean War still resonates today as the end of the "Century of Humiliation" and the beginning of the "New China."⁴⁵

Though without any clear Asian or regional policy, the PRC experienced a series of conflicts with its neighbours during the Cold War.⁴⁶ The most important of these were the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the Sino-Soviet border conflict over the Ussuri River in 1969 and the Sino-Vietnamese war of 1979. Most of the time, the *casus belli* was the control over disputed territories (with India and the USSR), which the PRC usually ended up seizing after invading the occupant of those territories (India and Vietnam).⁴⁷ It also did the same with Burma in 1956. In the case of the USSR and Vietnam, these conflicts illustrated to the Chinese leadership how allies could turn into arch-enemies over a short

⁴⁵ Gries, *loc.cit.*: 8-9.

⁴⁶ Yu, *loc.cit.*: 183-6. The author explains this lack of a coherent regional policy, which is odd for a so-called regional power, by China's tradition of cultural domination of its surrounding environment, the absence of a domestic stability (which would correspond to state power in my model) and the Cold War bipolar setting (which is the structural variable of my model).

⁴⁷ China started the hostilities with India and Vietnam, but while the PRC seized Indian territories, it withdrew from Vietnam after a month of "punitive operations." Ralph Zuljan, "Sino-Vietnamese War 1979," Armed Conflict Event Data, 16 December 2000, [Cited 5 April 2005] Available online from www.onwar.com/aced/nation/cat/china/fchinavietnam1979.htm; Global Security, "Indo-China War of 1962," 15 July 2002, [cited 4 April 2005] Available online from www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/indo-prc_1962.htm; Global Security, "Sino-Soviet Border Clashes," 11 February 2005, [Cited 4 April 2005] Available online from www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/prc-soviet.htm.

period of time because of divergences over international politics.⁴⁸ Another lesson to learn from these conflicts is that settling political problems may require the use of military might, even if this means poisoning bilateral relationships.

These disputes can be resolved over time, though, as the one with India that has entered a new phase in early 2005 after the conclusion of a border delimitation agreement. For the more consequential relationship with the USSR, the *détente* started during the 1980s with the resumption of normalization talks in 1982, which finally occurred in 1989.⁴⁹ This warming up of Sino-Soviet relations was an important development for Chinese security, but the sudden collapse of the Eastern Block, followed two years later by the break down of the USSR, came as a shock for China as it did for everyone else. This created some fear that the collapse of the other major Communist state (and the aborted coup against Gorbachev in 1991) would undermine the existence of the CCP and the PRC.⁵⁰ It also constituted an example of how bad a situation can turn out when one country gets into an exhausting arms race with the global hegemon, even when this country is as powerful as the former USSR. The example of the Soviet Union's demise offered substantial incentives to act cautiously in this changing environment, thanks to a process that Waltz calls socialization.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ong, *op.cit.*: 32; Yu, *loc.cit.*: 188. Other than ideology and territorial disputes, disagreements between the USSR and the PRC pertained to policy towards Mongolia, Afghanistan and Vietnam, while the rift between China and Vietnam, while resting on a tradition of opposition between the two countries, had something to do with the latter's rapprochement with the USSR and the invasion of Cambodia and Laos.

⁴⁹ Ong, *op.cit.*: 33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 47-9.

⁵¹ Authors emphasize the cautious nature of strategic thinking in China. Johnston, who does not claim that this culture is essentially Confucian but closer to what he calls a *parabellum* one, argues that Mao – and incidentally his followers – borrowed the concept of “absolute flexibility” from Sun Tzu, which means that it may be better to wait before attacking until the circumstances are more favourable rather than face a threat

As an illustration of how China's situation could change swiftly with regard to its strategic environment, Beijing took part in a rapprochement with the US during the 1970s, was then removed from the SIOP 6 nuclear target list during the early 1980s but put on it again in the SIOP 00 of 1999.⁵² Since then, it is considered a potential challenger to a near-unipolar, US-dominated state system. Contrary to Russia, there has been a direct militarized conflict between the PRC and the US during the early 1950s, and Taiwan constitutes a major issue of contention between them.

These variations occur in a context of imperfect information that is worse than the setting of Russo-American relations. Contrary to Russia, China does not enjoy the same kind of institutionalized, iterated communications with the US. The latter still debating whether it is more appropriate to engage or constrain the PRC in its rise,⁵³ there is no communication channels like those between the US and the USSR, mainly because USSR's peer status came as a *fait accompli* with which the US had to deal on a regular basis. The quality of exchanges is not the same, and China's recent admission to the WTO does not generate the same level of bilateral interactions that Russia has access to.

right away. Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995): 102-3, 249, 255.

⁵² Bruce Blair, "Background Paper on the Strategic War Plan and the START Reductions," Centre for Defence Information, 18 May 2000 [Cited 22 March 2005] Available online from www.cdi.org/issues/proliferation/blairbckReduc.html.

⁵³ The scholarly work on the topic is amazingly prolific. See for example: Christopher Marsh and June Teufel Dreyer, eds., *US-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century: Policies, Prospects, and Possibilities*, (New York: Lexington Books, 2003); Alastair I. Johnston and Robert Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power*, (New York: Routledge, 1999); David Lampton, *Same Beds, Different Dreams: Managing US-China Relations, 1989-2000*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Richard K. Betts and Thomas J. Christensen, "China: Getting the Questions Right," *The National Interest* (Winter 2000): 17-29; Alastair I. Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security* 27 (Spring 2003): 5-56.

This feature of US-Chinese relations can reinforce suspicion, introduce misunderstanding and constitute another incentive towards cautiousness on China's part.

Therefore, it is safe to say that Russia and China have different patterns of past interactions, with the US in particular and the rest of the world in general, that influence their perceptions of threat in different ways. It is now appropriate to assess these perceptions in relation to the variables that were analyzed above.

D) Perception of Threats

As one proponent of neoclassical realism put it, "if power influences the course of international politics, it must do so largely through the perceptions of the people who make decisions on behalf of states."⁵⁴ Perceptions of threat, the dependent variable component of the main relationship of the model proposed in chapter II, is informed for the purpose of this study by the distribution of power, the power of the state apparatus and the patterns of interactions it conducted in the past. The share of relative power between states is the first variable to be considered in an analytical perspective as it affects the scope of their interests as well as their capabilities to meet the challenges posed to these interests.

Perceptions are usually difficult to assess, and it is even more the case when it comes to those of decision-makers in autocratic states. The challenge can be more daunting when the study is about relatively recent events touching on national security for which there are obviously no archives available. Yet, it is not a reason to avoid studying

⁵⁴ Wollhorth, *op.cit.*: 2.

this dimension, above all when it is considered critical from a theoretical point of view.⁵⁵ Taking into account the limitations of such a method, it is possible to assess aggregate decision-makers' perceptions based on the signals they send and the ones they receive. The typical realist "black box" assumption is useful and not too damaging in the specific context of this study as the two states under investigation have more centralized decision-making processes than most other states, and national security is surely an area in which this feature plays out the most.

The objective, quantitative advantage of the United States in the distribution of power as portrayed in the previous section is likely to be perceived as even more important by Russia and China because of its qualitative dimension. Its technological supremacy, power projection capabilities, isolated and thus secure geo-strategic position are all elements that increase the perceived gap between the US and other powers. BMD builds on each of these parameters to extend American capabilities and room of manoeuvre.

Only the greatest of great powers can have the luxury of viewing its interests so expansively as to set the international agenda all alone, weaken existent or emerging international regimes, walk out of an arms control agreement depicted by almost all other states as the cornerstone of strategic stability and wage preventive wars based on potential threats. The very fact that Russia and China were unable to curb American intentions to deploy BMD after years of bitter opposition is a strong signal for them. In this respect, it is possible that some states question the extent of the "status quoness" of the most powerful country in the system. The hegemon's actions aimed at reshaping the rules of

⁵⁵ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

the game do not automatically go against their interests, but it surely signals changes on which they have little control and introduces more uncertainty in their calculations.

However, there are reasons to argue that Russian perceptions differ from those of China. Moscow can be more confident about its nuclear deterrent, which confers upon Russia a virtual parity status, because even a relatively dense BMD would not significantly undermine the hundreds of warheads of a retaliatory strike.⁵⁶ This perception contributes to make the gap in the distribution of power less striking, especially when it comes to nuclear affairs. Furthermore, because Russia has been declining for a decade and is slowly recovering, it can allow itself to be less combatant and more cooperative. Balancing is more resource-consuming than bandwagoning, so if one expects that it is not threatened in the short or medium term (which is the time horizon of a declining state) and can even hope to influence the project in order to reduce the probabilities that it will be threatening in the future, cooperation is more likely. Indeed, as reported in the first chapter, Moscow has sent hints about its willingness to cooperate with the U.S. on various issues, and generally speaking to enter in a new strategic relationship with the hegemonic power.⁵⁷

On the other hand, bandwagoning can be painful if the relative distribution of power confines a state to a junior status, reducing the likelihood of influencing the shape of the project, all the more if it does not have much expertise to trade in return of such influence, as opposed to Russia. Furthermore, China's status as a rising power makes it more aware of potential threats that may emerge along the way, making it more sensible

⁵⁶ For an assessment of different configurations of BMD and their effects on the strategic deterrent of Russia and China, see Dean A. Wilkening, *Ballistic-Missile Defence and Strategic Stability*, (Oxford: IISS – Adelphi Papers 334, 2000), 29-44.

to uncertainty. In addition, China has reasons to be less confident than Moscow in its strategic nuclear deterrent: it has only a few ICBMs, which are outdated and not mobile. The modernization process is thought to be aimed at making them more mobile and more easily launched. Moreover, while submerged deterrent forces are usually considered the most secure ones, its only SSBN, which is not yet as silent as its American counterparts, is not armed with long-range SLBM. In sum, given the impact of relative power on the perception of threats, China faced and still faces more incentives to balance against the United States than Russia.

Looking at the influence of the state power variable on the perception of threat, the comparison of Russian and Chinese parameters again reveals differences that are significant and that somewhat reinforce the main relationship. Russia's government struggles at the domestic level, in terms of revenue collection, executive powers and national unity is diverting a substantial portion of its attention away from international affairs, downsizing the potential threat emanating from BMD on Moscow's radar screen. Furthermore, for Russia to put up a fight against the BMD initiative and counteract in the short or medium term, it would require too great a proportion of its national resources that are already used to restore state power within Russian borders. The Kremlin invests these resources in much-needed reforms for economic, governmental and military structures.

The PRC, in contrast, has a state apparatus whose power is in relatively better shape than Russia's. The reforms of the 1980s and 1990s are paying off, even though there are still numerous challenges to overcome. The developmental nature of the Chinese state still requires investments in infrastructures to match the pace of the steady economic growth the country has generated during the last two decades. The fact that

⁵⁷ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment for Russia (09/15/03), available online from www.catalog.janes.com/index.

there is room for improved state power means that China will be more willing to look after threats in the medium-run and will have the resources to face them thanks to these increased state resources. Domestic concerns are not as likely to distract Beijing from international challenges as they do for Russia because of the rising status of China. The PRC's massive efforts to begin or complete high profile projects show that it has substantial mobilization capabilities when it is determined to achieve important state goals. This feature should make China more aware of the threat posed by BMD.

The last condition variable, past experiences, helps clarify the explanation of China's and Russia's diverging response to BMD. On the one hand, Russia has a long history of interactions with the United States. Whether high levels of tension or a certain measure of understanding characterized them, these multiple exchanges occurred in a context of parity, served to identify common ground, shared interests, and helped, to a certain extent, to reduce perceived misunderstandings. These interactions were progressively institutionalized into more formal structures of interactions at the bilateral level (SALT, START) or preferential multilateral level (NATO-Russian partnership) that relieve systemic pressures to formulate worst-case scenarios and therefore alleviate threat perceptions when signals are unclear.

On the other hand, China does not have a history of high interactions with the United States. In fact, the country has been isolated for a long time, and the way it was opened to the world by European powers, alongside Japan and the United States, has generated a "syndrome of victimization" due to a "century of sufferings and humiliation" inflicted by these foreign powers. Since it has not enjoyed this status for a while, the PRC longs to be fully recognized as a great power and suspects that some may try to

constrain it to a minor role. As a counterpoint to this perceived historical weakness stemming from these experiences, the Korean War provided China with the proof that it could hold its ground against a coalition led by one of the two superpowers. Various border conflicts during the second half of the 20th century, largely initiated by the PRC and often based on land claims, have proved that it was possible to settle political quarrels through military means. The seed of dispute that Taiwan constitutes should prompt China into resenting BMD more acutely. However, the powerful example of the collapse of the Soviet Union, its impact on prospects and possibilities for Chinese leadership as well as the lessons it gives in terms of trying to compete with the US on an unequal economic basis all contribute to reduce the propensity of China to balance against the US.

Indeed, the threat posed by BMD is compared to the threat that breaking ties with the US would pose to China's economic growth on the medium-term and rising power on the long-term. As a developmental state, China knows that it needs a strong power base if it is to become a major international player. The example of Soviet collapse has shown that it cannot hope to compete with the US in the current situation, with a still shaky industrial base and a sizeable proportion of its development resources coming from FDI. To achieve its goal of becoming an independent global power, China is ready to go along with the most advanced player in the game in all domains that might enhance its future capabilities, while not projecting itself as a follower and losing its credibility.⁵⁸ That is why Beijing usually remains silent on many international topics, but keeps an eye on what is going on and intervenes from time to time.

⁵⁸ Rappai, *loc.cit.*: 51.

E) Conclusion

The explanation of the puzzle identified by the research question and exposed in the first chapter required the mobilization of four variables. The main independent variable, the distribution of power, offers a contrasted portrait of the two cases under investigation. As the second power in a wide range of areas pertaining to strategic considerations, Russia could technically balance against the United States, given what is at stake in the context of its overwhelming superiority. However, as a stagnant great power in a number of key sources of power (military, economy, demography), Russia sees its material capabilities constrained and the scope of its interests abroad narrowed both spatially and temporally. China is the third but rising player in that sphere and therefore has expanding interests abroad; that makes it more likely to resent the threat more acutely. The fact that its deterrent power rests on a limited quantity of vulnerable warheads also speaks to that assertion.

Two other variables condition the modalities of the perception of threats variable. The first, the power of the state apparatus, upholds the contrasted portrait drawn from the China's and Russia's positions in the distribution of power. Moscow has been experiencing massive troubles controlling its society during the past decade or so. Tax collection, law enforcement and national unity have been major issues on the domestic scene and have seriously limited Moscow's ability to face external challenges. In contrast, Beijing has done a terrific job at reforming its economy to turn it into a rapid-growth, capitalist one, even if there is still a long way to go before it becomes a full-fledged advanced economy. The CPP has been able to repress contestation and ensure its dominance on Chinese politics, but the risk of social disruption is present. When it comes

to the other variable, past interactions, the two countries are again different. Russia's experience as a great power having multiple interactions with the United States, and benefiting from a wide network of communication channels with it, makes it more likely to dismiss worst-case scenarios and cooperate with the US as these features help them to recognize common interests. China, on the other hand, has every reason to be suspicious about US intentions and resent unilateral actions such as BMD when one looks at its past interactions. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union after decades of arms race and intense rivalry with the US provides a shocking example for the Chinese establishment to act with caution.

Taken together, these parameters shape the perception of threats. Because it has a stronger nuclear deterrent, Russia could feel less threatened by BMD. However, the fact that under anarchy, Russia cannot know what are the US' intentions and how the situation might evolve in the future should make it more likely to react negatively. The action of the two condition variables alleviates this propensity. First, weak state power makes Russia more likely to discount threats coming from its external environment, provided that it is short of the risk of invasion. In addition, past interactions of Russia, particularly in its relations with the US, introduce better communications between the two and contribute to dismiss perceived threats generated by uncertainty. For China, both its relatively weaker nuclear posture and its rising status should have made it likely to perceive BMD as threatening and consequently react more strongly to the December announcements. Furthermore, the power of its state apparatus, even if it has problems of its own, is in a better shape than Russia's and should accordingly lead it to pay more attention to, and get ready for, external threats. However, the combined action of

elements of the past experiences variable, and particularly the example of the Soviet collapse, leads it to compare the threat posed in the medium-run by BMD to the immediate threat to its long-term power associated to antagonizing the US.

This concludes the explanatory chapter of this thesis, which used a neoclassical realist model to answer the research question as to what explains Russia's and China's weak reaction to the announcement by the United States to deploy a ballistic missile defence system.

Conclusion and Implications

Unwilling foes: the explanation provided through the application of the model proposed in the second chapter to answer the puzzle presented in the first chapter illustrates what makes Russia and China unwilling to become overt opponents American hegemonic enterprises. It seeks to explain why Russia and China reacted so weakly to the announcement by the United States to deploy a ballistic missile defence system.

The first chapter of this thesis served to identify the theoretical and empirical puzzle that is the focus of the analysis. The presentation of the debate on strategic defences against ballistic missiles in a historical context showed that there has been a steady growth in US efforts to develop a BMD during the second half of the 20th century. Then, events that led to the “December decisions” to abrogate the ABM Treaty in 2001 and to deploy BMD in 2002 were discussed. The starting point of the last phase of the missile defence debate started with the Rumsfeld report released in July 1998 and the catalytic effect of Taep'o-Dong North Korean missile test that was carried out shortly after. As the BMD project gathered momentum in the United States, Russia and China registered their strong and sometimes bitter opposition to the alteration of the ABM Treaty or its destruction in favour of a nationwide strategic missile defence system. Both countries published numerous declarations against the projected “missile shield”, called for a more multipolar world and proceeded to strengthen their relationship through a series of informal and formal arrangements.

This united front was preserved throughout the pre-December decisions period. The announcement made by Washington in late 2001 that it would abrogate the ABM

Treaty six months later considerably weakened the Sino-Russian common position. The two states had a similar reaction: a surprisingly weak one, not followed by a substantial opposition to the project nor other American unilateral enterprises – save for their opposition to the War in Iraq, which many more countries than Russia and China also opposed.

During the months that followed the first announcement, as well as the second one in December 2002, the difference in Russia and China's stances became more apparent. While Russia deepened its cooperation with the US, among other things exploring partnership opportunities on missile defence and signing a post-START II arms control agreement rubber-stamping the previously announced American position, China was somewhat left outside this new climate of understanding. Russia's bandwagoning with the US, at the expense of China's interests, is not mirrored by the same type of behaviour on China's part; however, there is a sense that the PRC is soft-balancing against American attempts to stay alone at the pinnacle of Asian affairs and, more generally, of international politics.

These considerations are not satisfactorily dealt with by existing theoretical explanations. While they provide a useful starting point to analyze these dynamics, various approaches based on balance of power theory fail to account for Russia's bandwagoning with the United States and offer little in terms of systemic explanations to China's reluctance to seriously challenge American hegemony. The parsimony that is a strong feature of balance of power theories undermines their ability to take into consideration the spectrum of possible threats and reactions to threats that can occur in the real world and may have to be integrated into a theoretical framework. Noteworthy

attempts to fix balance of power theory weaknesses have been underscored, including balance of threat theory and efforts to increase variance on the dependent variable's modalities.

Deterrence theory simply fails to account for the dynamics at play in the context of BMD, given that its success as a guide to policymaking is quite limited. It does not consider the kind of scenario for the situation at hand because it takes for granted the impossibility of deploying effective defences against the delivery of WMDs. Its proponents admit, though, that if there were such a thing as an effective BMD, the theory's claims would be negated. Other approaches, such as hegemonic stability theory and the complex interdependence model, misrepresent the behaviour of the dominant player and offer little understanding as to why weaker players such as China and Russia acted as they did.

As an alternative building on the contributions of these approaches, the theoretical model proposed to answer the research question relies on other neoclassical realist works and incorporates new dimensions into them. As a neoclassical realist explanatory model, one of its objectives is to bridge foreign policy and international relations theories by linking structural and unit-level variables within one theoretical framework. Because a choice has to be made in terms of the sequence of influence, systemic incentives keep the critical position they hold in neorealist theory, even though their effect are filtered through unit-level variables. While incentives are at the structural level, how response occurs is found at the unit-level. Indeed, another goal of this model is to associate material and perception-based incentives in the explanation of the puzzle, despite the challenge it entails. In the context of this study, the two variables that were

chosen as conditioning the determination of perceptions of threats are the power of the state apparatus and past interactions.

The resulting explanation of the puzzle is as follows: as a stagnant great power (structural variable) having trouble at the domestic level (state power variable), Russia discounts the threat coming from the challenge of BMD. Such a tendency to overlook this threat is supported by past interactions at the superpower level that have highlighted the potential for a common understanding between Russia and the United States. The three variables align themselves to shape perceptions of threat in a way that makes Russia react differently from what balance of power theory predicts.

On the other hand, China, as a rising great power (structural variable), should have balanced with more vigour against the project because it is in a position to anticipate longer-term threats. Beijing is not doing so because even though its state power is in better shape than Russia's, it still faces significant challenges due to the unequal development schemes throughout its territory as well as legitimacy contestation. Furthermore, past interactions involving China with other great powers offer mixed evidence, but the SDI precedent, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, constitutes a hint about what China should not do in the short-run. Even if the PRC perceives the threat of BMD, it recognizes that its power base may be damaged or even jeopardized altogether by an early policy of balancing against the hegemon. Such an endeavour would impede its efforts to sustain its high level of economic growth, which goes hand-in-hand with its security strategy to make it a leading global power of the 21st century.¹

¹ Paul, "State, Security Function..." in Paul, Ikenberry and Hall, eds, *op.cit.*: 156.

For sure, this research is not without caveats. As previously stated, dealing with perceptions is not an easy task. The mastery of Russian and Mandarin would have been useful to have access to more primary sources, particularly non-translated ones. Furthermore, on-site interviews with civil servants and political leaders, preferably high-ranking ones that were involved in the decision-making process during the studied period, would have provided supplementary insights and input for the measurement of the selected variables. Indeed, the passage of time will also allow more data to become available as more scholars carry out research on that topic and official documents are released or leaked. Nonetheless, given the state of data available and the scope expected from such a project, this study offers a great deal in terms of explaining the puzzling reactions of China and Russia to BMD.

Some implications can be drawn from the explanation based on this neoclassical realist model. The model developed and applied in the context of this analysis calls for more variability in structuralist explanations by looking at specific variables that matter. At the empirical level, due to structural incentives, more organized resistance and opposition to US hegemony is bound to happen. The timing of such behaviour will depend on unit-level factors and thus vary according to each state. Candidates for attempts to balance American hegemony are not numerous. Apart from Russia and the PRC, Japan and a better-integrated European Union could become potential poles in a less unipolar world order.²

² Both of them are deeply enmeshed in the security web and alliance network designed by the United States, so that eventuality is quite remote. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some indications about possible changes to the status quo. For instance, there is an ongoing debate in Japan about constitutional reforms that would allow a more assertive Japanese defence and security posture in terms of interventions abroad and military spending. This movement is encouraged by the US as it would relieve its defence efforts in Eastern Europe, but that would also mean more independence for Japan in its foreign policy. Europe is

Russia's situation provides a case of a "special partnership" with the United States that may last for some time. Russia's share in the distribution of power may improve, as its macroeconomic situation is improving. Its position in the strategic industry of energy may offer great potential for influence and economic recovery, even if it must be accompanied by an overhaul of its manufacturing base. However, the extent of Russia's problems in terms of state power constitutes a major hindrance on its balancing US dominance. As an indication of that, it is noteworthy that since 2001 Moscow has let the United States establish military bases and therefore bridgeheads of influence in a very important portion of its "near-abroad", namely in some former Soviet republics of Central Asia. The effect of the past interactions variable will last for some time and support the effect of the state power variable, but its effectiveness in dampening the perception of threats will depend on the United States's willingness to restrain itself from exploiting its predominant position. One incarnation of such a policy would be to avoid moving from the Cold War containment doctrine with regard to Russia to a rollback policy to make sure that Russia stays in its dismayed status.

If China does not openly balance US predominance and its willingness to use this position to fashion the world order as it sees fit, that is likely to change in the future. For sure, the unavailability of Russia as a balancing partner makes it more difficult for the PRC to carry out such a policy. Given that China is not used to nurturing long lasting alliances, it will rely on its own resources, building on its increasing share in the distribution of power and the reinforcement of state capacities at the domestic level. The modernization of the PLA and its strategic forces will continue, as will the pursuit of a

struggling to define and enforce a new common security and defence policy, while its efforts to resume arms sales to the PRC can be seen as a buck-passing attempt.

blue water navy and the acquisition of asymmetric warfare capabilities. The caution effect of the Soviet collapse example derived from the past interactions variable can only last as long as China does not feel sure enough about its own capabilities to enter into a new, maybe more uncluttered stage in its strategic rivalry with the United States.

That being said, if internal disruption were to become part of the picture, China would turn its attention away from external threats and adopt a more acquiescent posture towards its near-unipolar environment; a greater share of its resources would have to be allocated to face internal challenges as opposed to external ones. This would be done on a more temporary basis than Russia given China's massive growth in capabilities in structural terms. A notable qualification to that resides in the question of Taiwan: it is possible that a challenge on this would generate a reaction from China despite domestic troubles. Letting the Taiwan question be settled under unfavourable terms would be problematic for Beijing's control over the rest of the Chinese territory and population. The status quo over Taiwan is related to both structural and domestic variables because of its specificity; altering it would lead to a reaction that may include the use of force. Given that one of its tools of influence is its arsenal of short- and mid-range ballistic missiles targeting the "rebellious province", it is no wonder that Beijing is wary of American plans in Asia with regard to BMD. Japan's inclusion in the project, and its likely support to Taiwan in case the situation heats up, is just one circumstance among many others that would upset the PRC and create more instability in the region.

In short, if the United States is committed to staying at the top of the distribution of power, it would be better to look more interested in the preservation of the status quo, these institutions and processes that were established by Washington. Its behaviour with

regard to the use of nuclear weapons such as the bunker-buster “mini-nukes”, its undermining of international justice which is the logical continuation of an American-inspired movement or its somewhat weak commitment to the international trade regime, and obviously all questions related to BMD, are part of a redefinition of the rules of the game not fruitful in terms of alleviating collective action problems. The current course of action chosen by the American administration may even prove to be counterproductive as it is likely to increase the perception of threats by other states and eventually lead to a questioning of its role at the global level.

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