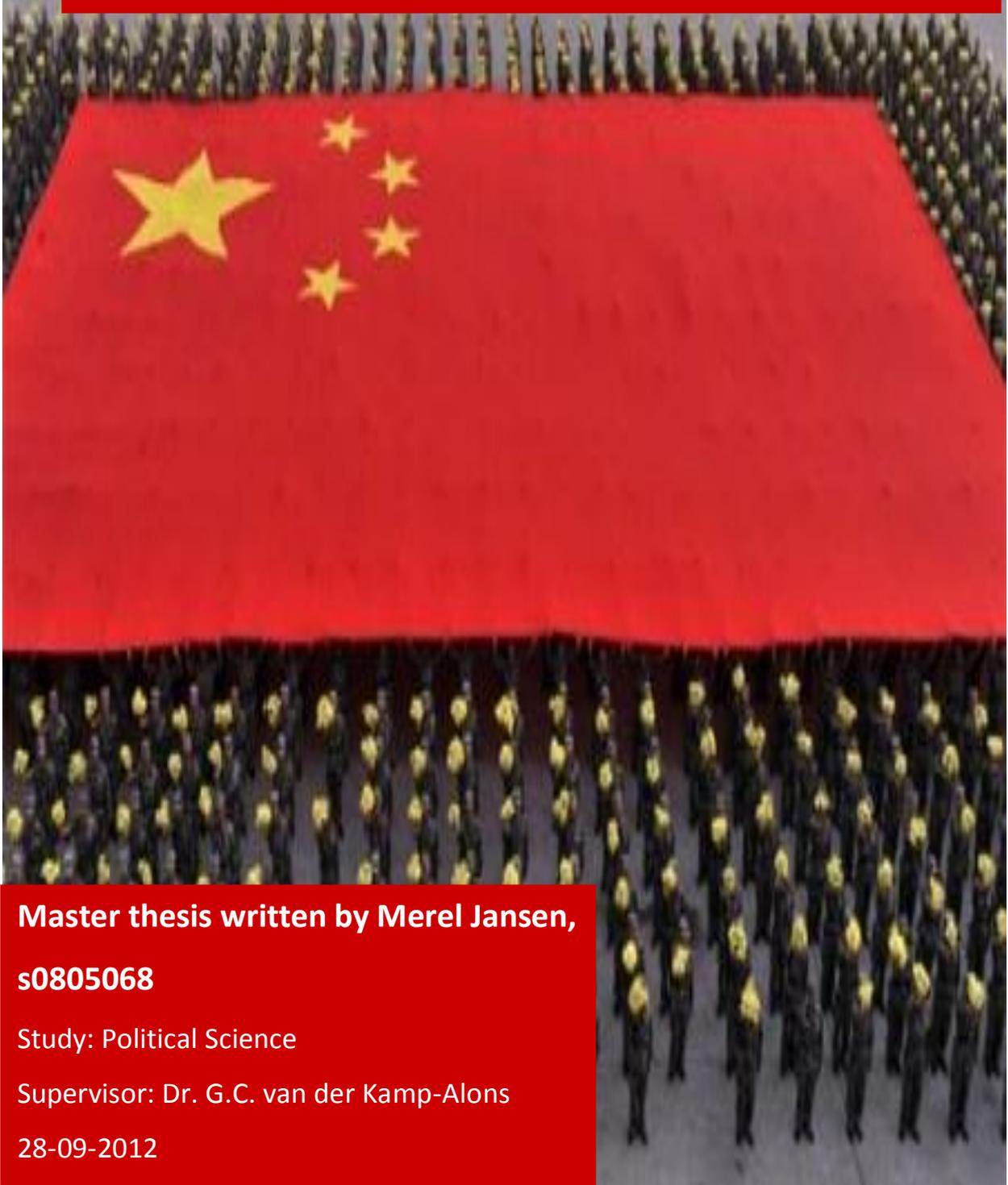


# The US response to China's rising power

*Explaining the case with offensive realism and constructivist  
neoclassical realism*



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# The US response to China's rising power

Master thesis written by Merel Jansen

## A comparison of offensive realism versus neorealism supplemented with constructivism in explaining the US policy towards China



### Abstract

*Power and war: which concepts can be more characteristic for the field of International Relations? Realism claims it to be exactly these phenomena which determine the course of mankind. However, China seems to be on the rise to become a new superpower without the full blown balancing behavior expected by offensive realism taking place in a totally convincing and irrefutable manner. From an offensive realist point of view China's rise is seriously threatening the hegemony of the US. The question is whether the US is really executing balancing or buck-passing behavior on a level as obvious as expected by this theory. Therefore, this research tries to determine if a theory focusing on other factors than accounted for by offensive realism can better explain the current situation, for which neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivist elements is chosen. With this theory, domestic and ideational factors can be taken into account in trying to explain the current situation. This research compares the ability of these two theories in explaining US foreign policy directed towards China in the light of China's rise in power. The focus lies on current developments in the relation between the US and China instead of trying to predict future developments.*

## Chapter 1: introduction

### 1.1. China: causing a new international order?

Throughout history and around the world, different periods of hegemony can be distinguished. Before the First World War, hegemony was in the hands of European countries, from which it passed to the US and the Soviet Union after the Second World War. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the school of political science is confronted with an unipolar power system with the US as leading hegemon in international relations. However, this situation might be changing due to China's rising power which in time could make it a new superpower.

Of course, China's power collection has attracted the attention of experts in the field of International Relations (Chan, 2005, pp. 688). Considering the school of realism, the clearest expectations about the US response to China's rising power comes from offensive realism. This

theory states that the US would want to remain the only regional hegemon, because states are incapable of knowing each other's intentions with full certainty and therefore gather as much relative power as possible in order to protect themselves. According to this theory, the US would constantly search for opportunities to increase its power and prevent China from doing so. For achieving this goal the strategies of buck-passing and balancing are expected to be used. Buck-passing means that states will try to make other states fight for their case (a kind of freeriding) in order to avoid costs or to prevent its own involvement in conflict, while balancing consists of forming a contra-weight against the rising power (Mearsheimer, 2001). The question is, however, if this balancing and buck-passing behavior is taking place in a manner as clear as expected by offensive realists (Kang, 2007). This doubt arises because at first sight the US policy seems to be ambiguous and contradictory. On the one side, the US performs balancing behavior stationing more military personnel in Asia and Australia (Algemeen Dagblad, 2011), together with strengthening its relations with states in the region. On the other hand, important attempts are made to cooperate with China when it comes to terrorism, proliferation and solving the economic crisis (Chung, 2004, pp. 1004-1005), while a lot of economic cooperation is already taking place (a broader explanation of these contradictions will follow). This makes it interesting to investigate this case in a more in-depth manner.

The second theory used in this research is the theory of neoclassical realism, which focuses on domestic and ideational factors in explaining foreign policy. This theory will be supplemented with constructivism in order to explain the process of national interest formation. Because combining realism with constructivism is not an undisputed theoretical combination, an explanation of this combination will be given later on in this research. Neoclassical realism does not see the state as a black box the way offensive realism does, but instead believes that domestic actors influence the choice of foreign policy.

The goal of this research will be to test and compare the explanatory power of these two competing theories when applied to the case of US-Chinese relations. The research question that will be answered in order to achieve this goal is:

*'Are the theory of offensive realism and the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism able to explain US policy towards China from the year 1991 until today, and which of them provides us with the most satisfying explanation?'*

## **1.2. Explanation of the theoretical choices**

The realist school of thought is probably the oldest and most-used theory in the field of International Relations. As the term 'school' already suggests, different theories exist in this paradigm which share

a common ground but deviate in certain components. They all believe the international realm to be anarchical, which means there is no overarching power capable of forcing states to perform certain behavior. States are believed to be the most important actors in the international system.

The reason for choosing the theory of offensive realism instead of other theories, are the theories' clear expectations about the behavior the US should perform towards China facing their growing capabilities. They should perform a policy of buck-passing or balancing because of the uncertainty of the international system. This insecurity leads to a constant need of remaining the largest power (Mearsheimer, 2001). This means a clear judgment can be made about the explanatory power of this theory on this case.

However, we have to take into account the possibility that offensive realism is not able to explain this case in a satisfactory way. That is why the second theory used in this research is a theory which takes domestic and ideational factors into account instead. Neoclassical realism does not only focus on trends emanating from the international system, as offensive realism does. It also takes into account the influence domestic factors have on the choice of foreign policy (Taliaferro, Lobell & Ripsman, 2009). What I believe to be insufficiently explained by this theory, though, is the process by which these domestic actors come to an understanding of the national interest. Because Weldes (1996) pays attention to this process in a very detailed way, her theory of national interest building is chosen to fill in this gap in the neoclassical realist theory.

### **1.3. China's increasing power: is it so puzzling?**

In order to carry out this research, it is of course important to explain why and how China's rise in power is perceived. First, let me state that 'a rise in power' is not only considered in military but also in economic and political terms because these sources are convertible in military power (Mearsheimer, 2001). Let us look at these sources in more detail.

When we consider China's military power it is notable that the country modernized its military apparatus in recent decades by spending more money on new technologies (Chan, 2005). Nuclear and military, the country is one of the largest powers in the world and certainly the largest power in Asia (Kang, 2007, pp. 16-17). In addition to this, it is sometimes argued that the other Asian countries seem to accept China becoming the new regional power simply because they are eager for less western interference in their region, a point on which Japan and Taiwan may be exceptions (Kang, 2007, pp. 48-50). This means China expands its military power which is possibly reinforced by support from the region for their policy. Although the US has partnerships with countries in the region as well, most of these stem from the period just after the Second World War. There is for instance ANZUS, which is a military alliance between Australia, New Zealand and the US, but this treaty stems from 1951. The same goes for the Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the

Philippines and the US, which stems from 1951 (White House, 2012). This means that these formal alliances already existed before China's rise in power set in. They can only be considered to be part of a balancing strategy if we observe a renewed use of these alliances in order to keep China in check. Only the existence of these alliances is not sufficient to speak of balancing behavior, since they originate from a period before there was talk of a Chinese rise in power. To determine if there indeed is an intensification taking place more research is required, which will be executed later on in this paper.

Second, how about China's economic growth? China's rapid growth is well observable when its GDP is studied. In the last three years China's real growth rate of GDP has fluctuated between 9.2 and 10.3 percent per year (CIA Factbook, 2012) while its economic growth had an average of 9 percent since its economic reforms in 1978 (Kang, 2007, pp. 3). This makes China the country with the second largest GDP worldwide according to the CIA World Factbook, which means it is ranked immediately after the US who occupy the number one position. The country is a very powerful player in international economics, a situation which is enforced by the US being highly indebted to China (Kang, 2007). Due to the economic crisis which started in 2008, the US indebtedness only became larger. Therefore we can state that economically there are strong indicators of an increase of China's power.

Finally, when we consider China's political power, the country increased its participation in international organizations both the regional and international stages (Chan, 2005, pp. 687). Regionally, the country has become a very important actor by establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an international security organization which is believed to be directed towards countering the influence of the US in Asia (Chung, 2004, pp. 989). Internationally, China was already included in the UN, but it is also trying to expand their membership in other international organizations, such as the WTO (Homan, 2005, pp. 2)<sup>1</sup>. This makes China more powerful, since these commitments to cooperation give the country more possibilities to influence the international system and to get preferences translated into international policy. At the same time, this also means that other countries obtain more possibilities to control China through their cooperation in international organizations which leads to increasing interdependence between China and, among others, the US.

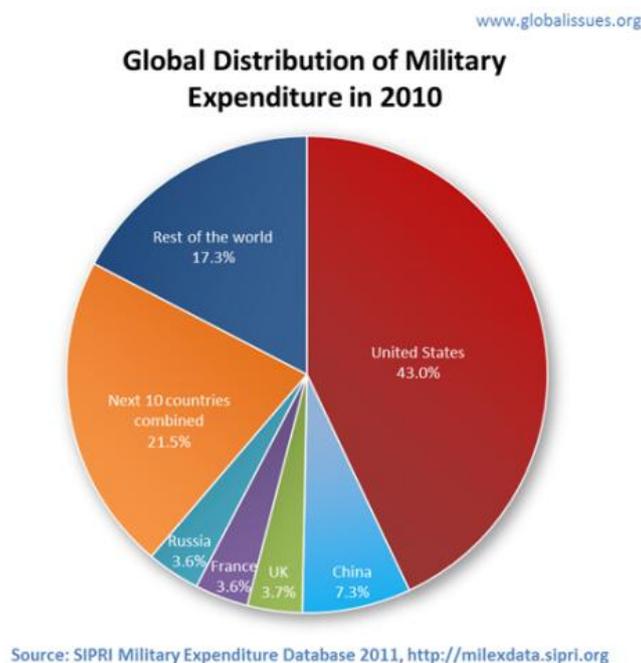
Of course there are also actors denying China is gaining power. They also have arguments concerning the Chinese economy and its military apparatus and argue that China's power and goals

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<sup>1</sup> Other important international organizations of which China is a member: Asian Development Bank (1996, founding member), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (nineties), ASEAN (dialogue partner), G-20, G-24 (observer), G-77, International Atomic Energy Agency (1984), International Criminal Court, ILO, International Monetary Fund, Interpol (1923), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (1985, observer), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (1996), United Nations (1945), and therefore also member of UNAMID, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNFICYP, UNHCR, UNIDO, UNIFIL, UNISFA, UNITAR, UNMIL, UNMISS, UNMIT, UNOCI, UNSC (permanent), UNTSO, UNWTO, UPU, World Health Organization

are modest. Economically, they believe the active attempts of China towards more development to be based on a policy of peaceful rise, with the goal of accomplishing more cooperation towards stability and development (Friedberg, 2005, p. 24-26). Along with this, it is stated that China's GDP is indeed the second largest worldwide, but its income per capita remains much further behind (Kang, 2007, pp. 13). These are however dangerous arguments from an offensive realist view. In the first place, intentions are always uncertain and can be ignored, and second China's welfare per capita may indeed be much lower than in other countries, but this does not mean China's overall capital and therefore overall power cannot be tremendous and a real threat. This means these arguments do not make China less threatening when gaining power.

When we consider military aspects of power, opponents of the 'China-rising school' point to the fact that China's military expenditure is smaller than the US military expenditures (Friedberg, 2005, p. 24-26) (see Figure 1).



**Fig. 1. Global Distribution of Military Expenditure in 2010 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2012)**

However, it is questionable if China's real military expenditure is the same as their official military expenditure (Globalsecurity, 2012). The defense spending in China is believed not to be transparent because large categories of expenditure are not included in this published budget. China is deliberately hiding its real military expenditures (Globalsecurity, 2012). The second reason why China's military apparatus is hard to estimate is the important but informal role undertaken by the PLA, the Chinese people's army. The PLA is not an official state body but is the armed force of the communist Party. However, the PLA has 2.3 million soldiers at its disposal which is what we can call a 'considerable amount' (Homan, 2005, pp. 2-3). It has to be admitted that the US is still superior to

China when it comes to military power, but this again does not mean China is not a threat to US hegemony.

Because the real military power of China is so hard to calculate, it is best not to compare China's power with the power of other states by looking at the absolute military expenditures, as is done in figure 1. Apart from the problem of uncertain data, there is also the problem that economic and political power is not included in the analysis if only military expenditures are taken into account. A better alternative is to use the CINC-index (Composite Index of National Capability) to determine China's power (for results see Figure 2) (data obtained from *Correlates of War*, 2012). This index takes a variety of variables into consideration when calculating the capability of states<sup>2</sup>. It has to be remarked, as is for instance pointed out by Chan that because CINC is sensitive to population size China's power could be exaggerated due to its enormous population (Chan, 2005, pp. 690-691). Therefore this index cannot be used to compare the US and China directly because of methodological biases, but the index is useful for observing general trends<sup>3</sup>.

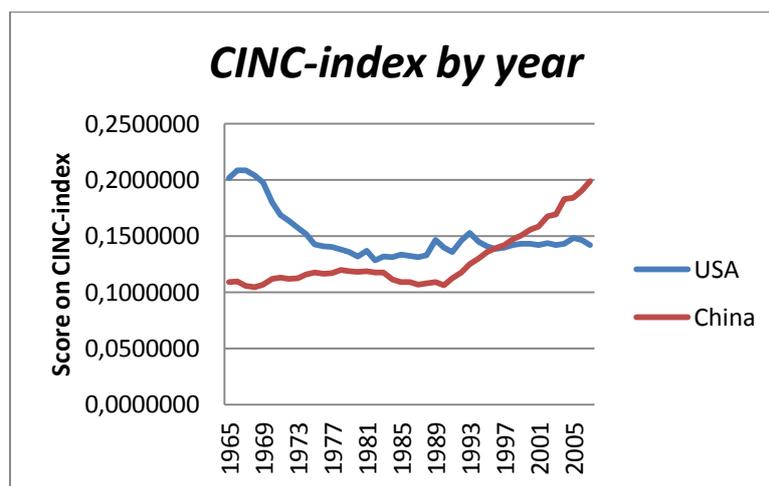


Fig. 2. Data obtained from *Correlates of War* (2012). Self-produced graph.

When we use the CINC-index to discover general trends, it becomes obvious that China is gaining more power and is catching up in capabilities when compared to the US. It is doubtful that China really overtook the US in capability terms as suggested by the graph, but a rise in capabilities is certainly observable.

<sup>2</sup>The CINC-index is calculated by combining a country's energy consumption, iron and steel production, military expenditures, military personnel, total population and urban population. In this way, military factors (iron & steel production, military expenditures, military personnel) as well as social factors (energy consumption, total population, urban population) are taken into account. This offers a more realistic view than when only China's hard to measure military expenditures are used.

<sup>3</sup>There are other indexes which are less biased towards population size, but using these indexes leads to other kinds of problems. The CNP-index (Comprehensive National Power) takes the sum of the powers of a country in economy, military, science & technology, education and resources as well as their influence (Angang & Honghua, 2002, pp. 2-3). Ideational ethos is included as well. This makes the index inappropriate for measuring power in a realist way: they focus on military power and economic power when convertible in military power.

When all these facts are taken into account, I want to argue that we can speak of a rise of China's power. I also argue that because of the amount of power China is gaining, China has real potential for becoming a regional hegemon. This claim is based on its military, economic and political development. China's capabilities are growing, and although it is not possible to state that China has overtaken the US in power, as the CINC-index indicates, I believe China is catching up. This means that based on the theory of offensive realism certain behavior from the side of the US can be expected since China is clearly moving towards regional hegemony in Asia. According to offensive realism, this is something the US would want to prevent from happening. Since this is not what seems to be happening at first sight, this research also tries to explain the US behavior towards China by using the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism, since the theory of neoclassical realism takes systemic but also domestic factors into account. Domestic factors may explain why the US is showing other behavior than balancing behavior, while at the same time the theory of neoclassical realism does acknowledge the limitations that the international system provides states with. This makes this theory of interest for further research. Because a variant of neoclassical realism is chosen in which the perception states have of each other is believed to be important for state behavior, the theory of constructivism is used to fill in the process of the formation of perception. How these theories are combined and used will be discussed in the second chapter of this research.

#### **1.4. Scientific and societal relevance**

Since China's rapid growth in power has not gone unnoticed, a lot of debate about the US-Chinese relations is already taking place in the field of IR. In this debate a lot of attention is paid to the expected future relations between the two countries. What is notable is that researchers working from the same theoretic schools come to very different expectations about the future: all strands of theories represent both skeptical and optimistic researchers (Friedberg, 2005)<sup>4</sup>. This research however will not predict future relationships between China and the US but will try to explain the current US policy towards China since the US is now being confronted with a potential new regional hegemon in Asia.

The research executed in this paper contains a test and judgment of the explanatory power of the theory of structural realism and the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism in order to explain the formation of national interest and foreign policy. What makes this research highly relevant in scientific terms is that it provides us with insights about the

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<sup>4</sup> This goes for sentiments among the US society as well: there is a more optimistic school observable consisting mostly of businessmen and scientists who are pro globalization due to opportunities in their territory, versus a skeptical group containing mostly members of Congress and military being more concerned about current developments (Homan, 2005, pp. 5). However, because this research is executed from a scientific perspective discovering general trends leading to theories is of concern here instead of the practical considerations of different groups of stakeholders in the US.

differences in explanatory power between a theory on a purely systemic level and a theory taking the systemic level as well as the domestic level into account. When it turns out that a difference exists in explanatory power of these two theories, this could indicate a difference in explanatory power of these two kinds of theories in a broader range of cases. When it comes to the practical relevance of this research, what must be understood is that China's rise in power is very recent which means there are practical implications expected in the future. The recent occurrence of the events also contributes to improving the theories investigated by testing them against new cases. When it comes to offensive realism, this test is even more interesting because offensive realism has been accused of having '(...) trouble explaining why the leading power would ever permit another state to catch up (at the very least, it should work very hard to prevent it)'. This means this research will be a useful contribution to internal debate among realists (Walt, 2002, p. 209). Lastly, this research will contribute to a better insight in US policy goals and manifestation of its power in general.

### **1.5. Overview of the research**

To determine what the theories used in this research exactly predict, a more elaborate explanation of them is required. This will be done in the first part of this research, which will constitute the theoretical chapter. In this part the actual content and line of thought of the different theories used will be explained in detail, as well as how they are embedded in the broader theoretical debates in the IR literature. An explication of their process mechanisms will be included. After this, it will be explained which US behavior towards China can be expected based on the theories used. These expectations will be processed into hypotheses which will be tested in the empirical part of the research. Another important part of this chapter will consist of an elaboration on when a theory is considered to be 'better' than another theory, because this is a vague and obscure standard in itself.

Chapter three of this research consists of the methodology of this paper. In order to properly test the hypotheses formulated in chapter two, the concepts under investigation will be operationalized in order to provide a full understanding of the methods chosen for doing empirical research. This chapter also contains the delineation of the cases which are analyzed in this research.

The fourth and fifth chapter will contain the core of this research, which means the hypotheses formulated in the theoretical chapter are tested by means of investigating the case(s) defined. The tests of these hypotheses will form separate and distinct parts of the research, divided in two chapters: one testing the hypotheses considering offensive realism in chapter four, the other testing the hypotheses about neorealism/constructivism in chapter five.

The final chapter will consist of a conclusion reflecting on what has been investigated during the entire research. In this conclusion recommendations for future research as well as reflections on the generalizability of this research will be given.

## **Chapter 2: theoretic framework**

In this chapter I want to make clear what the exact content of the theories under investigation is, in order to give a detailed explanation of the concepts and causal mechanisms they apply.

### **2.1. Offensive realism: a structural approach**

The theory of realism originates from around 400 B.C, when Thucydides started to approach the relations between states in a rational and scientific way. Since then, different theoretical approaches have developed within the broader realist framework.

First, the theory of classical realism evolved. Classical realism focuses on the human behavior in order to explain states striving for power by stating it is in the human nature to pursue power (Morgenthau, 1978). Reason for this is the fact that a human's first interest is survival. This goal is best accomplished by gathering as much power as possible. Since states are collections of individuals, their primary goal will be survival. This makes security the most important theme of international relations. In order to accomplish this goal of survival and security, states strive for power (Morgenthau, 1978). However, what makes classical realism hard to investigate are the many variables which have to be considered. According to classical realists, state behavior can only be understood when a whole range of domestic variables is taken into account, which makes formulating falsifiable hypotheses and predicting state behavior nearly impossible. This led to criticism stating that classical realism is more a worldview instead of a scientific theory. This criticism eventually resulted in the development of the theory of neorealism (Waltz, 1979).

Neorealism primarily looks at the structure of the international system in order to explain state behavior. This makes it easier to predict and explain state behavior because of the smaller amount of variables taken into account. The state is considered to be a unitary, rational actor which strives for power not because this stems from human nature but due to the international anarchic system which makes achieving power the best means toward survival (Waltz, 1979). This means the focus in explaining state behavior is no longer put on human nature, but is exchanged for a focus on the structure of the international system and the actors in it willing to survive as explanatory factors.

Within neorealism (also called structural realism) different strands can be distinguished. The theory under investigation here is offensive realism, which just like classical realism assumes state behavior to be constrained and limited by incentives coming from the international level or international structure (see for instance Waltz, 1959 or 1979). An important neorealist challenger of the theory of offensive realism is the theory of defensive realism. It is important to elaborate on the

differences between these two strands of neorealist thought in order to justify the choice of using offensive realism in this research.

First, both offensive and defensive realism assume survival to be the ultimate goal of states, but they differ in their recognized methods to achieve this survival. Offensive realism assumes all states strive for power maximization in order to become so powerful that no other state can be a threat to their existence. The national interest of states will always be power maximization and expansion of power because this offers the best protection to achieve the goal of survival (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 17-18). Defensive realists take a different view. They believe cooperation to be important as well in achieving security goals<sup>5</sup>. According to them, offensive realists are too pessimistic about international relations since they believe that only competition is effective for achieving security goals (see, for instance, Glaser 1994/1995)<sup>6</sup>. Since cooperation can also contribute to the realization of the national interest, self-help does not always lead to competition. Self-help can also take the form of cooperation. Defensive realists acknowledge that cooperation can be a risky business, but they argue this to be no different from competition which is also risky.

From this we can say that defensive and offensive realism observe different logical implications coming forth from anarchy. They expect different behavior of states: offensive realism expects states to maximize their power while defensive realists believe competition and cooperation can be rational behavior for states. In this way, what is appropriate behavior for a state can only be determined when the context is taken into account (Taliaferro, 2000/2001).

Another important theoretical difference between defensive and offensive realism consists of the use of an 'offense-defense balance' by defensive realists where offensive realism denies the validity of this concept. The offense-defense balance is a tool used to distinguish offensive from defensive military capacities in order to determine the intensity of competition between states. Offensive realists do not make this distinction in sources of power. Defensive realists expect a large offensive capacity to cause more power competition between states than a large defensive capacity of one of the actors. In this way power maximization is not always the best goal states can strive to achieve because a maximization of offensive power will cause balancing from other states against this growing capacity, which makes expansion costly and therefore not automatically the best strategy. Expansion may still yield profitable benefits, but not under all circumstances which makes defensive realism more of a status quo policy than offensive realism which argues in favor of power maximization (Glaser, 1994/1995).

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<sup>5</sup> Defensive realist even believe that too much power collection of a state will lead to balancing behavior from other states; more about this will follow.

<sup>6</sup> Glaser is an author writing about defensive realism from an international relations perspective and conducts its own research in the field of defensive realism. He is usually considered to be a defensive realist author.

If there is so much debate between offensive and defensive realism, then why is the offensive strand chosen to be used in this research? Reason for this is the fact that our case forms a more severe test for offensive realism than for the theory of defensive realism. Defensive realism considers power maximization to be appropriate in some cases but not always since cooperation is also considered to be rational in some circumstances. This means that there are different options for the expected behavior of the US towards China, which leaves us with uncertainty and ambiguity in assessing our case. Offensive realism on the contrary always expects states to maximize their power regardless of their context or regardless of national calculations of the character of power. For this reason, the theory of offensive realism is chosen since it provides us with a clearer cut analysis of expected behavior and therefore leads to more firm conclusions.

### **Underlying assumptions of offensive realism**

The most important offensive realist author is probably John Mearsheimer. He is a self-proclaimed structural offensive realist and has presented his offensive realist framework in his book 'The Tragedy of Great Power Politics' (2001). Mearsheimer's work describes and predicts the influence of the international structure on state behavior (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 5). The fact that he sees the international system as constraining state behavior, means that the influence of for instance the head of state or the leading ideology in a state are not taken into account as a variable determining state behavior (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 10-11).

Mearsheimer's structural realism contains three core beliefs. First, like most realist theories he sees states as the most important actors. The focus of his theory lies with great powers because their strength gives them the largest influence on international relations. Second, the external environment instead of internal characteristics provides states with incentives for state behavior, which means the international structure is decisive in determining foreign policy. Third, power calculations dominate the thinking of states because the achievement of power takes the form of a zero-sum game wherein all states try to gain as much as possible (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 17-18).

Where authors mostly state the assumptions of a theory are given and must not be contested, Mearsheimer claims his assumptions to be very important because when these are wrong reality cannot be explained by the associated theory (2001, pp. 30). His assumptions are, first, that the international system is an anarchic system, which means there is no higher authority that can force states to behave in a certain way. Sovereignty lies with states which does not automatically lead to chaos but mainly forms the ordering principle of the international system. Second, great powers inherently possess military capabilities which make them capable of damaging or even destroying each other, so weaponry is very important to states. Third, there is no possibility of ever being certain about states' intentions because pronounced intentions are not necessary real

intentions and even when they are these intentions can change very quickly. Fourth, all states want to secure their own survival and in doing so, fifth, they are all rational actors aware of the international anarchic environment. They think strategically about surviving by taking each other's preferences in account and considering the way in which their own behavior affects preferences of others (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 30-31). Combining these five assumptions means we are dealing with an international system in which states are each other's potential enemies striving for power maximization in order to keep themselves safe. The power distribution that arises from this is called the Balance of Power.

Because of the continuous possibility of war, states are very wary and consider each other as 'potentially deadly enemies'. This does not mean alliances are impossible, since they can be founded in order to protect from the threat of another state, but these alliances are always temporal and never solid and fixed since states always need a way out to protect themselves from other powerful states. From what has been discussed so far we can deduce three general patterns of behavior: fear, self-help and power maximization (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 31-33). The third form of behavior results from the first two: fear and self-help lead to the striving for power maximization. As previously stated, the struggle for power is a zero-sum game which means that changing the Balance of Power in the favor of one state is gained at the expense of another:

'All states are influenced by this logic [power maximization], which means that not only they look for opportunities to take advantage of one another, they also work to ensure that other states do not take advantage of them. After all, rival states are driven by the same logic, and most states are likely to recognize their own motives at play in the actions of other states. In short, states ultimately pay attention to defense as well as offense. They think about conquest themselves, and they work to check aggressor states from gaining power at their expense.' (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 35).

The fact that all states are striving towards power maximization makes relative power an important concept, for which material capacities are determinate (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 36). This is mostly the case for large powers for which offensive realists make a distinction between a hegemon, which is a power capable of ascendancy over all other powers worldwide, and regional hegemons, who are the largest and most powerful power in their own region. Mearsheimer states there is no global hegemon at this moment, because the most powerful power, the US, is only capable of preponderance in its own area instead of worldwide. When a state reaches regional hegemony it would want to prevent others from following their example even when they operate in an entirely different region, because of the importance of power maximization and relative power. The ideal situation for a state is to be the only regional hegemon in the world (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 39-42).

### **Intentions of states and the interpretation of power**

An argument often pronounced by those claiming China's increasing power to be of no concern is that China's intentions are friendly and peaceful. Offensive realism has a strong vision about intentions of states: pronounced intentions of states are of no importance and have no decisive effect on the behavior states will show towards each other because it is unknown if their intentions are true and unchangeable in the short term.

'When a state surveys its environment to determine which states pose a threat to its survival, it focuses mainly on the offensive *capabilities* of potential rivals, not their intentions. As emphasized earlier, intentions are ultimately unknowable, so states worried about their survival must make worst-case assumptions about their rivals' intentions. Capabilities, however, not only can be measured but also determine whether or not a rival state is a serious threat. In short, great powers balance against capabilities, not intentions' (emphasis in the original, Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 45).

Great powers will always pay careful attention to the power of their rival states. In order to do this, large populations and fast expanding economies are of great concern in deciding on the growth of capabilities (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 45-46).

From all this it becomes clear that power is decisive over intentions. This leaves us with the question 'what is power?' According to Mearsheimer, power means military power. The reason for this is that military power is the *ultima ratio* in international policy. It consists of the specific assets and material resources available to a state, which are not always easy to estimate for potential enemies (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 56-60). Apart from military assets and resources Mearsheimer distinguishes latent power which is socio-economic power that can be transformed into different sorts of military power (Mearsheimer, 2002, pp. 79-83). In practice, latent power equates to wealth and population (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 55).

### **Strategies for survival**

When we summarize the goals of states considered so far we know that states aim at achieving hegemony in their region and in doing so they expand their military capacities and develop their welfare to a level above the welfare of other states (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 138). To achieve an increase in power states can decide to go to war, but this is often a controversial policy due to the instability it causes. States can also perform more peaceful strategies such as blackmailing or use a strategy of bait & bleed to arrive at their preferred goal (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 147-154). However, this is not the kind of behavior this research is interested in, because we are investigating the rise of a new hegemon rather than an existing hegemon increasing its power.

It is more important which strategy states possess to prevent others from becoming a regional hegemon. For this there are two policies: balancing and buck-passing (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 140-141). The first, balancing, means states will deter or even fight an aggressor to prevent it

from upsetting the balance of power. This can be done through diplomatic signals and external balancing which means the formation of a defensive alliance to fight or deter the aggressor or through mobilization of the extra resources of a state in order to change the balance of power in its own favor. An important aspect of this is the enlargement of the military expenditures (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 155-157). Second there is the option of buck-passing. This means that a state tries to pass the costs of balancing against a state to a third party. This is done by attempting to make the third state balance instead of solving the problem by themselves. This does not mean that the danger of the rising power of the other state is not fully understood, but it means that states try to solve their problems while at the same time it tries to diminish their own risks and costs. This can be done by making a third state strive for your case by making this state believe that it has to balance against the aggressor for its own sake. Buck-passing leads to different sorts of behavior for the buck-passing state: first, it will improve its diplomatic relations with the aggressor. Second, it will distance itself from the state that balancing is passed on to, because it wants to avoid the risk of being dragged into the conflict after all. Third, at least it can choose to add some of its own sources to the sources of the state that the buck is passed on to when this state is not able to fully balance against the aggressor on its own. This still reduces the costs of conflict because not all the balancing resources have to be funded but only a part of them while at the same time the balance may be altered. Fourth, a growth of the buck-catcher could be allowed or even facilitated because this leads to better possibilities in containing the aggressor. This is done mostly within alliances (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 158-160). In extreme cases of balancing and buck-passing it is easily possible to establish in which of the two categories behavior has to be classified. In practice however, cases are often not as distinct and clear cut as we would like, which could make it problematic to distinguish the categories empirically. Especially the behavior where a buck-passing state is balancing against another state in order to help the state that is fully balancing makes the line between the two categories blurry<sup>7</sup>.

Overall, states favor buck-passing over balancing because this policy is cheaper and less risky and when performed in the right way, achieves the same goals as balancing does (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 160). However, buck-passing is not foolproof and when buck-passing fails this could bring the initiating country in a awkward strategic position. Another danger is that when the power of a state the buck is passed to is increased, this could also mean a disturbance of the balance of power (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 160-161). In deciding if buck-passing is a feasible strategy for states, the architecture of the system is the decisive factor. Mearsheimer states that when the rise of a potential hegemon will cause a bipolar system buck-passing is not possible because there is no third power the

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<sup>7</sup> This blurry line will not be problematic for this research. As will be explained in this research, buck-passing is no viable policy option in the US-Chinese case.

buck can be passed on to<sup>8</sup>. Balancing is therefore most suitable in a multipolar system and not in a bipolar one:

'No buck-passing takes place among the great powers in bipolarity because there is no third party to catch the buck. A threatened great power has little choice but to balance against its rival great power. It is also not possible to form balancing coalitions with other great powers in a world with just two great powers. Instead, the threatened power has to rely mainly on its own resources, and maybe alliances with smaller states, to contain the aggressor. Because neither buck-passing nor great-power balancing coalitions are feasible in bipolarity, we should expect balancing in this kind of system to be prompt and efficient' (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 279).

This means that buck-passing, contrary to balancing, is not always possible and therefore will not always be executed in reality although states prefer this strategy over balancing.

When the conceptual mechanism of Mearsheimer's offensive realism applied to a uni- or bipolar system is explicated, it looks as follows:

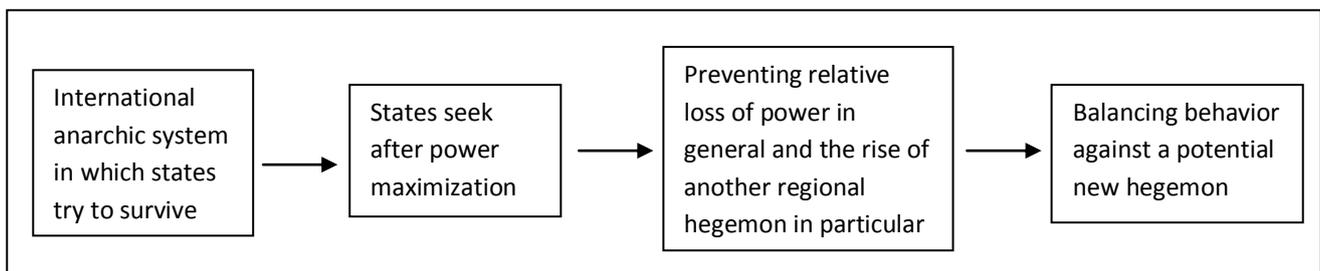


Fig. 3. Conceptual mechanism of Mearsheimer's offensive realist theory.

## 2.2. The theoretic expectations of offensive realism on US-China relations

Now we have a more detailed vision on the theory of offensive realism, it is important to consider what this means for the case investigated in this research. First, we have to ask ourselves the question whether this theory is adequate to apply to the behavior of the US and China. The theory is directed towards the behavior of great powers, which the US certainly is. I want to argue China to be a great power as well, based on the criteria Mearsheimer has given us to measure power<sup>9</sup>. This makes the theory suited for analyzing the relations between the US and China.

Second, it is important to explore if the theory of offensive realism is still adequate to explain state behavior in modern times. Since Mearsheimer clearly states the theory is still relevant despite of the increase in international institutions and better opportunities for states to work together, it could be strongly argued that offensive realism should be able to explain our case. Indeed, Mearsheimer is already reflecting on US-China relations in his book. He states that in 2000 China was not yet powerful enough to be a grave concern for the US, but if its growth of that moment were to

<sup>8</sup> A broader explanation of why this is the case in this research will follow in §2.2. First I want to explain Mearsheimer's general theory after which I will apply this theory on US-Chinese relations.

<sup>9</sup> When it comes to China's power we have to take military expenditures, wealth (via GDP) and population size into consideration when Mearsheimer's mode of thought is followed. When it comes to military expenditures, China only takes the 21<sup>st</sup> place in the worldwide ranking order, but it is explained before that these figures are difficult to measure because a lot of military expenditures are displayed as other expenditures. When it comes to GDP, China stands 3<sup>rd</sup> on the world ranking list, where at population size the country is the largest worldwide (Source: CIA Factbook)

continue, then the US should deter China with all resources at their disposal (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 375-400).

This makes clear that offensive realism should be able to explain and describe US-China relations. The next step is to consider what kind of behavior the US should show. Offensive realism believes states to always maximize their power since they want to prevent each other from gaining regional hegemony. Therefore we cannot conclude differently than that the expectation of offensive realist theory is that the US and China should both be trying to gain as much power as possible, just as any state in the international system does. In addition to this, based on the offensive realist theory, the US should want to prevent China from becoming a regional hegemon since it is argued that any state that has achieved regional hegemony wants to prevent others from following its example. This means that the US does not want China to become the regional hegemon in Asia. Intentions are considered to be of no importance in explaining or predicting state behavior, because one can never be totally certain about proclaimed intentions of another state and because intentions can change very rapidly on a short term. Therefore it is of no importance what China proclaims it wants to do with its newly gained power. The argument that China's rise in power is not important because the state pursues economic development and peaceful relations is therefore not a valid argument for explaining state behavior from an offensive realist point of view.

From what has been discussed so far, it is clear that the US should demonstrate balancing or buck-passing towards China. As said by Mearsheimer, buck-passing can only occur in a system where there are two or more great powers so that the state feeling threatened by the rise of another state has a third state it can pass the buck on to. This is however not the case in the current system. When the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1990 only one hegemon remained, which is the US. One could argue the European Union to be a great power, but when it comes to alliances offensive realism does not see these as fixed and enduring but only lasting for as long as they benefit the most important actors in the alliance. This is consistent with Mearsheimer's analysis of great powers throughout history: Europe is never mentioned as a great power (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 361-362). Because we cannot consider the EU to be a great power, the US and China are considered the two most important great powers, which makes the strategy of buck-passing inappropriate<sup>10</sup>.

In conclusion, what we should observe is a strategy of balancing reflected in diplomatic efforts, external balancing or using extra of the states own resources as indicated by offensive

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<sup>10</sup> Mearsheimer takes military expenditures, GNP/GDP and population size to measure power. China occupies the 21<sup>st</sup> place when it comes to military expenditures, but this is due to the fact that a large part of their military expenditures are hidden and because the data used represent military expenditures as part of GDP. Besides this, the countries that are ranked above China are obviously not considered to be potential great powers (respectively Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Israel, Yemen, Eritrea, Macedonia, Burundi, Syria, Mauritania, Maldives, Turkey, Kuwait, Morocco, Singapore, Swaziland, Bahrain and Brunei). When it comes to GDP, China takes the third place after the EU, of which is explained why it cannot be seen as great power, and the US. What is of importance is that China's GDP is 2,5 times bigger than the number four, India, which makes the distinction between the EU, US and China versus other states very large. Finally, when it comes to population size China is the largest country worldwide.

realists. The possibility that the US is not demonstrating this behavior due to unconsciousness of China's growing capacities does not exist, because offensive realism clearly states that states will continuously monitor each other's power. When this is translated into a general hypothesis, this will look as follows:

General hypothesis: if states seek to secure their survival through power maximization, regional hegemons will prevent other potential hegemons from rising by demonstrating buck-passing or balancing behavior towards them.

Since this research is testing a specific case, this hypothesis has to be adjusted to this research. This means the US wants to prevent China from becoming a regional hegemon, for which it only has the strategy of balancing at its disposal since it is operating in a unipolar system. The first hypothesis of this research is:

Hypothesis I: if China is rising as a potential regional hegemon in Asia, the US will demonstrate balancing behavior towards China shortly following their expansion of power since it wants to remain the only regional hegemon.

The question is whether the US is really performing this behavior in an unambiguous way and if they are performing this behavior, whether the timing of this balancing behavior is congruent with the timing of China's increasing power.

### **2.3. Neoclassical realism combined with constructivism**

In the 1990s, realist scientists faced the problem of being incapable of explaining affairs in international relations because domestic variations leading to choices in foreign policy were not included in the analysis of the realist school. This led to the development of the theory of neoclassical realism, which, contrary to earlier theories of realism assumes a complex relation between unit-level variables and the system (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009). Unit-level variables are for instance the structure of the state or perceptions of state leaders. Within the framework of neoclassical realism a lot of different variants exist but they all share an inclusion of domestic factors in explaining specific foreign policies of states. These domestic factors are considered to intervene between the international system and the behavior of states in it (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009, pp. 1). Focusing solely on the system or only on domestic factor is not considered to be enough because both are believed to have influence (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009, pp. 3). Neoclassical realism still is a realist theory and in this way shares characteristics with other realist variants. These are the assumption of an anarchic international system and relative power and security as central concerns of states. The reason that this theory is particularly interesting to this research is its emphasis on specific foreign policy of states instead of the study on general trends in the international system (Christensen & Snyder, 1990, pp. 137). Since this is exactly what is the goal of

this research (explaining the US policy towards China) this theory provides a very interesting analytical perspective for this research.

When compared with offensive realism, neoclassical realism acknowledges offensive realist claims that states strive for material capabilities and security under enduring uncertainty, while they are at the same time faced with the fact that power is a scarce commodity. They also assume the international system to be anarchic, which leads to international conflict when a state wants to achieve more power because an international overarching actor or institution providing order does not exist. The resulting struggle for power does lead to a balance of power, in which the relative distribution of power is decisive for the external behavior of states. The scope and ambitions of a state's foreign policy are determined by their relative power (Walt, 2002).

So far, there are large similarities between neoclassical realism and offensive realism. What is characteristic for the theory of neoclassical realism however is that the impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is considered to be indirect and complex because unit-level variables translate these power capabilities into policy. This is what neoclassical realists call the 'imperfect transition belt' which consists of the transition of power into direct policy. The way in which policy makers and state officials have to translate state goals in concrete policy is not unambiguous or a standard process, which makes it possible for policy to be inefficient and unpredictable. In this way, neoclassical realism sees relative power as the independent variable, leading to state policy as the dependent variable. The state structure and perception of leaders work as an intervening variable in this process (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009, pp. 7):

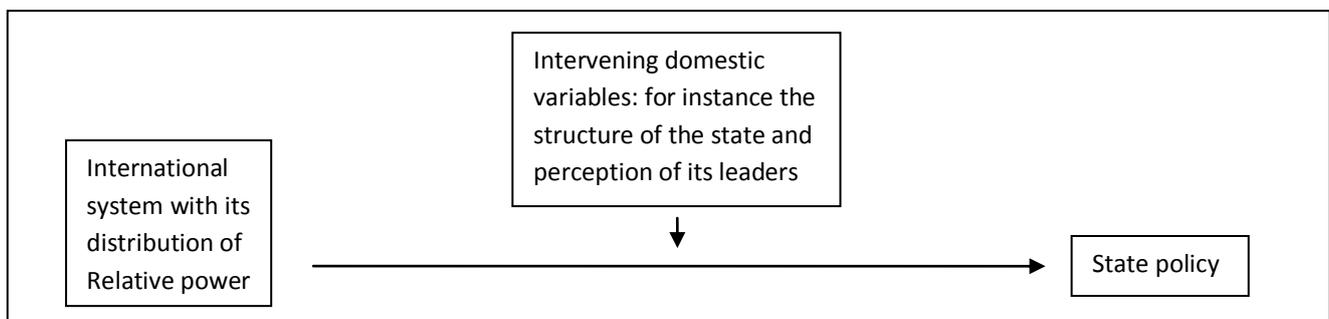


Fig. 4. Mechanism of intervention of domestic variables in neoclassical realism.

What neoclassical realism tries to do in this way is applying a 'grand strategy' of international politics, which means that the international system constrains the policy of states on a specific time and place. It differs however from other theories by its claim that domestic factors determine the exact interpretation of what is the preferred policy, which makes deviations from the 'grand strategy' possible (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009). In other words, they try to make a generalization of the behavior expected by states while at the same time focusing on the characteristics of a specific case in order to more precisely predict and explain foreign policy of states in a specific time and place.

This results in the theory of neoclassical realism predicting and explaining foreign policy of states instead of focusing on trends accounted for by the international system.

But how does this relation work precisely<sup>11</sup>? Neoclassical realists first state that anarchy is a broad concept since it provides states with considerable freedom in determining their policy. Anarchy is a permissive condition instead of an independent causal force because it does not lead to specific policy of states (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009, pp. 7). Anarchy does impose states with their security interest, which is survival, but policy formation by states is a two level game instead of it being solely dictated by the international structure. The external environment provides states with their goal of security but resources needed to pursue this goal come from the level of the domestic society (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009). The executive power of a state will have to bargain with domestic actors in order to achieve the required sources for policy as well as in order to get policy implemented (Lobell, Ripsman & Taliaferro, 2009, pp. 25). The fact that the specific policy of states is not determined neither by the structure of the international system nor by any other factor also means that how the security of the state is best guaranteed is subject to interpretation. In other words, it is clear for states that their national interest consists of state survival but how this is best achieved is a matter of interpretation. Stating that 'survival' is the national interest of states is an empty concept, because how this is exactly done and what is in the direct national interest of a state in terms of policy remains hollow. The concept 'national interest' of states must be more specifically formulated than is done by neoclassical realism in order to make a real test of the theory possible. More about completing the concept of national interest will follow later in this paragraph.

A second consequence of the fact that domestic actors determine the policy of the state is that it is possible to have different visions on the optimal policy option. This is not always the case but there are situations where it may occur. But how then do we come to the eventual choice of one of these alternatives? In case of diverging preferences for policy, internal struggle among domestic actors within the state apparatus will determine the eventual policy outcome. Neoclassical realism uses the concept of struggle for power, which is already used by classical realists and neoclassical realists, but applies it to the internal structure of the state as well as to the international system (see, for instance, Sterling-Folker, 2009)<sup>12</sup>. This research does not focus on the internal struggle inside the state-apparatus but instead focuses on the formation of state preferences. This means that the different visions in the state-apparatus will be investigated and explicated. In order to give a complete overview of the model of neoclassical realism used in this research, the possibility of internal struggle is taken into account and included in the model:

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<sup>11</sup> See subheading 'Filling in the gap: working towards a constructivist neoclassical realism' in §2.2.

<sup>12</sup> The goal of this research is not to intensively test if there is real internal struggle in the US government concerning policy towards China. The focus of this research will be on the formation of different visions on the national interest, which means that the development of the internal struggle will not receive extensive attention due to limitations in time and resources. A further elaboration of this will follow, but for the completeness of our model the existence of internal struggle is still included in the process model.

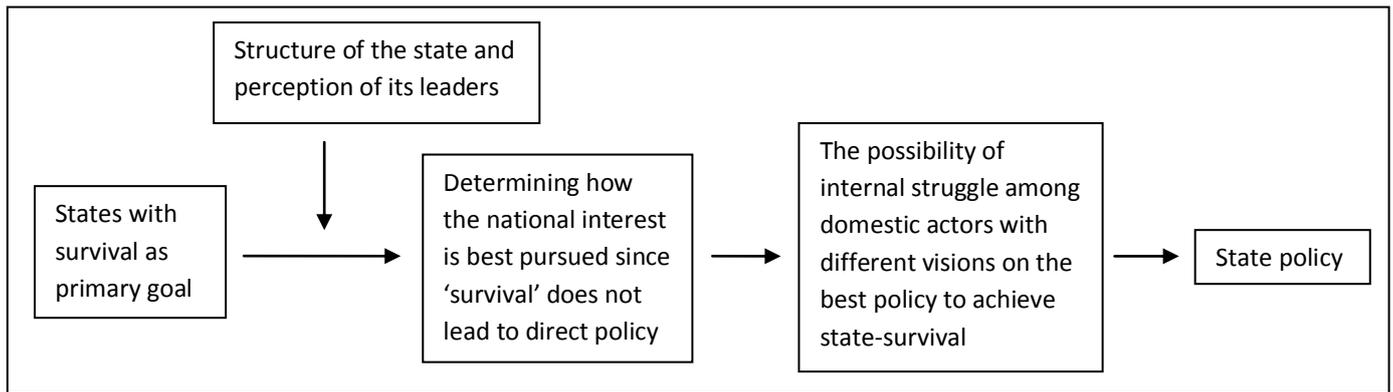


Fig. 5. Conceptual mechanism neoclassical realism.

What must be noted is that stating that different actors within the state apparatus make different estimations about the national interest of the state and the best policy to promote this national interest still does not lead to concrete expectations about the chosen state policy. It is still not clear on which basis these estimations arise. In order to fill in this process, Weldes's theory of national interest formation will be used to investigate how the national interest can differ among sub state actors.

### Combining realism with constructivism

The combination of a realist theory with constructivist elements is found controversial by some researchers in the field of international relations. However, this is not the first and certainly not the last research that makes this combination. There are more authors arguing that realism and constructivism need to be filled in with further content to give them more explanatory power (Jervis, 1998, pp. 975). The most important cause of alleged incompatibility between the two theories stems from the materialism and rationalism on which realism is based versus the role of idealism of utopianism in constructivism (Barkin, 2003, pp. 325).

A lot of this is due to misunderstanding between theorists from both schools. When we consider the school of constructivism, its different theories share a focus on the social construction of politics. This means that its researchers believe to be dealing with an intersubjective and social reality. Among constructivists we can make a further categorization. There are the more 'hard core' constructivists, often called postmodernists, who do not believe in an objectively observable reality but instead reason that the observer influences his surrounding in such a way that reality is always subjective. Contrary to this vision there is the strand of neoclassical constructivism which does acknowledge an objectively observable reality, although people can add meaning to what they observe (Barkin, 2003, pp. 326-327). Personally, I believe it is not possible to combine the postmodernist view with realism because realism is very clear about the objectivity of the reality 'out

there'. However, when we consider neoclassical constructivism I do not see why a combination with realism would not be possible: anarchy is considered to be objectively observable in the international system, but how states deal with this anarchy depends on their interpretation of this anarchy and each other (see for instance Wendt, 1999).

Another possible point of incompatibility between the theoretical perspectives could arise from the central concern with power, while constructivism focuses on processes of interpretation. In my opinion a concern with power may well be incorporated into constructivism. Realism assumes survival to be the ultimate goal of states, a goal for which they need power. According to realism however, survival is not necessarily the only goal a state pursues, but when it comes to it this will always be the most important goal a state can pursue. For deciding in which cases survival is really threatened there is no standard procedure or calculation possible: states have to make this consideration themselves and taking the circumstances into account. In this way, interpretation and social constructions are important because they determine how threat is perceived by states which can fluctuate per situation. This makes a combination of realist theory with constructivist elements possible (Barkin, 2003, pp. 328).

One problem concerning power remains. What could be problematic in combining realism and constructivism is the fact that power is not subject to interpretation. Power is measurable in absolute terms according to realists, where for constructivists interpretation is important in determining power. This however is a claim not undisputed among realists themselves, because there is only a very small number of realists claiming power to be only material. Implicitly it is argued that power can be immaterial as well (Waltz, 1979, pp. 131 and also Morgenthau, 1985, pp. 34-36). When considering each other's power, states are using a form of interpretation and social construction which fits in with the school of constructivism. Besides this, constructivism often implicitly accepts power to be a very important force in international relations. They do differ in their treatment of this concept, because realism assumes all people to be materialistic and striving for more power, while constructivism assumes the human nature being diverse (Barkin, 2003, pp. 330). Though, as long as constructivism is willing to acknowledge that even when only a portion of people are trying to accumulate their power this will lead to uncertainty for all people regardless of their individual motives, this divergence in assumptions does not lead to big insuperabilities for realism because it is possible to assume that despite differences in aims among people, some dictate the behavior and circumstances for all.

That said, I believe it is clear why realism provides us with enough possibilities for interpretation to make this school of thought compatible with some form of constructivism<sup>13</sup>. There

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<sup>13</sup> See for more authors Wendt (1999), Sterling-Folker (2009), Ruggie (1998).

are important similarities between constructivism and (neoclassical) realism, for instance their skepticism about ideas being universal, their focus on interaction and their inclusion of domestic factors in the analysis (Jervis, 1998, pp. 977-979). What this research therefore aims to do is to fill in the gap left by neoclassical realism. Neoclassical realism is stating that different actors can have different interpretations of the best national policy to pursue, a theory which I want to supplement with a constructivist theory assessing how different visions of the national interest come about.

### **Filling in the gap: working towards a constructivist neoclassical realism**

When considering what has been said about neoclassical realism, we are still facing a theoretic flaw. This flaw consists of determining what different actors within the state perceive to be the national interest, which policy fits with this perception and in which way different state officials and policy makers form their consideration of which foreign policy should be executed by a state. I want to fill in this gap by using Weldes's theory of national interest formation:

'With realists, I agree that 'the national interest' is crucial to our understanding of international politics. In both the classic and the structural or 'neo' varieties of realism, the national interest – or what is sometimes called 'state interest' or 'state preference' – carries a considerable explanatory burden. However, the way in which realists have conceptualized the national interest is inadequate' (Weldes, 1996, pp. 277).

In general, the national interest fulfills two functions. First, it offers a description of an interest as being something of importance to the state. Second, the national interest is coexistent with policy for which it offers options (Nincic, 1999, pp. 29-30). Weldes sees the functions of national interest to be twofold as well. She believes that on the one hand it makes policy makers understand their goals, which is pursuing the national interest, and on the other hand it functions as legitimation of the policy chosen because policy makers can point to the national interest when defending their actions (Weldes, 1996, pp. 275-276). These two visions are broadly convergent, since both reason the national interest to be of great importance for policy and both assume the national interest to lead to policy. Weldes's theory is considered constructivist, because her theory assumes the national interest to be a social construction. What is exactly considered to be 'the national interest' or 'in the national interest to do' is determined through a process of interpretation about the world and forces in it (Weldes, 1996, pp. 276). To understand the international situation and deciding on the best response to this situation is a constructivist process according to Weldes.

Although Weldes is a constructivist author, she does acknowledge the realist claim that international anarchy leads to a deductive understanding of the national interest. The international structure does restrain the national interest because survival will always be a state's ultimate goal. Where Weldes differs from realists, is in stating that this deductive interpretation of the national interest is too broad and indefinite to explain state policy or state behavior. A policy directed to

survival is not determinative for the policy eventually chosen because a whole lot of policy options can be chosen to best serve 'the national interest' this broadly defined (Weldes, 1996, pp. 277). This means an interpretation of reality is necessary to form concrete policy towards the national interest<sup>14</sup>. Power and welfare are the resources generally considered suitable to accomplish the goal of survival, which means there are many possibilities for the best policy to pursue.

But then, by whom and how is the national interest determined? It was already discussed that realist thinking neglects the process of interpretation. This is problematic because, as constructivists explain, 'things' do not present themselves as unproblematic to the observer. A process of interpretation will always take place. This goes for states as well: their identity and interests are not simply dictated by the international system but are formed through inter-state action.

When it comes to the question which actors form the national interest, Weldes argues the institution or cluster of practices known as the state divided in individuals working in this branch are forming the national interest and national identity. They do this because the state needs an understanding of the world around it in order to act. This understanding leads to national interest formation. Without this understanding, it is impossible to specify the goals of the state. In this way, the decision to act in a certain way is dependent on a description and the nature of a specific situation (Weldes, 1996, pp. 280-282).

The 'how-question' is the most important question, because it provides us with insight about how the formation of the national interest comes about. Weldes acknowledges certain cultural and linguistic sources to be available with which people are able to populate the world with certain objects, or in other words, to establish relations between the Self & Other. This is exactly what state officials are doing: they draw on their available cultural and linguistic sources in order to make representations of themselves, their state and other objects in the world around them. Objectives receive an identity which makes it possible for state officials and people in general to have a vision of different actors they observe. Important to notice is that since these identities are created by state officials through their available resources, these identities do not have to be 'true' in an objective way but they are considered true and objective by the person or actor which has drawn this image (Weldes, 1996, pp. 281). In providing identities to the objectives around us, relations between the Self & Other are established as well. This is because the identity of an objective determines the reaction required towards this object since the observed identity of an objective determines what is seen to be a threat and what has to be protected (Weldes, 1996, pp. 282).

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<sup>14</sup> Weldes is not the first or the only constructivist scientist stating that anarchy is a 'hollow concept' from which contradictory policy options can be derived, since for instance Wendt is claiming the exact same thing. The problem with Wendt is however his perception of the state as being a black box forming the national interest through interstate interaction. This is an insufficient approach because in reality states are no unitary actor but a collection of actors, all with their own social baggage (Weldes, 1996, pp. 280).

Weldes distinguishes two processes of valuation and forming of identity of objectives. First, there is the process of articulation. In this process meaning is derived from raw cultural material and linguistic resources. More concretely this means there is certain data available about an actor, which are connected with each other through linguistics. These data and their connections produce consistent and contextual representations of the world. Chains of connotation are established, or in other words, different objectives are considered to be connected with each other or related to each other<sup>15</sup>. I want to emphasize once again that these connotations do not have to be real or true, but apart from reality they are *considered* natural and representing reality. These connotations do not have a 'necessary character' for which there are several possibilities for establishing these relations. These representations are contestable because they are socially constructed and perceptions about these representations can change. Therefore, specific articulations are not permanent and once and for all but instead they can be disconnected and their elements arranged differently. This means relations between objectives are convertible over time which gives state officials a certain degree of freedom in establishing relations between objectives. Possibilities to construct an identity or meaning for certain actors or objectives are in this way contextually bound (Weldes, 1996, pp. 283-286). From these relations between objectives the national interest can be derived, because the observed relation between objectives and actors determines what is in the state's interest to do.

Second there is the process of interpellation. This is a dual process where the established relations that led to the concrete identities of objects and actors also determine the subject-positions of the parties involved in these relations. Because the established relations are seen as 'how the world really is', individuals will identify themselves with their subject-position and with representations they are provided with. Differences in representations among actors can lead to different identities. When this process is applied to states, a territory, population, governing principles and organs are created through political and legal abstraction. Individuals recognize themselves in representations of the world and because these representations establish relations they determine how actors respond to each other. In other words, these representations contain the national interest in them because they determine which response is appropriate towards different actors and because they provide policy makers with meaning of the world around them.

Concluding, Weldes claims interests to be socially constructed through representations of the Self & Other. The relations that are believed to exist between different actors and objectives provide states with their goals and with different visions on the best way to accomplish these goals. (Weldes, 1996, pp. 281-283). It is possible to have diverging perceptions of actors and objectives among different actors in the state, but this is not necessarily so.

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<sup>15</sup> An example of this process: actor A is my enemy, actor B is a friend of actor A, this means actor B must be my enemy as well. This leads to an identity of actor B as an enemy without knowledge of the intentions of actor B. Instead, the identity is based on a connotation chain.

When Weldes's process mechanism, as it is tested in this research, is explicated, this leads to the following model:

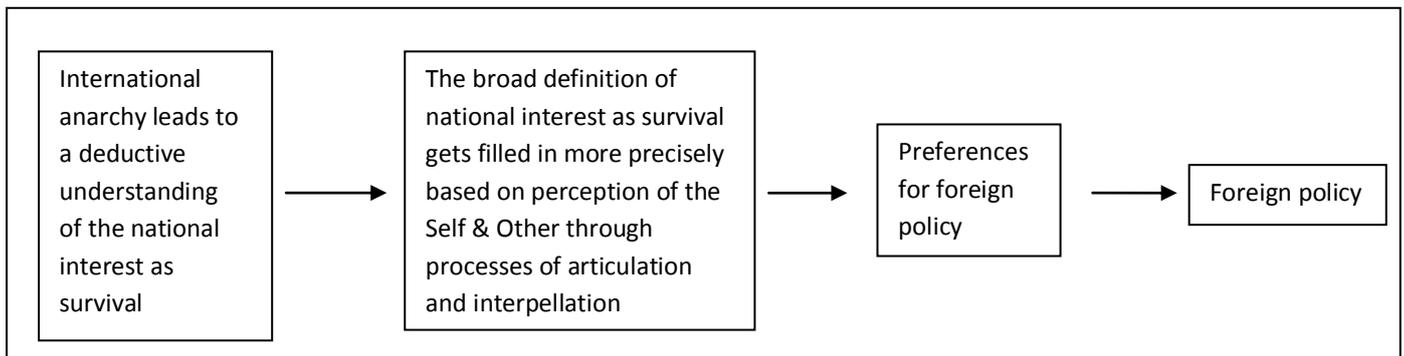


Fig. 6. Weldes's model as tested in this research

#### 2.4. The theoretic expectations of neorealism combined with constructivism on US-China relations

Considering our discussion of neoclassical realism and constructivism, which practices we expect to take place in reality? First we need to consider if neoclassical realism is applicable to this case. The theory aims at explaining foreign policy of states and is developed because of the need for a theory focusing on domestic variables of states. Since this is exactly what this research tries to do the theory certainly is applicable. In applying this theory to our case it is possible to focus on actors within the state instead of considering the state to be a black box, which leads to different expectations on US-Chinese relations.

Since national actors are considered to have possibilities to influence the chosen policy, it is possible that different visions on how the national interest of the US is best pursued exist among different subgroups within the US government. If this is the case, struggle will take place among the US government departments to decide which preference will be translated into foreign policy. This process of struggle will not be the focus of this research; instead, this research is focusing on the process of national interest interpretation in certain US state departments, based on their perception of China. This process can be investigated by undertaking research of the images and visions existing in government departments.

Neoclassical realism assumes the anarchic system to restrict the total amount of possibilities for policy because security must always be provided. This means China has to be prevented from becoming too strong when it is perceived as a threat by the dominant actors in the US. The best way to prevent China from gaining too much power is open for interpretation according to Weldes's theory because the process of identity formation leads to interests and a policy preference. The process of articulation produces consistent representations of the world which are socially constructed and therefore not fixed. In this way, different actors in the US can observe different relations between themselves, the state and China which means a divergence in the observed

national interest as well as different visions on the best policy to serve those interests. This is all based on the manner in which individuals and actors see 'how the world really is'. When we prepare a general hypothesis from this combination of neoclassical realism with constructivism we arrive at the following:

General Hypothesis: if the perceptions which states have of the Self & Other determine their choice of policy, states will only demonstrate behavior which is in line with their perception of the national interest.

This means that in theory there are multiple options for state policy, depending on the perception states have of how to best fill in their national interest. This leads to two major options for US behavior towards China in this research. First, the US could perceive that China is not a state which the US should fear but instead a state with which trade and cooperation are appropriate because this serves the national interest of the US best. Second, the US could perceive that China is a state which should be feared and therefore limited in their rise in power because it is in the US national interest to contain or diminish China's power.

This means there are two possible hypotheses for this research when it comes to the theory of neoclassical realism combined with constructivism: one focused on a situation in which the US perception of China is that of a friend or economic partner and one in which the US perception of China is that of an enemy or economic rival:

Hypothesis II in case of an US perception of friendship and/or economic partnership: if the US perception of China is a perception of China being a friend and/or economic partner, balancing behavior from the US towards China should not occur.

Hypothesis II in case of an US perception of enmity and/or economic rivalry: if the US perception of China is a perception of China being an enemy and/or economic rival, balancing behavior from the US towards China should occur.

## **2.5. Assessing a theory: how to determine which theory is best**

The goal of this research is to decide whether an offensive realist theory or a neorealist theory supplemented with constructivist elements is best in explaining and describing the behavior of the US towards China. Therefore it is of considerable interest to establish the standards to which the theories are compared and what outcomes are considered 'best' or 'better'. I will now briefly reflect on this matter. A criterion often heard for a successful theory is that many scholars adopt it. This approach is problematic because, according to this vision, popular theories are considered to tell us more about international politics than alternative approaches. Of course the popularity of a theory is not necessarily connected to its potential, which means an unpopular theory can be a theory with high potential for explaining reality (Jervis, 1998, pp. 972). Therefore this approach does not seem to

be a fruitful way of assessing a theory. In order to determine which approach is, we have to engage in the field of epistemology of the social sciences.

An author that has written distinctively about the requirements a good theory has to meet is Popper. An important point in Popper's epistemology is his conclusion that scientific knowledge can never be certain, because what we have observed in the past does not guarantee us with the same observed behavior and proceedings in the future. This means scientific knowledge always has a temporarily character and scientists must be continuously looking for falsification of their theories (Popper, 1968, pp. 36-37). A theory that is not falsified for a very long time receives a high probability rate. However, when scientists find evidence contrary to the expectations of a theory one must be careful to reject the theory as a whole, because new theories can be derived from it (Popper, 1968, pp. 50-51).

Another significant point of Popper's theory is falsifiability. This means the theory forbids certain phenomena to take place in order to specify circumstances which would lead to rejection of the theory (Popper, 1968, pp. 38-39). Popper calls this his criterion of demarcation which makes a theory rejectable. A theory must meet this criterion in order to be considered scientific and is also used when different theories exist side by side. In such a case, the theory with the highest empirical content, which means the theory that forbids the most phenomena from occurring, is considered best since this theory is most specific. This only applies when both theories are adequately capable of describing and explaining the phenomena under investigation: when one of them fails to, this theory is automatically found insufficient.

When we consider the theory of offensive realism, we can speak of possible falsifications, because as the US is aware of China's rise in power we should be able to observe balancing behavior from the US towards China. The offensive realist school has proclaimed this behavior must occur, and therefore when this is not observed in reality the offensive realist theory can be considered falsified. When it comes to falsification of neoclassical realism there are possible falsifications as well. The theory expects the national interest to be formed by social processes at which the dominant perception determines the actual policy being executed. If there are different visions existing among different government departments, internal struggle will decide which perception becomes the dominant one. When the different government departments share a vision on the policy they prefer, this vision will automatically become dominant. This means that in order to falsify the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism, what we should observe is that the perceived national interest and associated foreign policy do not match with the dominant domestic perception of the national interest in the US government. This would happen for example when the dominant perception of China in the US government is that China is a great danger to national

security, but when the US does not show balancing behavior. In that case, the dominant perception of the national interest and foreign policy do not match, which means the theory has to be falsified.

There are however authors who set different requirements for a theory to meet. Lakatos builds on Popper's theory, but states that empirical contra evidence is not enough to reject a theory. When this method is used, science runs the risk of rejecting theories that are true because this can be caused by affairs totally different than which the theory takes into account<sup>16</sup>. In this view, a theory can only be rejected when another theory is developed which has a) greater empirical content than its predecessor, b) which is able of explaining all content of the old theory and c) of which its new content is partly confirmed (Lakatos, 1974, pp. 116). When following this method, a scientist no longer runs the risk of rejecting a true theory, because an alternative is introduced that can explain more than the original theory. In order to perform this method of improving science Lakatos makes a distinction between the hard core of the theory and its protective belt. The hard core consists of the basic principles of a theory, where the protective belt consists of distractions from this hard core which are testable in practice (Lakatos, 1974, pp. 109-110).

When Lakatos's method would be used in this research, it would be impossible to elect one of the two theories over the other. In order to adequately do this according to Lakatos, it is necessary to replace the least suitable theory of the two with an alternative that satisfies Lakatos three demands, which means introducing a whole new theory or argue why the other theory used satisfies all these three points. This is not the goal of this research. What is meant to be accomplished in this work is to determine which of the two theories is best suited for explaining the current relations between the US and China. This could be seen as a falsification of one of the theories on this case. Therefore, the method of Popper is used in this research because it focuses more on determining if a theory is capable of explaining and describing cases instead of introducing a new theory when a theory fails.

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<sup>16</sup> For an extensive discussion of these circumstances see Lakatos, 1974. In short, this argumentation comes down to the vision that theories consist of statements that can only be contrary to other statements instead of empirical phenomena. Along with this, science makes use of instruments to measure and observe parts of theories, which may lead to deviations and errors.

## **Chapter 3: methodology**

In this part of the research it will be explained how this research will be executed and which period of time is investigated. Our period of research will also be divided in subcases for the different theories used. After this, it will be explained how certain concepts are defined and how they are made observable and will be measured in this research.

### **3.1. Research method and case selection**

This research tries to compare the explanatory power of two theories. In order to do so, it is necessary to test the theories on the same case(s) since only this enables us to speak of one theory as being 'better' than the other. This makes an evaluation of one (set of) case(s) the best method, which means that a case study is the most suitable method of investigation. The number of research units is very limited, which makes a qualitative method of research best suitable in this paper.

When it comes to the generalizability of the results of this research, it must be acknowledged that our results can only be applied to other cases in which a hegemon is faced with a potential new hegemon. When this is the case however, our results could well be applicable to other cases as well, indicating that a new period has come in which relations between hegemons and potential newcomers no longer take the form proposed by offensive realism. Instead, the perception of states could have become an important factor.

This being said, we have to determine which period or periods will be investigated. What this research tries to do is to investigate the behavior of a hegemon faced with the rise of a potential new hegemon, applied to the case of US behavior towards China since this case seems not to follow patterns established by the theory of offensive realism. Therefore an alternative theory is introduced. This makes a case selection covering the period from the moment China started its rise in power up until the point when China's rise in power stopped or when it became a real new hegemon the best choice. An exact definition of this case will be given in §3.2. The entire period in which the rising power set in until the point in which some kind of status quo is achieved has to be taken into account. This new status quo can take different forms: China can remain less powerful than the US, become a new regional hegemon besides the US' hegemony or become more powerful than the US. Since this situation seems not yet to be achieved, our case will be defined as the period from the point in which China started its rise in power until today, since relations are still evolving.

This leaves us with the task of determining the period in which China's rise in power set in. This date is determined to be the year 1991, since from this year on a clear increase in power of China can be observed based on the CINC-index:

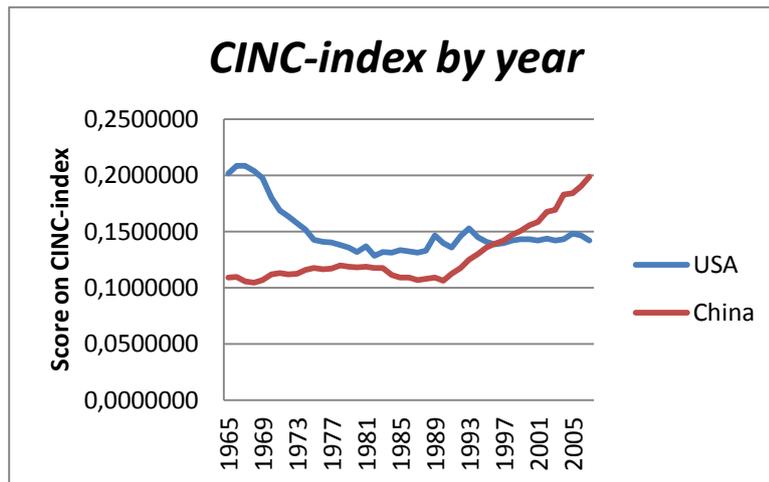


Fig. 2 (repeated). Data obtained from *Correlates of War* (2012). Self-produced graph.

Our next task is to decide if the period from 1991 until today should be considered as one case or be divided in subcases. Let us first consider the theory of offensive realism. The major question of concern here is 'when would we expect the US to start its balancing behavior towards China?' Mearsheimer has said something about this matter: he claimed that in 2000 China was not yet powerful enough to be a grave concern for the US, but when its growth of that moment would continue the US should balance against China in the future (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 375-400). This means the breaking point in which we should expect balancing to take place should not be put before this date. When we would determine the breaking point based on external resources such as the CINC-index, our test would become too severe for the theory of offensive realism since this breaking point lies before the year 2000. Since it is not my purpose to make the test too severe for the theory of offensive realism, an alternative has to be sought.

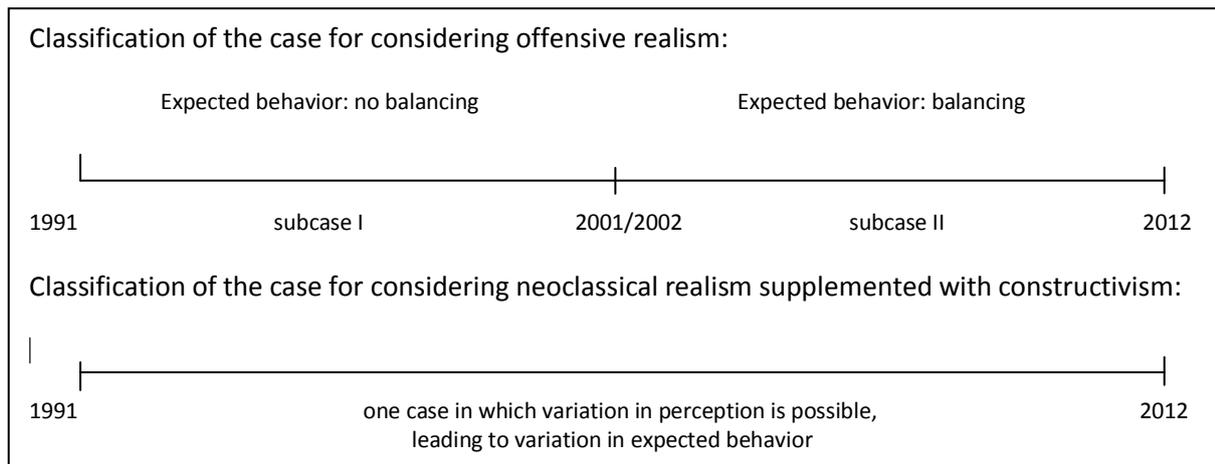
Based on the CINC-index, Mearsheimer's claim is not very convincing since based on this source we can state that the US was already overtaken in power somewhere around 1997. This source of course does not represent the full picture, but I am convinced that shortly after 2000-2001 the US should have become concerned about China's increase in power. This argument is enhanced by the distribution of power in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan has long been seen as the most important large power in Asia which overshadowed the concerns with China. This situation changed in the 1990s. When Japan started its rapid growth in the 1970s which experienced its peak during the 1980s, the country put the US in a difficult position (Shinohara, 1991, pp. 13). In the 1980s Japan had a higher per capita output in certain important sectors of the economy such as steel and car production, while at the same time Japan was internationally more competitive than the US. Japan also became a security concern to the US because it became the largest lender worldwide, while at the same time the US became the largest borrower (Shinohara, 1991, pp. 14-18). This situation altered in the 1990s, when the Japanese economy started its downturn around 1991 (Yeung & Lin,

2003, pp. 109). This process was aggravated by the Asian crisis which occurred in the years 1997 and 1998 and which hit Japan particularly hard (Higgot, 1998, pp. 333). This led to a situation where after 1998 it should have become clear to the US that China would become or already was the only regional hegemon in Asia.

Since I do not want to make the test for offensive realism too severe, Mearsheimer's claim that it was not yet necessary for the US to balance against China's power in 2000 will be taken into account. However, considering what has just been said, I believe it is obvious that shortly after this period balancing behavior should have commenced. It is too extreme to expect the US to start balancing behavior as soon as China started to gain any additional power at all. What I therefore intend to do is assume that the period in which balancing behavior is not expected to occur to range from 1991 until 2001. The year 2001 is chosen because of Mearsheimer's claim about the lack of necessity of US balancing behavior in 2000. In this way it is rightful to start research into balancing behavior in 2002 which is after Mearsheimer's mentioned date in his book from 2001. The period during which we should observe an alternation in US behavior towards balancing ranges from 2002 until recent times, which is 2012. This means the period 2001/2002 is considered to be a breaking point: before, the US cannot be expected to show balancing behavior, but after this point it should according to the theory of offensive realism.

The delineation of cases is harder when considering the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism. This theory deals with perceptions and ideas about the Self & Other, which are concepts that do not change overnight. One rather expects a gradual variation instead of a rapid change. This means that it is hardly possible to divide our period of investigation into two subcases as is done for the theory of offensive realism. Indeed, this research tries to determine what the perceptions of China among a number of government departments are and if this perception has changed over time. This makes it impossible to determine in advance if and in which period we should expect changing perceptions, since this is exactly what we are trying to investigate. Therefore, when discussing the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism our period of investigation (1991-2012) will be considered as one period. In this period, it will be investigated what the perceptions of China are in different US departments and if this perception has changed over time. If these perceptions are mapped, the following evaluation highlights the expected preferences for national policy stemming from these perceptions (per department).

When we graphically depict what has just been discussed about the division of the case into subcases concerning the theory of offensive realism, and of treating the case as one when discussing the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism, our research period looks as follows:



*Fig.7. classification of the cases for the theories under investigation*

With this choice of cases, it might be possible for neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism to explain the affairs under investigation if offensive realism fails in doing so. For this to happen, it is necessary that the timing in which the US changes its policy is in accordance with the timing of a change in perception<sup>17</sup>.

### 3.2. Definition and operationalization of concepts

When we consider the theories under investigation, it is not always so clear how the different concepts have to be interpreted and how they can be observed. This will therefore be explicated.

First, let us consider the theory of offensive realism by Mearsheimer. He states the international structure to restrict the behavior of states. This restriction consists of survival being the primary goal of states. Since this is an assumption of the theory and not a testable hypothesis, this does not need to be tested. It is assumed to be universally valid for all states in all cases. An important consequence which can be derived from this survival as ultimate goal is, as said before, states striving for power. Since state behavior is focused on obtaining power it is important to clarify the concept power. When we study Mearsheimer's definition of this concept, it seems to consist of two separate parts. First, Mearsheimer focuses on military power which means the specific assets and material resources available to a state (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 56-60). Second, Mearsheimer distinguishes resources which can easily be converted into military power which in practice comes down to wealth and population (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 55). The economic aspect of power is

<sup>17</sup> This could lead to the often heard argument that constructivism is not able to predict behavior of states but only to explain affairs after they have taken place. This however is not true, since it is clearly argued which behavior should be observed for constructivism to have explanatory power, which is a change in perception. This is not something which can only be observed afterwards but also at the time in which the changing perception takes place. When a change of perception indeed leads to a changing policy, it is well observable that the theory of constructivism has had explanatory power. True, it is almost impossible to predict the exact time of a change in perception, but one should wonder what the purpose of a theory is: to formulate expectations and predictions to explain reality or to predict the future. If an offensive realist prediction of the future turns out to be false because perceptions appear to matter, I believe it to be better to explain reality in a constructivist way.

however subordinate in importance to the military aspect of power. Population size is also taken into account in Mearsheimer's model in order to compare the power ratio of states. However, it is not a variable which can be adjusted through state policy. States cannot plan fluctuations in their population size in order to balance power against other states. This means this variable is not considered to be a balancing instrument in this research.

Since this research tries to determine if balancing behavior from the US towards China is taking place, it is of great importance to operationalize how balancing will be measured. Mearsheimer divides balancing into three kinds of behavior, which are the formation of alliances, diplomatic power directed towards providing a contra weight against a third party and the mobilization of extra resources by a state in order to alternate the balance of power. I will treat these components of balancing separately.

First, there is the formation of alliances. With alliances, self-proclaimed cooperation between states in order to counterbalance or deter the power of a third actor is meant. Of course intentions for cooperation cannot be considered the same as the real behavior of states, but this is not relevant in the proclamation of alliances between states. Alliances are an important tool in deterring actors from becoming too powerful. In order to accomplish this goal actual support in the case of full blown aggression is more than what is necessary, because the deterrent originating from the proclamation of an alliance is believed to be effective in constraining an aggressive power without actual action taking place. What is important for this research is the fact that states work together to counterbalance power by explicating their intentions to work together when faced with aggression from a third party. This outspoken intention of cooperation is what is considered to be an alliance for offensive realism and these alliances will indeed always remain insecure. Although this could be viewed as a broad definition of the concept, the reason for this choice is that we do not want to make the test for offensive realism too severe to pass in advance. The concept of formation of alliances can be measured by examining policy documents from the US governments as well as speeches, scientific articles and newspaper articles. If there is an outspoken intention for cooperation against aggression from a third party, the cooperation is considered to be an alliance. More extreme examples of this are the NATO and the EU, but such cooperation can also be found between states.

Second, there is the use of diplomatic power which can be used as a contra weight against another state. This means that a state is attempting to diminish the options of behavior from another state through contact between state officials. This can be done by threat, for instance when state A is trying to intimidate state B by threatening with reprisals if certain behavior is exhibited. It can also be done by offering benefits if certain policy options are chosen over other options, because this also reduces the amount of probable policy options. This concept can be measured by policy documents

as well. What must be found in these documents is contact between state officials of two or more countries in which one of the parties is trying to induce a certain option for policy on another state.

Third, a state can mobilize extra resources. As previously explained, Mearsheimer defined these resources as being military and economic. This concept is fairly easy to measure when compared to the other aspects of balancing, since we are talking about an observable increase in the amount of these resources. A mobilization of extra resources will be measured by comparing the military resources directed against the state at which balancing is believed to be executed in the periods under investigation. In order to investigate this mobilization, the redirecting of military resources due to conflicts in the region will be taken into account as well. US policy documents will be used in order to determine if real balancing behavior against China is taking place. These documents will enable us to determine if an increase in resources is indeed directed against China's rising power. This is necessary since it is possible that a state will only try to expand its resources in order to keep the status quo in order instead of making serious attempts to limit the power and actions of another state.

Apart from military power, Mearsheimer also states 'latent power' or in other words economic power, to be important since this power can be converted into military power. However, economic power is subordinate to military power according to Mearsheimer. This leads to the conclusion that if the US is really balancing against China's rising power, this should primarily be a military matter but that protecting its latent power could be a supplement on this behavior. Therefore, if military balancing is found in one of the subcases, it will be investigated as to how the US is protecting its economic or latent power since this would enforce balancing behavior. This would be done through a maximization of their own economic power in relation to China and through attempts to prevent China from large economic progress. Since economic power is subordinate to military power, it is only useful to investigate this resource if military balancing is taking place, because otherwise it is impossible to speak of real balancing behavior from an offensive realist perspective. Therefore, economic power will be considered to be a supplement on military power and investigated if balancing behavior as defined by Mearsheimer is found.

What we should observe in order to conclude that the US is seriously undertaking balancing behavior against China are US attempts to form coalitions with other states, executing diplomatic pressure and/or mobilizing extra resources which are directed against China's increasing power. In addition to this, we should observe US efforts to keep up its latent power in order to be able to control the balance of power.

Certain concepts from the theory of neorealism supplemented with constructivism must be operationalized as well. What is of great importance for this theory is the perceptions among US state departments when considering China. When it comes to perceptions, operationalization is

always difficult. In this research, the perception of China will be determined by asking the questions as to how the department views China (friend or enemy?), if China is perceived to be a goal on itself or just a mean towards achieving US goals, if China is believed to be a threat for US hegemony or if the US is believed to be way more powerful than China, and, lastly, if the image of China in the department has changed over time or has remained the same. The sources studied will be varied. Documents which clearly offer opportunities for determining perceptions of China are speeches, policy proposals, press releases, reports and newspaper articles. These sources can be obtained from the US government archives, which are freely available on the websites of the departments under study. When using speeches, bias could occur since these messages are directed towards a specific audience. This will be taken into account in the analysis. Apart from this, the analysis is not only based on speeches but also on other government documents, which will diminish the effect of this bias. There is always a risk of actors pronouncing visions and intentions which are different from their real visions and intentions. What does work to our advantage however is the fact that we are not dealing with just individuals but with government departments. This is advantageous because it is easier for individuals to deliberately hide their real intentions than it is for a whole department or government section. In this way we are better able to obtain reliable information by studying government documents.

When the images existing among different departments are mapped, it becomes possible to determine if there is divergence or overlap between the departments. The expected preferences for national policy which are expected based on the perception of the national interest will be compared to the actual national policy in order to determine if the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism has explanatory power in our case. The process of any conflict between the departments leading to the dominant preference being converted into policy will not be further examined: this process of struggle will be taken as given instead of being examined.

When it comes to taking into account the actors involved in this research, choices have to be made. Unfortunately, due to practical considerations and limits in time and it will not be possible to take all US actors related to China into account. Therefore only the US government will be taken into account, which fits well with Weldes's approach. Unfortunately, even the category 'US government' is too broad to study which means that certain departments must be selected for inclusion in this analysis. Since Mearsheimer defines power to be primarily military and economic, it is obvious to include the departments concerning these topics in our analysis. These are the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Commerce (DoC). Apart from these two departments, the State Department which is dealing with the US foreign affairs is also included. The reason for this is the fact that this department is focusing on the US relation with foreign countries, which makes it an important player in determining US policy towards China.

### **3.3. Studied sources and their reliability**

As said before, the sources under investigation are mainly policy documents from the US governments as well as speeches, scientific articles and newspaper articles. When studying documents from the US government itself, it is important to keep in mind that there might be some bias in these documents since they could represent a one-sided vision on relations or the status quo. However, by complementing these resources with newspaper articles and scientific articles, this bias will be corrected for since these resources represent broader visions. They are written from different perspectives and not solely represent pro-US views, which enables us to draw conclusions taking different perspectives into account.

In determining the perceptions in the US government, which is necessary in order to study neoclassical theory supplemented with constructivism, it is more difficult to make sure that the results from research are not biased since the most important way of investigating these perceptions is by using documents published by the US government itself. This could lead to bias if behind the scenes the US has decided to carry out only a specific attitude towards China, while in reality other visions on the country are present as well. This possibility will be taken into account. In order to minimize these effects, the analysis is not only based on speeches but on a range of different government documents which will reduce the likelihood of bias. As is said before, there is always a risk of actors pronouncing visions and intentions which are different from their real visions and intentions. What does work to our advantage however is the fact that we are not dealing with just individuals but with government departments. Since it is easier for individuals to deliberately hide their real intentions than it is for a whole department or government section, this means we are better able to obtain reliable information by studying government documents.

## **Chapter 4: answering the hypothesis concerning offensive realism**

In this part of the research I will attempt to answer the hypotheses that were formulated in chapter 2 of this research. This chapter is devoted to answering the hypothesis concerning offensive realism and is organized in the two subcases which were distinguished in chapter three (1991-2001 & 2002-2012). For each subcase the three points of balancing behavior will be discussed separately. After this chapter, a new chapter will follow concerning the hypothesis of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism.

### **4.1. US foreign policy towards China during 1991-2001**

The first hypothesis stated that if offensive realism is correct, the US strives for power maximization and want to remain the only regional hegemon and in that order demonstrate balancing behavior towards China. This means they should be forming coalitions with other states in order to counter China's rising power, executing diplomatic pressure and/or mobilizing extra resources.

Let us first map the international situation in which the US found itself in the 1990s. In 1989 the US and the Soviet Union ended the Cold war. This dramatically changed the field of international relations for the US since the international threat which was coming from the communist bloc led by the SU disappeared. When we consider the policy of the US after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the SU, the 1990s clearly show the US was executing large peacekeeping and nation building missions (CRS Issue Brief for Congress, 2005). Large interventions were undertaken when the interest of the US was at stake or when US allies were threatened by enemies. Examples of these kinds of operations are the Gulf War, the intervention in Yugoslavia and Bosnia, and missions in Liberia, Congo and Sudan. The US missions were mostly executed in the Middle East, Africa and eastern parts of Europe (CRS Issue Brief for Congress, 2005).

When we consider the US policy in Asia during this period, there were strategic concerns over long-running conflicts in East Asia. Examples of these are the division of the Korean peninsula, the tensions across the Taiwan Strait and the Indian-Pakistan nuclear competition. These developments shaped the US policy in the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2007). The focus of the US government was mainly on Japan since this country was rapidly expanding its economic and to some degree even its military capabilities.

That said, let us now consider the three aspects of balancing behavior as indicated by Mearsheimer.

### **The formation of coalitions/alliances**

In the period 1991-2001 the US did not conclude new military alliances in Asia. It was however already involved in some which could be understood as balancing behavior. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, the US established military alliances with some states in the Pacific-Asian region. In 1951, the US took part in the establishment of ANZUS which is an alliance based on a security treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States (Australianpolitics.com, 2012). The Treaty separately binds Australia, New Zealand and the United States to cooperate on defence matters. New Zealand temporarily withdrew in 1984 due to a conflict with the US, but rejoined the organization years later.

The countries forming ANZUS are not real Asian countries, but since the alliance is based on the reciprocity principle when it comes to the security of the members and since Australia and New Zealand are located in the vicinity of Asia, the alliance would be used if security was threatened in Asia. Since this alliance is founded in 1951, its formation cannot be considered balancing behavior relevant for this research. However, if we were to observe the US renewing its effort for using this alliance during the 1990s, this still could have indicated balancing behavior. This however was not the case. The alliance was used when Australia and New Zealand provided the US with military units in order to support the US in their war against terror in Afghanistan, following the terrorist attacks in the US on 9/11 (Australianpolitics.com, 2012). These actions were however not directed towards the balance of power in Asia but were instead used to keep certain actors in the Middle-East in check. Apart from this, ANZUS was not used for the security or for the securing of the power position of one of the members with regard to Asia. This means that this alliance cannot be considered part of balancing behavior in 1991-2001, since it was established long before China's increasing power and since no intensification of relations took place which would be expected in case of balancing.

More cooperation in the field of security in the Asia region can be found in the Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and the Philippines established in 1952 (US DoS, 2012c) and the Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and Korea in 1953 (United States Forces Korea, 2012). Both were established to maintain a stable and peaceful Asian region but were not used for the security or securing of power by any of the actors involved in the 1990s. The US also has a good relationship with South Korea which stems from the 1950s. In 1994 the US and South Korea cooperated to end North Korea's nuclear weapon research, but again this revival in their cooperation was not directed towards China. Instead the US tried to regulate the behavior of North Korea, with which it always has had a problematic relationship (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).

What the US did do however, was actively try to improve the relations with Japan in the 1990s in which it succeeded (Embassy of the United States in Japan, 2012). This is behavior eligible of being balancing behavior. This improvement was however due to the Japanese rise in power during

this period and mostly directed towards more economic cooperation in Asia instead of it being focused on a Chinese rise in power. The US was also actively involved in the relation between Taiwan and China, in which it sided with Taiwan. It is arguable that this is balancing behavior from the US towards China to counter its influence in Asia. On the other hand, it is also arguable that the US was not so much concerned about the balance of power but that it simply wanted to keep the Taiwan Strait open and secure its economic cooperation. The US is also a self-proclaimed advocate of the right to self-determination, which is a matter of importance in Taiwan. Since it is not the attempt of this research to make it impossible for the theory of offensive realism to explain our case, this behavior will be considered balancing behavior because it is possible to interpret this behavior in balancing as well as non-balancing behavior.

When we consider the US and alliances which it could have arranged with other countries in order to balance against the rising power of China, we can only conclude that it did not agree new alliances with Asian powers in the 1990s and that the alliances in which it already participated were not actively used to balance China's rise in power. In the case of existing alliances we would expect an intensification of relationships taking place in order to speak of balancing behavior, since this would indicate a renewed interest in China. This behavior did not take place. The only possible exception to this was the behavior the US demonstrated towards Taiwan. This meant the US did not seriously balance against China's power through the use of alliances during the 1990s.

### **Diplomatic pressures**

Earlier we found that during the 1990s the US foreign policy was mostly focused on developments in the Middle East and Africa. This of course did not mean there were no diplomatic ties with Asia which provided the US with possibilities for exerting pressure in this area. These developments will be discussed here.

First, the US exerted diplomatic pressure on China itself. This pressure was directed towards the improvement of human rights and the democratization of China, which the US believed to be of great importance (US DoS, 2012e). The pressure was executed by diplomatic efforts from US officials, but also through the United Nations. Apart from these efforts, there is no clear indication that the US exerted diplomatic pressure directly focused on the reduction of China's power.

A country the US was intensively pre-occupied with was Japan. Diplomatic pressure was put on Japan to change its foreign policy and to make it more proactive and more involved in international matters instead of being reactive and self-focused (Kohno, 1999). An example of this were the US efforts to let Japan play a bigger role in the Cambodian civil war in the late 1980s (Kohno, 1999). The reason for these efforts was the fact that Japan had become a large and influential international player and was believed to be the most important actor in the region. This

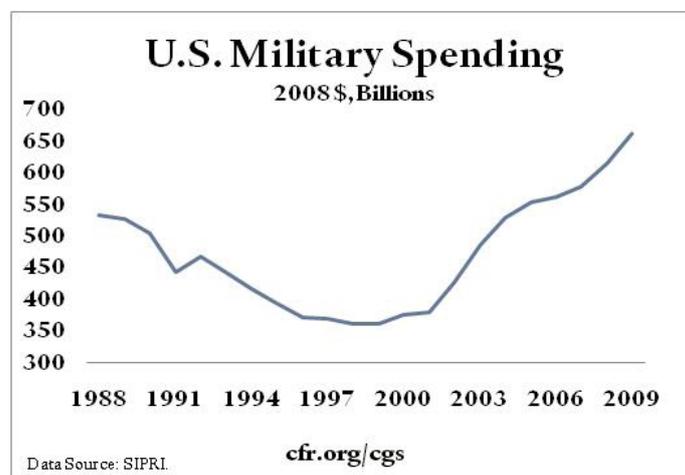
diplomatic pressure directed at more disclosure of the state can therefore hardly be understood as being balancing behavior towards China. Instead, it seems more probable that the US tried to maintain an influence on Japanese power, but this is not a case for this research.

Another state to which a lot of diplomatic attention was paid was North Korea. The reason for this was the US fear of the North Korean nuclear program. The diplomatic pressure took the form of diplomatic isolation and when this method seemed to be unsuccessful a diplomatic mission under the heading of former president Jimmy Carter was undertaken. This led to an Agreed Framework in 1994, but relations remain unstable until today (Congressional Research Service, 2010, pp. 5). These diplomatic pressures do not constitute clear balancing behavior since we are dealing with a special case involving nuclear weapons. However, North Korea is an ally of China (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011), and since we are not trying to confront offensive realism with a test impossible to pass, this behavior will be considered to be balancing behavior.

When we consider to the two 'western' countries which could possibly have exerted influence in the region, namely New Zealand and Australia, no events of any real interest took place between them and the US during this period. New Zealand and the US were on a less friendly footing following a conflict over New Zealand's anti-nuclear legislation. Australia and the US kept a friendly relation which made it unnecessary for the US to exert diplomatic pressure (US DoS, 2012c & US DoS, 2012d). This all being said, diplomatic pressures are not seriously used to limit the power of China during the 1990s. An exception on this is the case of North Korea. In general however, the focus was put on individual situations in states and on the role of Japan instead of there being real diplomatic balancing against China.

### **Expansion of resources**

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the Soviet threat, US military expenditure was seriously reduced (see figure 8):



**Fig. 8. US Military Spending (Council on Foreign Relations, 2012)**

This makes it arguable that we should conclude that the US was not demonstrating balancing behavior since they were not expanding their most important resource, i.e. military power. Since the purpose of this research is not to design a test impossible to pass for offensive realism, this line of argument will not be followed. Instead I argue it is still possible for the US to demonstrate balancing behavior against China although the US is decreasing its military expenditure, if the condition is met that the overall savings are combined with a regional increase in military resources in Asia. When the US is reducing its total expenditure but at the same time redistributing its military apparatus resulting in more resources in Asia, this behavior will also be considered to be balancing behavior.

During the 1990s the US was militarily present in Asia but foreign policy in this area did not have the highest priority. The Middle East and Africa received much higher attention and more military resources which made Asia a region in which the US was present, just like any other region in the world, but which it did not consider to be highly relevant for national security (Council of Foreign Relations, 2007). There was no real expansion of US presence in the region nor were there any indicators of serious involvement other than securing stability in the region for the purpose of the American interests. These interests were mostly economic and directed towards an increase of trade and focused on the national security by preventing certain countries from using or developing nuclear weapons (Council of Foreign Relations, 2007). There were some regions in which the US did expand its resources. From 1991-2001 the US executed some large interventions and peacekeeping missions. First the US played a very important role in the Gulf War which was a conflict between Iraq and an alliance led by the US (US DoS, 2012c). This conflict started in 1990 and ended in 1991 and took place in Kuwait, which makes it irrelevant for our research. The US also executed a large peacekeeping mission in Somalia in 1992-1994 and tried to uphold democracy in Haiti by intervening in 1994-1995. The US also participated in a NATO-led multinational implementation force (IFOR) during the war in Yugoslavia which took place during 1992-1994. Troops were also sent to Zaire, Libya and Albania in small operations in order to evacuate foreigners from these countries in 1998 and there were renewed bombing raids on Afghanistan and Iraq in 1999 (Grossman, 2012).

The interventions and conflicts were all regionally bound and mostly executed to restore balance in these regions. Of course conflicts outside of Asia can have consequences for the balance of power in Asia. This however was not the case. The conflicts had no real consequences for the regional balance of power in Asia, which meant these US operations cannot be considered as balancing behavior towards the region Asia or the state China in particular. The US could be working towards strengthening its power position worldwide, but this cannot be considered balancing behavior especially directed at China.

When we combine this with the fact that the military expenditure was reduced during this period, it is clear that it must be concluded that there was no expansion of military resources

indicating balancing behavior towards China during this period. The total amount of resources was diminished, and the focus of US military policy was pointed at peacekeeping missions and interventions which mainly took place in the Middle-East and adjacent areas. In conclusion, the US did not expand its resources in general and that there was a regional expansion of resources in Asia neither, which means that when we examine an expansion of resources as indicator of balancing behavior, we do not observe balancing behavior against China during this period.

#### **4.2. US foreign policy towards China during 2002-2012**

Now, let us consider the period 2002-2012. This period is interesting since at the end of 2001 there was a need to change the US foreign policy after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. These attacks led to a shift in focus of foreign policy towards the Middle-East since this area was believed to be a direct threat to US safety. After this period, there were demands for cuts in the military budget in the years 2004/2005. In 2008, the outbreak of the economic crisis led to a revival of this demand. Let us now investigate this period in a more detailed manner and based on the three categories of balancing behavior which are defined by Mearsheimer.

##### **The formation of coalitions/alliances**

In the period 2002-2012 the US did not evolve new military alliances or coalitions. However, as argued previously, if the US is breathing new life into its existing alliances, this could also indicate balancing behavior. When the US is found to have tightened its ties with states in the region in order to form a coalition against China, this is a sign of balancing behavior as well.

First, let us consider the ANZUS-alliance. In the first part of our period under investigation, New Zealand took no part in ANZUS due to a conflict mentioned earlier. Apart from this, in 2006 the ANZUS alliance was considered to be a 'bit of a relic' according to the US government. This indicates that this alliance is not important in US foreign policy. However, from 2011 onwards, the US strengthened its relation with Australia in military matters<sup>18</sup>. The strengthening of this relation was firmly directed towards the formation of a counter-power against China in order to prevent China from becoming too powerful in the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011). The same goes for the relation the US has with Japan; it is trying to improve its relations with this state as well with the goal of preventing China from becoming too powerful (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).

The US also reviewed its defense treaty South Korea. The US improved its relations with the country from 2008 onwards, with the goal of restraining North Korea from becoming too powerful in the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011). Apart from this, the renewed relation can of course

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<sup>18</sup> More about this strengthened relation can be found under the heading 'expansion of resources' on page 46-52

be used to form a counter-power against China, a case which becomes even more probable when we take into account the fact that China is North Korea largest and most important ally (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).

The relation between the US and the Philippines has always been good, but since 2012 the two countries conducted joint military exercise in an attempt to influence the balance of power in the Chinese Sea (BBC, 2012). Relations with Vietnam are improving as well. Since 2008, the US and Vietnam are having annual political-military talks and policy planning talks, which are now called the Defense Policy Dialogue (US DoS, 2012a).

This all indicates that the US is attempting to improve its relations with individual countries in the Asian region, which indicates balancing behavior. These active attempts were undertaken from 2008 onwards. Before this time it is not possible to speak of real balancing behavior in this category. There are however also allies which may possibly cause a problem for the US balancing behavior. This does not affect the US intentions for balancing but it could have practical implications. The US has a hard time finding (non-Asian) allies willing to support the US balancing behavior by actively participating. The European states, with which the US has a history of cooperation since World War II, are not willing to compete against China on a military base and therefore do not want to help the US with its balancing behavior towards China. This is due to the fact that the EU has large economic interests at stake in the region, particularly concerning China. The EU is China's largest export market and therefore a decisive factor in the performance of the European economies, while at the same time European governments are trying to attract more investments from China since this country has enormous foreign reserves which could be helpful in stabilizing the euro on global markets (Yale Global Online, 2012). Therefore there exists a large interdependence between the two regions. This makes the tie between the European area and China a strong one.

Australia, one of the countries which participate with the US in ANZUS, is becoming more agitated with the large US military presence in the region. There are government officials who are afraid that if Australia allows the US to be present in Asia on the large scale it wants to, other countries in the region will become suspicious towards Australia (The Telegraph, 2011a). This does not mean that US policy proposals to send troops to Australia cannot be executed but it does mean that US policy is not undisputed which makes the base for this policy more unstable than would otherwise be the case.

When it comes to the other Asian countries in the region, there is a general willingness to cooperate with the US as we have already seen. Other Asian states do not desire a situation in which China is capable of dominating them. Therefore they are expected to move to the American side if there is an escalation of tension between the US and China. However, there is a problem in that they do not want to make an explicit choice between the US and China in advance because this can only

be detrimental to their current relationship with China or the US and will probably damage their interests in various ways (The Telegraph, 2011b). By forcing these states towards expressed sympathy for US military presence in China's backyard the US might be smashing its own windows.

These developments could lead to a situation in which balancing behavior from the US might become less effective in its execution than would be the case if these other countries would proclaim strong and unconditional support for the US. This of course does not influence the US attitude towards balancing in Asia, but it does change the effect. However, we can state that based on what is said so far, the US has tried to form coalitions against China's power, but active attempts can only be found from 2008 onwards. Before this period, no real attempts were made.

### **Diplomatic pressures**

When it comes to diplomatic pressure, first of all the US was executing diplomatic pressure on China itself. As it already did in the 1990s, the US kept on exerting diplomatic pressure on China to improve human rights and democratic processes during 2002-2012 (US DoS, 2012e). Apart from this, the US was also exerting diplomatic pressure on China to open up its economic market and to give more insight in developments of its military apparatus (US DoS, 2001). This kind of diplomatic pressure is part of US balancing behavior, since in this way it becomes easier for the US as well as other states to estimate the military power of China and to form a counter-power, while at the same time it is an attempt to diminish the options of behavior for the Chinese government in a manner which is in favor of the US government.

When it comes to the diplomatic pressure on North Korea, which had already been exerted during the 1990s, the US is still trying to stop North Korea from developing nuclear weapons through diplomatic efforts. What is striking however is that the US was actively trying to obtain support from China in order to achieve this goal (Congressional Research Service, 2010, pp. 5). This led to the Six Party talks in which the US obtained help from China, South Korea, Japan and Russia and which took place from 2003 until 2007. This resulted in certain agreements between North Korea and these parties, but the situation is still believed to be unstable. The US is still hoping that China can play an important role in diminishing the North Korean threat in the future (Congressional Research Service, 2010, pp. 6). The diplomatic pressure the US puts on North Korea is an indicator of its attempts to keep the region in check and under its own influence. The diplomatic pressure exerted by the US is in effect forcing these states to make a choice as to which state they want to be dominant in Asia, the US or China (The Telegraph, 2011b).

When it comes to the relationship with New Zealand, the US did not deal a lot with the country during the period 2002-2012 due to a conflict about New Zealand's anti-nuclear legislation. The US evolved a conflict with New Zealand over the US nuclear ships since New Zealand banished

these ships from their ports. The US tried to exert diplomatic pressure to 'solve' the conflict and to get its ships back in place (US DoS, 2012d). This kind of behavior could be considered to be balancing behavior towards China, since military ships in the Asian region can be used as a deterrent against China's rising power and to consolidate US power in the Asian region.

When it comes to Australia, with which the US has a long and friendly relationship, there is no diplomatic pressure to be found. Relations kept being friendly and stable, and the US had no need to exert pressure in order to maintain smooth relations (US DoS, 2012c).

This means that diplomatic balancing occurred during 2001-2012. The US exerted diplomatic pressure in order to make China reveal its real military expenditure and to prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons. Diplomatic efforts were also undertaken to replace the US navy in New Zealand's waters.

### **Expansion of resources**

Finally, there is the expansion of resources which forms the last aspect of balancing behavior. First, let us look at the general trends the US was facing in our period of investigation. At the beginning of this century the US government started to develop proposals for a restructuring of their military apparatus. Due to bad experiences and high costs, government officials as well as US citizens demanded a stop in executing large counter-insurgency and nation building missions (Center for American Progress, 2011). Apart from these considerations there was also the need for savings (Center for American Progress, 2011). In 2004, Bush announced a program of change which he called his Global Posture Review which was aimed reducing the military expenditure. These plans were further developed during 2005. One of the intentions was to reduce the amount of military locations overseas (CRS Report for Congress, 2005). 70,000 troops which at the time were stationed in Europe and Asia would be brought back home to the US (40,000 out of Europe, 30,000 out of Asia), while other overseas troops would be redistributed to locations closer to areas considered to be potential troublesome spots (CRS Report for Congress, 2005). An example of this was the shifting of the troops left in Europe: these troops were moved from the center of Europe to the south and east so as to be stationed closer at hotspots in the Middle East.

The military bases that were intended to be maintained and the bases that would be newly established would also differ in form and functioning from bases in the past. Great bases were removed and replaced by smaller stations because of the need for financial savings on the military apparatus. Most of the large posts would be abolished and the US would make more use of cooperation with host nations in areas where which troops would be stationed which meant US forces would not be present on a daily basis. This cooperation would make it possible for the US to

maintain a military presence but also gave them some respite from their peacekeeping duties (CRS Report for Congress, 2005).

Considering this general policy, one could state that the US was not demonstrating balancing behavior since these savings mean a reduction in military resources. My argument however, is that because offensive realism must not be tested too strictly, we can speak of balancing behavior when we see that in spite of general savings there is nevertheless an expansion of military resources in Asia. This means we have to focus more precisely on the situation in Asia.

The proposed policy with respect to Asia in 2004/2005 was to consolidate bases in South Korea while at the same time remove 12,500 military employees from the region. The troops would have to be more efficient and leaner because this would make them cheaper to maintain (CRS Report for Congress, 2005). In Japan, 7,000 of the 15,000 military employees would be moved from Okinawa towards Guam and troops would also be shifted towards Africa (CRS Report for Congress, 2005). There was also talk of moving troops towards Hawaii and Alaska but there were doubts about the strategic usefulness of these movements, for instance by the former Deputy Secretary of Defense (CRS Report for Congress, 2004). What was problematic with these plans however was the fact that it was unclear what the exact costs of the entire reforms and regrouping would be. The Department of Defense had calculated that the costs would be around 7 billion dollar and would yield a saving of around 1 billion dollar a year after implementation. An investigation by an independent commission however led to the conclusion that the picture sketched by the DoD was too optimistic since certain costs were not included in the DoD analysis. The independent commission concluded the plan was too easily devised and the question about affordability persisted (CRS Report for Congress, 2005). This meant discussions about the intended budget cuts persisted without much action taking place. This changed under the Bush administration.

Although there was no question of real implementation of the proposed plans, the plans do reflect intentions for policy which indicate the way in which the US believed the national security to be best served. What is striking is that the intention for savings was accompanied by a retreat of troops from Asia towards the Middle East. This development is understandable from the US perspective when the attacks of 9/11 are taken into account, but are hard to understand from an offensive realist perspective when taking China's growing capacities into account. Although Mearsheimer states that savings in the military budget cannot coexist with balancing behavior, I believe it is easily understandable that the US did want to make savings on its military budget. The US possess a large military apparatus and is present in so many regions worldwide that savings can still be accompanied by increasing presence in a certain region at the cost of presence in other regions. Increased presence in this way does not necessarily mean an increase in the military budget because it is also possible to shift military resources in such a way that balancing in a certain region is

accompanied by savings. This however is not the case since savings were accompanied by a retreat from the Asian region.

The reduced performance of the proposed plans made in 2004/2005 led to a poor implementation. This was strengthened by other matters seeking attention, such as the financial crisis which started in 2008. In 2010 the US started making new plans concerning reduction of the costs of their defense department, which was partly due to the need for savings after the financial crisis came about. A very important difference for this research is the fact that the focus of the reforms was put on Asia. Again, the US intended to reduce US military personnel in Europe and to move personnel towards the Middle-East and Africa but this time Asia was pronounced to be a very important focus as well. The US and the NATO had become concerned of China's rising power (Yale Global Online, 2012). Europe clearly became a lower defense priority compared with Asia. As the US Military Department announced:

The United States will remove an Air Force fighter squadron from Germany, an air-control squadron from Italy, and two army heavy brigade combat teams and a headquarters element from Germany. Altogether, about 15,000 US troops will leave, leaving 65,000 after 2013, of which some 30,000 will be Army soldiers based in the heart of Europe – or almost 1/10th of the peak total during the Cold War (Yale Global Online, 2012).

Europe nowadays is considered as a less relevant region which is about to fall behind on military matters. This is due to its lack of producing a single coherent European policy, since separate member states continue to form military policy on a national base. The US therefore urged the EU to participate in taking 'urgent matters' around areas the US perceives as vital for demonstrating their power (Yale Global Online, 2012).

The new focus on the Asia-Pacific region consists of several measures. A very important one is the agreement between the US and Australia to perform a major expansion of the military ties between these two countries. Officials from both countries have stated they will cooperate more closely in the future. In practice this came down to the siting of 2,500 US marines in Darwin, a region in Australia (Washington Post, 2012a). Another measure which was already planned for and spoken about in 2004/2005 was a deal reached between the US and Japan which involved the relocation of thousands of US soldiers from the south Japanese islands towards Guam and other Asia-Pacific sites. A total of 9,000 soldiers would get relocated, of which 5,000 would be moved towards Guam and the remainder of troops would be moved towards Hawaii and Australia (Al Jazeera, 2012).

This renewed military focus on Asia was acknowledged by the American government and Obama clearly articulated this point:

'Our enduring interests in the region [the Asia-Pacific region, ed.] demand our enduring presence in this region' (The Telegraph, 2011b)

Obama declared that since the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan are coming to an end, the presence and missions in the Asia-Pacific region are the US top priority. He also declared that the reduction in the military expenditure should not be at the expense of the spending on defense in the Asia-Pacific region since military presence is considered to be crucial for the leading role the US plays in the region and which it does not want to lose (The Telegraph, 2011b). In order to accomplish this goal, the US wants to establish a new military pivot in Asia in order to strengthen its position in the region. The number of troops that finally will be based in Asia will be smaller, but the US will use their troops to create a much leaner, agile and flexible fighting force than the US troops had been in the past. In this way they would be able to quickly respond to new developments and they would be cheaper to maintain (The Telegraph, 2011a).

Concluding, we can state that an expansion of military resources towards China was taking place despite general savings in the military budget. As is explained in Chapter 3, if military balancing behavior is taking place, in supplement to this it is relevant to investigate if the US is also protecting its latent power. Since economic power is subordinate to military power, it is only useful to investigate the development of economic power if military balancing is also taking place because without military balancing it is impossible to speak of real balancing behavior from an offensive realist perspective. Let us now turn to an evaluation of the US protecting its latent power.

### US latent power

We just found that from 2010 onwards, US balancing behavior towards China is taking place. This means that the development of economic power from this period onwards will be investigated as well. First of all, when it comes to an expansion of economic resources in general, we can conclude that during the period 2002-2012 the US GDP has increased (figure 4). This meant that the US had increased resources which were convertible into military resources:

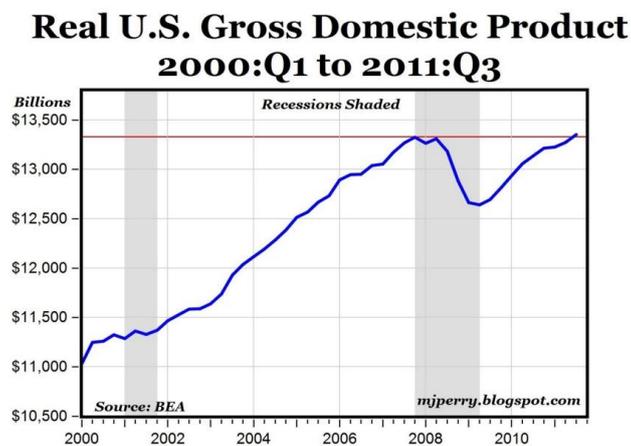


Fig. 9. Real US Gross Domestic Product 2000: Q<sub>1</sub> to 2011: Q<sub>3</sub> (US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2012)

However, when the economic development of the US is studied in more detail, it turns out that China plays an important role in this development. China is seen as key to economic growth and prosperity in the US. To further develop cooperation, the Strategic and Economic Dialogue was founded in 2009 (White House, 2011b). This partnership represents the highest-level bilateral forum, and serves the goal of discussing mostly economic issues between the two states (US Department of Treasury, 2012). Economic issues receive a special focus since growth and trade are considered crucial for the future possibilities of the US. The US is aware of the fact that economic development and cooperation works for both sides which means that success for one party will also mean success for the other party included in the cooperation. This becomes very clear when discussing US-Chinese trade: export from one country to the other improves the welfare of both countries while at the same time it makes the countries more interdependent on one another (White House, 2011b).

The US does acknowledge the fact that there is economic interdependence between the two states, but it tries to play down its importance. It states that its economy is still much larger than the Chinese economy, particularly when considered per capita. It also states that 87% of the US assets are owned by the US while only 1% is in Chinese hands. When it comes to Treasury Bills, only 8% of these loans are owned by China (White House, 2011b). It also puts emphasis on the argument that the success of one country does not need to come at the expense of another country, which makes cooperation mutually beneficial for both countries (White House, 2010a).

This argument when viewed alongside the US national debt is a problematic one. The US has a low savings rate, which means the US is highly dependent on foreign capital in order to fund its budget deficit and to secure investments in the US companies (Morrison & Labonte, 2011, Summary). The US is the country with the largest budget deficit worldwide, while at the same time China is the country with the largest budget surplus. In June 2010 China was the largest holder of US securities. It also held 25.9% of total foreign holdings in Treasury securities. There are US policymakers being concerned with the size of China's large holdings of US government debt. They are afraid that China could use its large holdings to bargain in economic as well as noneconomic issues (Morrison & Labonte, 2011, Summary). A second striking fact is that the US is still trying to expand its export to China, for which it wants to further open up the Chinese market (US DoS). Goal of this opening up is to make it easier for US firms to sell products and even establish companies in China (The Washington Post, 2012b).

What we can and must conclude from this, is that the US government is aware of the interdependence between the US and China. It is however not trying to prevent this relation of mutual dependence for further extension, on the contrary, the US is trying to further disclose the Chinese economy. This policy is followed since the US believes its economy will profit from these developments. It does however also mean that the US economy is increasingly dependent on

Chinese stability and prosperity. This means the US power increases in the sense that welfare, which is by Mearsheimer identified as a source of power, expands. At the same time however, the relative latent power of the US in relation to China diminishes since success for the US means a success for China as well. Apart from this is the economic policy contrary to the balancing behavior the US executes: when conflict breaks out between the US and China while at the same time the US latent power is dependent on cooperation with China, this means that conflict would lead to a reduction in US potential power. Conflict would lead to economic downturn and therefore to a reduction in the possibilities to deter China's power. This behavior does therefore not fit in with the framework of balancing.

Of course, this does not mean that we cannot say that balancing behavior is taking place, but it is at least notable that economic policy does not coincide with military policy. It is unlikely that Mearsheimer would expect the US to expand its interdependence with China since this behavior does not lead to an expansion or conservation of US latent power which means that the US position becomes less strong. This leads to an ambiguous situation: the US does move its military resources towards the Asia Pacific Region but at the same time cannot be dragged into conflict with China since this would reduce its latent power and therefore weaken its position towards China.

When we conclude the developments discussed in this chapter, two points are important. First, based on expectations derived from offensive realism, we expected balancing behavior from the US against China to start taking place in 2002. This is however not what we observe in reality. In 2004/2005 Bush made plans for large scale savings in the military budget which were not accompanied by a movement of troops towards Asia. Instead, these savings meant a removal of troops from Asia towards the Middle-East. This means that in this period we certainly cannot speak of balancing behavior. This situation changes in 2010 when the US again faces savings in its military budget, but in spite of these savings moves more of its military resources towards the Asia area in order to balance against China's rising power. This means that based on this aspect of balancing behavior we indeed can state that that balancing behavior was taking place from 2010 onwards. If we relate this to the theory of offensive realism, this means the theory has a serious problem when it comes to the timing of the balancing behavior. In 2010, China already experienced an enormous increase in power, which makes it inexplicable for offensive realism to explain the timing of balancing behavior.

Second, the economic interdependence between the US and China is striking. Economic resources are considered to be important since they can be converted into military power. During the period in which the US is expanding its military resources which can be used against China's rising power, it is also becoming increasingly interdependent with China when it comes to economic

power. We would expect the US to diminish and prevent this interdependence, but this is not the case. On the contrary, more cooperation with China is believed to be beneficial for the US economy.

The conclusion therefore must be that an expansion of military resources was undertaken with effect from 2010 onwards. Apart from this the US does not evade a situation in which it becomes increasingly economic interdependent with China, which means the balancing behavior is not strengthened by a US economic policy focusing on strengthening its latent power in relation to China. We would expect this to happen, since economic interdependence leads to a situation where in economic resources can no longer be converted into military resources, since this would damage economic development and lead to a reduction in resources which are necessary in conflict.

#### **4.3. Conclusion concerning the explanatory power of the theory of offensive realism**

Based on what has been said so far, we should be able to draw a general conclusion concerning the explanatory power of offensive realism in the two cases highlighted. First there is the case ranging from 1991-2001. In advance, we formulated the expectation that in this period we would not find signs of balancing behavior from the US towards China. This was indeed the case. The US did not actively undertake active attempts to establish new alliances with which the power of China could be curtailed. Apart from this, the US did not use the alliances in which it was already involved in order to limit China's power. When it comes to diplomatic pressure there is no balancing behavior taking place since diplomatic pressures exerted are not directed towards limiting China's power. An exception on this is the situation in Taiwan, but this is not enough to speak of real and serious balancing. Finally, there is the expansion of resources which is considered to be part of balancing behavior. There was however no expansion of military resources and neither were there signs of a focus on Asia or China with the resources already at US disposal. This leads to the conclusion that, as we already expected, the period 1991-2001 is not considered to be a period in which the US showed balancing behavior against China based on the offensive realist criteria.

Next, this research covered the period 2002-2012. When we consider aspect of balancing consisting of alliances, the US did not participate in new alliances in Asia, but it did improve relations with some states it already was cooperating with. These coalitions are clearly directed towards the restriction of China's power. This form of balancing was taking place from 2008 onwards. Before this period, no real attempts at balancing can be found. However, at the same time there were also limitations in the use of alliances since Europe did not want to participate in military balancing against China and since in Australia they were sending increasingly conflicting messages regarding the US military presence in the region. This does not mean that we cannot speak of balancing behavior nor that it will become impossible for the US to perform balance behavior since it does not change the US willingness towards balancing behavior. What is striking however is the timing of the

increased use of alliances in balancing behavior. The theory of offensive realism would expect balancing to take place from 2002 onwards instead of only starting in 2008.

Considering the second way in which balancing behavior can take place, which is exerting diplomatic pressures, we do observe balancing behavior. There is the constant pressure on China to reveal their real military expenses and the pressure on North Korea to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons. Lastly, the US exerts pressure on New Zealand in order to station their navy in New Zealand's waters.

Finally, there is the matter of expansion of resources. During the entire period there was a need for savings in the military expenditure. However, the decreasing budget was not reduced at the expense of intensifying the amount of military resources in Asia, which were enlarged. This meant we did observe balancing behavior from the US against China from 2010 onwards, but not in the period before 2010 since in that period the focus of foreign policy was put on the Middle-East. From 2010 onwards, it is clearly seen that the military resources in Asia were expanded and that the reason of this expansion was to counter the Chinese power in the region. This meant military balancing was taking place. Taking these three forms of balancing behavior into account, we will speak of US balancing behavior against China from 2008 onwards. In this year the US started balancing through its alliances and since we do not want to make the test for offensive realism too severe, this year will be taken as turning point in US policy although balancing was not yet taking place through diplomatic pressures and an expansion of resources.

When we take into account that latent or economic power is considered to be a supplement on military power, it was also relevant to investigate the developments concerning the US economic power from 2008 onwards into account. Latent power could be used to complement military power. Our research showed that the US became more economically dependent on China. When the US wants to translate economic resources into military resources directed against China, this would lead to a decrease in their economic development or, in other words, a decrease in economic resources which would damage their power position. The fact that the US does not try to diminish its interdependence with China is contrary to offensive realist expectations. This means that economic power is not used to enforce balancing behavior but instead economic developments might weaken US balancing behavior.

This means that apart from offensive realism having problems explaining the timing of balancing behavior, contrary to expectations latent power is not used to enforce balancing behavior. From 2010 onwards, it is possible to observe balancing behavior, but we cannot ignore that offensive realism has problems explaining this timing of balancing behavior and that it is at least remarkable that latent power is not used to enforce balancing behavior. Offensive realism would certainly not expect that the US does not try to diminish economic interdependence while balancing against

China. Economic interdependence makes the US dependent on China because conflict would reduce US potential power and lead to economic downturn, which would also reduce the possibilities to deter China's power.

This all being said, we cannot conclude differently than that the theory of offensive realism has limited explanatory power when it comes to US foreign policy towards China in the period 2002-2012. In the period 1991-2001 we do observe the expected behavior (which is a lack of balancing power) but this could also be due to coincidence since the chance of not showing balancing behavior against a random state is always larger than the chance that the US would be performing balancing behavior. In the period 2002-2012 we do observe balancing behavior from 2008 onwards when the US started to actively improve its relations with states in the region. Since we do not want to totally condemn offensive realism, this year has been taken as the turning point. Offensive realism is incorrect when it comes to the degree of balancing and the timing of this balancing. This makes the theory inadequate in explaining our case.

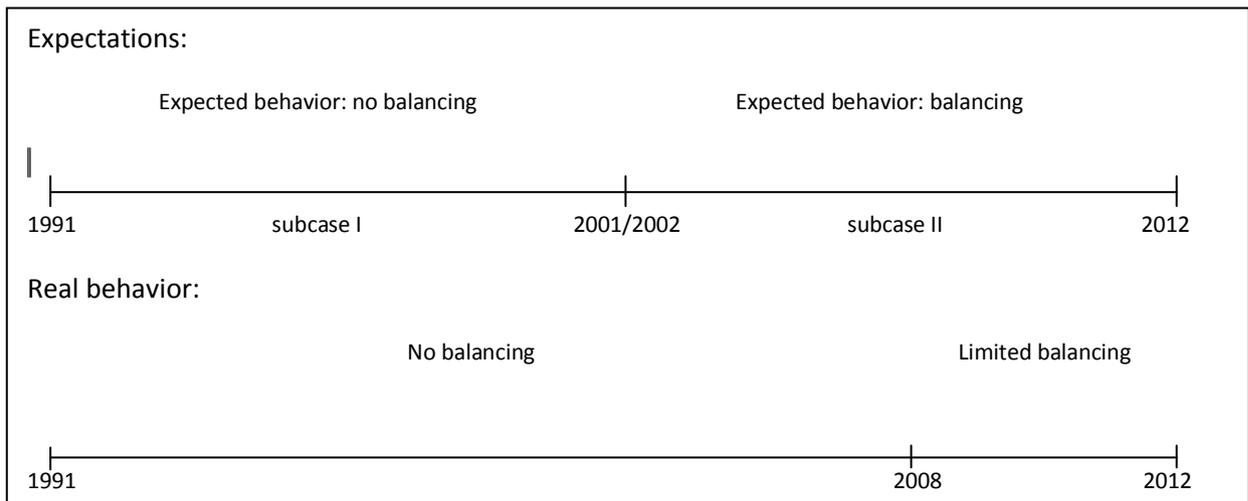


Fig. 10. Expectations versus real behavior based on the offensive realist theory

## **Chapter 5: answering the hypothesis concerning neoclassical realism combined with constructivism**

In this part of the research I will attempt to answer the hypothesis concerning neoclassical realism and constructivism. The existing perceptions of different US state departments concerning China will be mapped as well to show how different visions of the national interest arise from these differences. Afterwards a conclusion will be drawn on the ability of this theory in explaining the relation between the US and China.

### **5.1. Perceptions of China in the Department of Defense**

The first department to be discussed in this research is the Department of Defense (DoD). The dominant perception in the DoD is very apparent when studying the Defense Strategy or the Annual Reports to Congress. These sources, supplemented with speeches from employees of these departments, are representing a clear general line which changes over time.

When we consider the beginning of the 1990s, the perception of China among US officials was, first of all, that China could be used as an instrument in order to improve the US national interest. The regional focus of the US policy in Asia was put on Japan. This led to a situation where in the US generally viewed China as a means towards achieving regional and national goals in the region (US DoD, 1996b). China could be used for achieving US political, economic and security goals. The country was considered to be a regional power and it was not yet identified as a state that would play a serious global role on the same level of the US (US DoD, 1996a). A second important element of the Chinese identity, according to the US, was the high degree of secrecy concerning Chinese national policy, military in particular, which led to distrust from the side of the US. This is the reason why military-to-military relations were hard to establish, as China did not reveal meaningful information about its military capacities. China was clearly not believed to be a power or state which could be compared with the US, the US wanted to prevent conflict in the region but had a hard time building a reliable relation with China due to distrust from the American side. They did however not want to contain China's power but instead expand military contact with the country (US DoD, 1997). These identity aspects are captured in this quote from General John Shalikashvili:

China is a Great Power, and it is rapidly becoming a Greater Power. And believe me, we see your development, as being in our interest. I am told that there are some people here in China, who believe that the United States seeks to contain China. Nothing could be further from the truth. Containment would have to include severe political, economic, and military policies, none of which are in evidence in our policy toward China. Our interests can only be served, in the words of Secretary of State Madeline Albright, by a China that is neither threatening nor threatened. In the information age, at the dawn of the 21st century, our security and prosperity, and your security and prosperity are inextricably linked (US DoD, 1997).

This image of China was in some parts retained and in some parts changed over time. From 1998 onwards, China tried to obtain recognition of it becoming a medium and maybe even a large power in 2050. This expression of aspirations led to a renewed interest from the US in the Chinese developments (US DoD, 2000b). The US did not view the Chinese claims as very credible because it believed the country still had to deal with very large internal struggles. For this reason, the US held the vision that the country was in need of large economic growth in order for the Chinese government to keep its legitimacy. China started to build its military power as well, but because of the image the US had of China it believed the military buildup to be primarily directed at securing their own national and economic power (US DoD, 2000b). The US was aware of the fact that China was modernizing their military apparatus, but believed their focus was on internal matters, and because the US saw China as a lesser power and highly dependent on Russia and other former Soviet states for their military tools, they believed China not to be a concern (US DoD, 2000b). This becomes clear when in the DoD Report to Congress it is stated:

China seeks to become the preeminent power among regional states in East Asia. Beijing is pursuing a regional security strategy aimed at preserving what it perceives as its sovereign interests in Taiwan, the South China Sea, and elsewhere on its periphery and protecting its economic interests, while at the same time promoting regional stability [...] The technological level of China's defense industrial complex is too far behind that of the West to produce weaponry that could challenge a technologically advanced foe such as the United States or Japan for an indefinite period of time. [...] Nevertheless, the PLA will remain heavily dependent on foreign sources for key modern weapons and hardware, platforms, and technologies, as well as for systems engineering and integration. Even if the PLA were to acquire the modern weaponry it seeks, integrating those systems and training commanders and troops to employ them will remain a difficult task and will inhibit the PLA's maturation into a world-class military force [...] In the short term (2000-2005), the PLA will have only a limited capability to conduct integrated operations against Taiwan. The PLA conducts interservice exercises at the tactical level, but the services are not fully integrated into a cohesive combat force. This weakness would contribute to Taiwan's ability to sustain air, sea and ground operations in the face of a PLA attack in the short term (US DoD, 2000b).

This also contributed to the belief that although China started complaining about US interference in the region, these complaints were not taken too seriously since China did not possess sufficient power to seriously bother US power.

Apart from this, China became more of a country which the US saw as suited to build a relationship with. It started to participate in international organizations and took part in international operations (US DoD, 2000b). What is interesting however is that during this period the US kept interpreting China to be a state not to trust when it came to its data concerning military power and that military to military exchanges should only be undertaken when it offered a direct advantage to the US (US DoD, 2001). The DoD mistrusted the Chinese government on three particular points. First, it distrusted the Chinese intentions with regard to Taiwan. Second, it was unable to know for sure the capabilities of the Chinese army. Third, it was uncertain about the developments of the Chinese military changes (US DoD, 2002a, pp. 1). Therefore, their relationship lacked any real trust. However,

the US was convinced of its belief that China has a history of geopolitics challenges and that the focus of its military apparatus lies at these domestic struggles. Apart from this, the focus of the modernization of the military apparatus was believed to be aimed primarily at Taiwan, which made the US mostly concerned with the potential of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Again, due to the believed dependence of China on other countries for its military modernization and functioning, the US was not seriously worried (US DoD, 2002a). This became clear in the DoD Report concerning China's military capabilities of 2002:

'China's force modernization program is heavily reliant upon assistance from Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union (FSU). China hopes to fill short-term gaps in capabilities by significantly expanding its procurement of Russian weapon systems and technical assistance over the next several years. The success of China's force modernization will also depend upon its ability to overcome a number of technical, logistical, and training obstacles' (US DoD, 2002a, pp. 39)

When the US defined its relations with China during these years at the beginning of this millennium, it often puts emphasis on the fact that the US wanted to improve the relationship with China for the future (US DoD, 2002b). The DoD at the same time kept on emphasizing China's dependence on Russia and former Soviet States for expanding its military apparatus and for its modernization (US DoD, 2003). This belief seems to be one of the main reasons why building a mutual appreciated relation was believed to be a viable option.

Somewhere around the year 2004/2005 the dominant vision of China's goals slightly changed. During this period, the US started believing China to have global aspirations for which it deliberately hid its real capacities in order to hide their intentions of becoming a real superpower (US DoD, 2004). The US vision on China's possibilities for military intervention became more ambiguous: they still believed the internal strategy to have priority, but the US is for the first time seriously took into account the fact that China had the potential to successfully invade Taiwan (US DoD, 2004).

In the years following, a real change in perception and therefore attitude towards China took place. For the first time, the US started talking about China being a threat since it tried to expand its influence in the Asian region:

'Long-term trends in China's strategic nuclear forces modernization, land- and sea-based access denial capabilities, and emerging precision-strike weapons have the potential to pose credible threats to modern militaries operating in the region' (US DoD, 2006a, pp. 1)

At the same time, the US still put great emphasis on its belief that due to internal problems the rise of China's power would not be without problems (US DoD, 2006b). It is also noticed that China was very much dependent on other countries for its energy and that economic growth was needed by the communistic government in order to have a legitimate base for its power (US DoD, 2006a). This led to the conviction that China would not start a conflict in, for instance Taiwan, because it did not have

the military capacity to realize its political goals while at the same time it seriously feared political and economic repercussions (US DoD, 2006a).

The US started active attempts to get a brighter vision on Chinese capabilities since the country became more and more involved in regional and global issues. Apart from a partner who can be used to the advantage of the US, the DoD saw China now more as a partner and a competitor at the same time. This became clear in Gates speech, in which he proclaims:

"I do not see China at this point as a strategic adversary of the United States," Gates said. "It's a partner in some respects. It's a competitor in other respects. And so we are simply watching to see what they're doing." [...] "I think that greater transparency would help from the standpoint of the Chinese in terms of both what they're doing and what their strategies are, their intent in modernizing their forces. A greater openness about the purposes (would help)," Gates said during the roundtable. "My guess is that what they've announced does not represent their entire military budget. ... I think one of the most significant things they could do to provide reassurance to people is greater openness or transparency about what they're doing." (US DoD, 2007c).

At this time, the US believed the published military budget of China to be around one third of the real expenditures. It wanted China to participate in global issues and international matters, but it urged China to be transparent about its power and intentions at the same time (US DoD, 2008c).

In the years 2009-2010, the DoD's perception of China changed slightly. The US wanted to retain worldwide dominance and superiority, for which balancing against the Asia-Pacific regions and China in particular was seen to be of great importance. The image of China had become a little ambiguous. The DoD insisted on the US remaining the largest power and sole hegemon but at the same time it did see possibilities arising from the development of China. On the one hand, national security deals with matters like mass destruction weapons, violent extremists and nuclear power and for these goals the DoD believed it to be best to prevent China from becoming a superpower, but on the other hand security also benefits from an increasing power in China. For example, this is demonstrated in the increasing possibilities for providing public goods when China becomes a large power able of large contributions in this field. The DoD does see an important role for China in the future (US DoD, 2010).

The DoD declared that territorial interest was no longer the only interests that matter. It saw positive consequences arising from China's increase in power, since this meant possibilities for humanitarian contributions and the distribution of public goods worldwide (US DoD, 2010). What the US therefore aimed to do was to remain the leading power while at the same time allowing China to gain more power in order to support US power (Defense Strategic Guidance, pp. 5-8). Aggression would still be deterred and defeated. Because of the uncertainty of the future the Department of Defense saw it necessary to keep a broad portfolio of defensive powers. There is also a great emphasis on reversibility because investments which are made now need to leave options open for investments necessary in the future (Defense Strategic Guidance, 2012, pp. 10-11).

The image that now seems to exist among the US DoD when considering China is that China could be used to help the US in executing certain global tasks and in this way can be allowed to expand its military capabilities. This is what the US means when they state that ‘the peaceful rise’ of China should be allowed because in some ways this contributes to the US interest. At the same time, there is no such thing as a relationship of trust between the two, the US clearly mistrusts the Chinese military capabilities and in this fashion the DoD stresses it to be necessary to remain the largest power in the region as well as worldwide (US DoD, 2010). Due to a lack of trust and faith in China, the US believes that in order to achieve stability it is necessary to remain the regional hegemon in Asia.

When we conclude what has been said so far, we can observe a few general points. The perception the US DoD has about China at this moment, is that it is still more powerful than China. China can however not be trusted to honor its military agreements and declare its real capacities. It does not see China as a superpower at the same level as the US, but it believes it can use China in some circumstances in favor of US interests.

**Table 1. Overview of the DoD perception of China, period 1991-2012.**

1991-1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Instrument for reaching US goals and improving interests</li> <li>- Regional power, not considered to have a serious global role</li> <li>- Unreliable due to secrecy concerning military expenditures</li> </ul>
1998-2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More interesting due to acknowledgement of China being a medium power and on the long term maybe even a large power</li> <li>- Incredible due to internal problems</li> <li>- Modernization/increasing military expenses directed towards internal problems</li> </ul>
2001-2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Secrecy concerning military expenditures makes real trust impossible</li> <li>- US has interest in a good relation</li> <li>- No serious concurrent when it comes to power</li> </ul>
2004-2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global aspirations have arisen which is the reason for earlier secrecy concerning military power</li> <li>- Possible danger for the national security in the long run</li> </ul>
2006-2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increasing insight in military expenses due to more international involvement, but still not trustworthy.</li> </ul>
2009-2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rise in power is a threat to the national security</li> <li>- Rise in power leads to opportunities in the form of burden sharing in international matters</li> </ul>
2010-2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- China's rise provides opportunities</li> <li>- Possible threat to the national security, which means the peacefulness of China must be closely monitored</li> </ul>

### **The DoD's interpretation of US national interest**

What we are really interested in, is what we should expect to be the DoD's interpretation of the US national interest. When we consider the perception the US has of China, first there was a period in which the US believed China's rising power to be modest and directed towards internal struggle. The US was convinced the Chinese government needed economic growth to legitimize its power. This

meant it was logical not to use too much military resources in order to constrain China, since its increased power was not believed to be threatening or be used in a way contrary to the US interest. An exception on this was the Chinese conflict with Taiwan because the US interest was to keep the Taiwan Strait open and not let it fall into Chinese hands. What we should therefore expect to observe is the DoD trying to build a relation with China in so far as this is in the US interest. In areas where the DoD would not expect to be able to make use of a pact with China, we should not expect the two states to work together. A policy of balancing would not seem to be probable, since it is unnecessary for the US to do so.

Around 2004/2005 this situation changed. China revealed its global ambitions and its military modernization and expansion were no longer believed to be directed towards internal struggles. The existing distrust became more important since the US no longer believed China to be dependent on Russia and other former Soviet states for its military expansion. Although there was more international involvement with China, the DoD still did not believe China to be trustworthy. On the contrary, from 2009 onwards China was believed to be a real threat to national security from a DoD perspective since US hegemony in Asia became much more insecure. From this we would expect the need of balancing against Chinese power to be much larger. At the same time, precisely because China had become such a large power which was still increasing, the DoD saw opportunities in the area of burden sharing in international matters.

This all makes the DoD perception towards China ambiguous: on the one hand China's rising power threatened national security, yet on the other hand it also provided the US with other opportunities. What we therefore expected to be the DoD's preferences were attempts to increase cooperation and disclosure from the side of the US towards China in order to keep China in check.

## **5.2. Perceptions of China in the Department of State**

The second department under investigation is the Department of State (DoS). When considering the perception of China by this department, some speeches of high-ranked state officials were investigated as well since they often display the US foreign policy which is designed in this department.

In the 90s, the DoS mainly saw China as a mean which could be used to improve the US national interest through cooperation. Only the US economic interest was taken into account. There was already recognition that China would become a global economic power:

'Relations with China are crucial. It is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has nuclear weapons, and is destined to become a global economic power' (US DoS, 1995a)

The most important goal the DoS devoted itself to was promoting the US economic interests for which a stronger relationship with China was considered necessary. This was observed to be a difficult issue due to the divergence that exists in the area of human rights and the peculiar situation involving Taiwan, for which the DoS had no understanding. The US started planning for bilateral agreements with China in order to promote US interest with respect to trade (US DoS, 1995a). The divergence in other policy areas led to a relationship that faced difficulties during the 1990s (US DoS, 1995b). That China was not considered to be a threat but instead as an opportunity shows in policy documents:

‘Does this all mean that China is an aggressive power bent on dominating or threatening its neighbors, and that the proper response should be one of containment, a kind of revival of SEATO? In a word, no. The picture is much more complex than these troubling signs. [...] It is critically important, as we consider China's position from a security perspective, to have a clear view of China's own priorities. Its number one priority is economic development, its transformation from a poor developing country into a wealthy country [...] Put simply, China's development requires a peaceful international environment, and this has been China's goal in the last decade- and-a- half (US DoS, 1995b).

They DoS was aware of the fact that China is the country with the largest population and standing army worldwide, and did not believe the road towards China's integration as a large power in the international structure was without obstacles (US DoS, 1995b). But at the same time, China was believed to have peaceful intentions since international stability was in the Chinese national interest. These US beliefs were reflected and underpinned by the Chinese efforts to improve relations with their neighboring states, the increased authorizations of foreign companies to which the country has opened up and their recognition of the non-proliferation treaty and the Law of the Sea. The US-Chinese relations were observed to be a ‘complex picture’, but China was not observed to be a threat. The best thing to do was to integrate in international institutions since this would make their development more steerable:

‘[...] the question is not whether China will be a major player in global as well as regional security affairs, but rather when and how. China's rapid economic development, its growing military capabilities, and its historic international role will make it a major power in the coming century. The challenge we face is to assure that as China develops as a global actor, it does so constructively, as a country integrated into international institutions and committed to practices enshrined in international law. I believe that the policies we pursue should help encourage that evolution’ (US DoS, 1995b).

It became also clear that the DoS wanted to look after its own interests in the future but that isolation or containment of China was not the preferred policy. Economic policy should lead to the accomplishment of other goals (US DoS, 1996b).

The need for economic cooperation kept being the most important goal of the DoS during the following years. Apart from this, as China's power kept growing, there were increasingly expectations for cooperation on other global issues (US DoS, 2002). This meant that China was still considered to be an instrument towards US goals. In 2003, the relations between China and the US

were better than ever according to the US, and global integration of China became a main target of the DoS (US DoS, 2003). The DoS believed the international interests of China to be largely congruent with US interests:

'However, we can say that on some of the most important international issues of the day, China and the United States have overlapping, if not identical, interests, and that the areas of shared interest and cooperation are growing in both scope and intensity' (US DoS, 2003).

This led to a situation in which the DoS was not fearful of a Chinese growth of power. Great improvements had been made in the area of proliferation, and although there were areas in which Chinese policy had to be improved, the DoS was optimistic about Chinese efforts for doing so (US DoS, 2003).

The relation was not totally spotless however. Although the DoS acknowledged US improvements in the area of proliferation and was in favor of the Chinese membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group they still saw points to be improved (US DoS, 2004). An example of this was the fact that Chinese entities still had contact with Pakistan and Iran concerning nuclear weapons. The increasing dialogue created a greater level of trust in Chinese intentions (US DoS, 2005a). This increased trust was also helped by the role China played in keeping North Asia stable and peaceful (US DoS, 2005b). This trust becomes clearer when the DoS demonstrate a willingness to cooperate with China in the field of energy (Obama's speech 'Resources for the future, 2005). It also became clearer from statements about the US and China sharing national interests:

'America and China share many common interests. We are working together in the war on terror. We are fighting to defeat a ruthless enemy of order and civilization. We are partners in diplomacy working to meet the dangers of the 21st century' (US DoS, 2005).

Around 2005/2006, China became more and more perceived as a real partner in global issues. This is due to the fact that cooperation was expanding and intensifying. The DoS was very content with the cooperation between China and the US in the deploying of economic activities in Africa, and during this period the US kept referring to China as a 'rising strategic power throughout the world' (US DoS, 2007a). Cooperation rapidly expanded as the DoS also wanted to participate in the field of technology and intellectual property, with the argument that all these policy areas are closely related to the US economy and therefore China must be involved (US DoS, 2007b).

Due to the cooperation in all these different fields, the DoS did not perceive China to be a threat to the international security but instead observed opportunities from China's increasing power (US DoS, 2008). An example of this is the fact that the DoS did not perceive the US trade deficit with respect to China to be a matter of concern. Instead, they emphasized the fact that the increased export towards China has had large benefits and had resulted in economic growth, and that the US-

Chinese relation was of great importance (US DoS, 2008). The DoS believed China to have had a very large impact on the US as well as the other way around, which meant the US had to cooperate with China (US DoS, 2009). The DoS became more and more convinced of the shared responsibility of the US and China when it came to global issues (US DoS, 2010). The DoS was aware that there were still obstacles to overcome (human rights, Taiwan, etc.) but at the same time China was perceived to be important for US welfare:

The United States has a strong interest in continuing its tradition of economic and strategic leadership, and Asia has a strong interest in the United States remaining a dynamic economic partner and a stabilizing military influence' (US DoS, 2011a).

The DoS wanted to build a relation of trust, for which the Strategic and Economic Development (S&ED) was believed to be very important. This relation of trust would ensure that even in fields of disagreement, cooperation would still be possible (US DoS, 2011a). Apart from this aspect, China was also perceived to provide the US with opportunities for better contact with other states in the Asian region (US DoS, 2011a). Positive cooperation and a comprehensive relation therefore got the central focus (US DoS, 2011b):

'All of this effort has taken place within a larger regional push to strengthen our ties throughout the Asia Pacific. We've enhanced our relationships with our treaty allies Japan, Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines' (US DoS, 2012a).

Of course, the DoS was confronted with perspectives other than their own. Certain state departments and state officials are concerned that China's rise will lead to a US decline of power and influence. The DoS states that contrary to these visions, China needs to make change to build on its welfare and to improve the situation it is in (US DoS, 2012d). The DoS clearly sees China as a very important economic partner. Respect and mutual benefit are central in this cooperation:

'The United States welcomes a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China playing a greater role in world affairs and seeks to advance practical cooperation with China in order to build a partnership based on mutual benefit and mutual respect' (US DoS, 2012f).

China's open economy is considered to be beneficial for all, and important economic matters should be consulted with China (US DoS, 2012d). More important, according to the DoS, is that cooperation with China should obtain a bigger role (US DoS, 2012f). Human rights and environmental protection are still areas of conflict, but these can only be resolved through more integration of US and Chinese policy (US DoS, 2012f). These goals can be achieved through greater integration of China in international institutions:

'The U.S. approach to its economic relations with China has two main elements: the United States seeks to fully integrate China into the global, rules-based economic and trading system and seeks to expand U.S. exporters' and investors' access to the Chinese market' (US DoD, 2012f).

Therefore, we can conclude that the DoS have never observed China to be a threat to the US. The US and China are believed to share a lot of interests and both need a peaceful and economic prosperous environment to realize those interests. A subtle change has taken place however in the perception of China being an instrument; this perception was very strong at the beginning of our period under investigation, but later this perception was adjusted and the US now view China as a real partner. Certain issues remain problematic, for instance the Chinese-Taiwan relation and the protection of human rights in China, but the DoS believes that more cooperation will lead to a solution for these problems.

Comparing the DoS' perception with that of the DoD, we can already state that there are indeed different visions on China in the different US government departments which lead to a variation in preferences for foreign policy. If it turns out that the DoS has a large impact on the US foreign policy, their perception of China might explain the economic cooperation which was difficult to understand from an offensive realist perspective. However, it must be acknowledged that since this research does not examine the process of internal struggle leading to actual foreign policy, this cannot be decisively determined. It might be possible however.

**Table 2. Overview of the DoS perception of China, period 1991-2012. Time division is approximately.**

1991-2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Instrument for reaching US goals and improving interests</li> <li>- Regional power, in the long run certainly a global economic power</li> <li>- Very different standards when it comes to certain policy matters (Taiwan, human rights)</li> <li>- Peaceful intentions due to Chinese interests, which means no US threat</li> </ul>
2002-2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Instrument for reaching US goals and improving interests, but more and more possibilities for cooperation arise from China's increasing power</li> <li>- Peaceful intentions due to Chinese interests, which means no US threat</li> <li>- Trustworthy to a certain degree, due to increasing conversation</li> </ul>
2005-2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Becomes more important in international matters</li> <li>- Peaceful intentions due to Chinese interests, which means no US threat</li> </ul>
2008-2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Important international player, mutual interdependence with the US</li> <li>- Very important partner on global issues</li> <li>- Important economic power</li> <li>- Relation of trust increases</li> </ul>

### **The DoS's interpretation of US national interest**

Now, what can we expect with respect to the DoS's perceived national interest based on their perception of China? First, there was a period in which the DoS mainly observed China to be an instrument for achieving US goals. China was believed to have different standards when it came to certain policy issues, but since the DoS believed China would become a global economic power in the long run cooperation was very important. This meant China's power should not be restricted but instead China should be more closely involved in international cooperation. What we therefore expect to observe is the DoS trying to build a relation with China in so far as it is in the US interest,

which the DoS believed to be mainly in the economic field. A policy of balancing would not seem to be probable, since it is unnecessary for the US to do so.

During 2002-2005 China was still viewed as a means towards achieving US goals, but since China became more powerful, more opportunities for cooperation were created. Since China was still not perceived a threat, this eventually led to a situation in which China gained more power in their relationship with the US, since the US gained more and more from this relation. Eventually, somewhere around 2008, the DoS believed China to have a considerable influence on US matters, especially economic. This situation was accompanied by more trust and Chinese increased involvement and power in international cooperation. Since China was still not considered a threat, balancing behavior seemed very unsuitable. Instead, we expected the DoS to expand cooperation. Conflict was to be avoided, since this would lead to large adverse effects on the US economy, according to the DoS. What the DoS interpretation of national interest would justify were attempts at more cooperation in order to influence China in policy fields in which it has very different standards than the US, since due to the large impact the US and China were believed to have on each other, this would benefit the US best.

### **5.3. Perceptions of China in the Department of Commerce**

The last department taken into account in this research is the Department of Commerce (DoC). A remark must be made in advance: documents distributed by the DoC go only back to 2001. This means that the internal perception of China can only be investigated from 2001 onwards, which means that the first half of our period under investigation cannot be included in this analysis. This will not lead to bias in the period that is researchable, since in the period investigated the insight obtained has the same quality as that from the analysis of the other two departments. However, it will not be possible to observe if a real change of perception has taken place during the period 1991-2012. Unfortunately, we must work with the sources available, and I will execute an analysis of the DoC in the period 2001-2012, based on the premise it will not be possible to determine if the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism really explains our case under investigation. I will try my best however to compare the results from the period 2001-2012 with expectations of the theory.

Starting our analysis around 2001, the DoC observed China mainly as an instrument to improving the US economic development. Since more worldwide trade barriers were rejected, trade had become a very important factor for US economic growth. The DoC was a strong advocate of the inclusion of China in the WTO and of extending China's Normal Trade Relation with the US (US DoC, 2001a). The reason for this was the belief that if China were to enter into these partnerships, this

would result in a reduction in Chinese trade barriers and therefore more possibilities to use China for profit of US businesses:

'Let me stress this point again: the renewal of NTR is in our interests. China is our 11th largest export market - and despite a myriad of market access barriers, trade with China was up by 24% last year and by 36% in the first quarter of this year [...] And with WTO accession, our exports to China will be even stronger as their restrictions are removed' (US DoC, 2001a).

China being perceived as an instrument became very clear from the emphasis the DoC puts on the possibilities of profit for US companies from a Chinese accession to the WTO. The DoC believed China would continue to grow and is and will remain a very large trading partner of the US. There was some kind of fear for this development since the DoC wanted the US to remain the largest economic power worldwide. It tried to diminish this fear by steering China as much as possible in the desired direction by using international policy and bilateral agreements (US DoC, 2001b). There were barriers to overcome to improve relations, but the DoC believed that through agreements most of these problems would be overcome (US DoC, 2000). This meant that in the years following, active attempts were undertaken to cooperate in more fields such as pharmaceuticals and intellectual property matters (US DoC, 2004b). The relationship between the two states was not viewed as a relationship based on trust. This perception was further strengthened by the fact that China was not transparent when it came to legislation concerning trade, but also because China did not set the same standards for companies as the US does which led to an uneven playing field (US DoC, 2004a).

A very important development is that around 2007 the US started stressing the point that the US should remain the most dynamic when it comes to technology since this is important for their military overmatch (US DoC, 2007b). This led to demands for more control on China's use of technology, since this can be used to strengthen their military apparatus.

'And not just in terms of lost market share for U.S. industry, though that would be concerning enough. Because our military "overmatch" capabilities require and are sustained by, over the long-term, cutting-edge U.S. technology, there is a national security—as well as economic—imperative for ensuring that U.S. industry remains the most dynamic, the most competitive, and the most innovative in the world. [...] Second, the rule prudently hedges against China's military modernization by imposing new controls on a narrow, focused set of the most sensitive dual-use technologies, such as lasers and radar antennas, when they are intended for use in Chinese weapons systems' (US DoC, 2007b).

This again indicated that the perception the DoC had of China was not one of trust and there was fear of China becoming more powerful than the US. The DoC was also afraid of a policy of protectionism since they believed it possible that China would implement a policy which favored Chinese companies over foreign, or in other words US, companies.

'The first is a new network of policies that appear designed to favor Chinese "national champion" firms over foreign competitors. This trend, perhaps more than any other, worries American business leaders in industries from steel to software' (US DoC, 2008).

This fear came forth from a lack of trust, not only of Chinese intentions but also in Chinese capabilities of controlling their own economy. The DoC believed the enormous and rapid growth could possibly lead to high inflation and a lack of proper legislation (US DoC, 2008). The DoC therefore saw engagement in the Chinese economic development to be the best policy with China since it would make it possible to 'steer' China's development in the preferred direction (US DoC, 2008). It also meant the DoC still perceived China as a possible threat. They wanted to cooperate, but at the same time to keep on emphasizing that if the US decided not to cooperate with China, then China could develop in such a way that was deemed undesirable to the US which could damage their own development. The department saw engagement with China as inevitable. The US and China are believed to share a lot of interests and China will inevitably expand its international influence (US DoC, 2007a). The economic globalization cannot be prevented from taking place which means that the best the US can do is to have a clear communication with China. The enduring lack of trust remains intact, since the US is executing their engagement through a process of 'positive reciprocity' which means that the US and China must both take steps towards improving cooperation (US DoC, 2007a):

The "positive reciprocity" principle recognizes that the United States and China share many common interests in the area of export controls. It can be a future roadmap for mutual cooperation in facilitating responsible, civilian trade in high-technology products (US DoC, 2007a).

This perception of China remained dominant in the following years as well. Energy became a new area of policy which was the subject of bilateral talks between China and the US. The two states are cooperated in research for alternatives to fossil fuel. At the same time, China was very closely watched on its developments concerning a reduction of pollution due to economic activities (US DoC, 2009). The broader access which the US hoped to achieve through a commitment of China with the WTO rules remained a central concern. In this spirit, the US increasingly spoke about interests being tied together (US DoC, 2010).

During the last two years, the image that China was a potential threat but one which could be restrained through cooperation and engagement without China being trustworthy remained dominant. The DoC kept emphasizing the fact that China was welcome as a new global power, but that this power came with obligations:

'Let me be clear: The Administration welcomes a strong, prosperous, and successful China. But this new status comes with important responsibilities. This Administration seeks to engage China on regional and global affairs to advance international peace and stability – and in ways consistent with prevailing international rules, norms, and institutions' (US DoC, 2011e)

The US wanted Chinese and American companies to work together to overcome global challenges. This period was seen as a real turning point compared to the past, since the old practices and policy were no longer adequate to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

'It's a critical conversation for policymakers and certainly for investors, because we are at a turning point in the U.S.-China economic partnership' (US DoC, 2011c).

and

'Saying the current U.S.-China economic relationship is at a turning point in which previous policies and practices simply won't do anymore, Locke urged China to deal meaningfully with concerns expressed by foreign businesses and for the international community to work together to encourage China to carry out promised reforms' (US DoC, 2011a).

This turning point was believed to be caused by the fact that the 'debt-fuelled consumption binge in countries like the US' was over. The US believed China had to reform in order to uphold its economic growth (US DoC, 2011c). A better economic partnership was needed. The DoC preferred the Chinese government to work towards more cooperation with the US and to become both international economic leading powers (US DoC, 2012b). The US can help China with building on its strategic emerging industries, but in order for the US to do so, China would have to adapt to WTO rules (US DoC, 2011c).

Although there was no relation of trust among the two states, the US wanted to make progress towards a more balanced relation in which fairness and openness would form the basis of their relationship (US DoC, 2012a). The DoC very clearly believed that Chinese investments in the US were beneficial for both countries (US DoC, 2012a). If China would modernize, this would mean an enormous new market for the US export economy which the DoC perceived to be in the US interest and to open up China (US DoC, 2012d). In order to do so, the DoC believed that more dialogue with China was needed (US DoC, 2011e), which meant conflict should be evaded.

Fear of China's growing capacities was still present. The DoC however believed that this threat could be overcome since cooperation would lead to innovation, education and commercialization. Since the DoC believed the US to be very competitive when it came to innovation, China's growing economy was seen as an opportunity instead of being a threat. This meant that global leadership would remain in American hands (US DoC, 2011b), and that China would still be observed to be an instrument towards improving US interests:

'U.S. enterprise has always been amongst the most inventive in the world: the motorcar, the computer, the internet and GPS were all invented in the USA. When we have innovated we have prevailed. That is why this Administration places so much emphasis on innovation on building and owning the markets of tomorrow even as we vigorously compete for market share in today's markets' (US DoC, 2011b).

**Table 3. Overview of the DoC perception of China, period 1991-2012.**

2001-2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Powerful international economic power now and in the future</li> <li>- Instrument towards improving US interests</li> <li>- Fear of China becoming too powerful</li> <li>- Not trustworthy</li> </ul>
2007-2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Potential military threat due to economic and technological progress</li> <li>- Not trustworthy</li> </ul>
2011-2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Better economic partnership is necessary</li> <li>- Fear of China becoming more powerful than the US</li> <li>- Not trustworthy</li> <li>- Should be used as instrument towards US goals</li> </ul>

**The DoC's interpretation of US national interest**

Finally, what would we expect the DoC to perceive as the national interest based on their perception on China? The DoC perception remained quite stable and consistent during our period of investigation. The department believed that inclusion and engagement were the most suitable policies to make sure that China did not threaten the US hegemony because this made the Chinese development 'steerable'. These perceptions led to the expectation of cooperation and of a willingness to prevent conflict between the US and China.

It must be admitted that this desire to make Chinese developments 'steerable' could be interpreted as balancing behavior. However, what we can conclude is that the DoC would want to prevent conflict with China to break out. 'Steering' China was believed necessary since China is a state which cannot be trusted. This expectation is supported by the DoC's fear that China would become technologically so advanced that they will outrun the US in military capacities. Inclusion is clearly believed to be the path towards managing China's capacities. A policy of exclusion, which balancing is, is believed to lead towards aggression from the Chinese side which was perceived to damage the US interests and, more directly, their current economic developments and circumstances. Inclusion was also needed since China is no state which can be trusted, and inclusion is believed to lead to a situation in which China's policy can be influenced by the US.

What is striking, is that based on the perceptions the department had of China offensive realism would expect a policy of balancing behavior, while the DoC itself explicitly chose for a different policy of inclusion.

**5.4. Conclusion concerning the explanatory power of the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism**

Now the perceptions of China and the expected preferences for policy from the different US departments are mapped, this leaves us with the matter of judging the explanatory power of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism.

First, there was the Department of Defense (DoD). The perceptions of this department approach the actual events best when compared to the other two departments studied. In 2009-2010, the DoD perceived China to be a real threat to the national security. This makes balancing behavior a preferable policy. Since balancing behavior was indeed taking place from this period onwards, it seems arguable that the DoD's perception of China has been decisive for the US foreign policy. Apart from this, the DoD did believe that China's rising power should be used in favor of US interests whenever possible. This is what has happened in reality when we consider the fact that the US is indeed using China's rising power in order to achieve economic benefits for themselves. It also means that this theory might be able to explain the economic cooperation that seems to be so unlikely from an offensive realist perspective. This means that its position could be defended and the US foreign policy is to a great extent based on the perceptions the DoD has of China.

However, just as we must ensure the test for the theory of offensive realism not becoming too strict, we should also make sure that the test for the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism does not become too easy. After all, there are some parts of the DoD's perception which do not accord with the actual US policy. First, the DoD believed that it is best to use China's rising power whenever possible, which could result in economic cooperation. On the other hand, stating that China should be used when possible does not provide us with clear preferences for US policy since 'using when possible' is a very broad directive. We cannot know for sure, based on this preference, if the DoD really believes that using China's rising power in economic cooperation is really their preference for policy and there was also some ambiguity in the DoD's perception. Apart from this, it is also problematic that the DoD already perceived China as a threat in the period 2004-2005. This perception did not result in balancing behavior against China, which is another point of defectiveness in the DoD's perception of China as basis for US foreign policy.

The perceptions of China in the Department of State (DoS) and the Department of Commerce (DoC) are even much more problematic when used as explanation for the US foreign policy from 1991 until 2012. The DoS's perception of China was that China was becoming or is a real partner in global issues, with which a reasonable relation of trust arose. Precisely because China would become or was already viewed as a global and economic power with which the US could share certain global burdens, there was a kind of partnership evolving. The DoS did not perceive China to be a threat to the US. This meant that balancing would not be the preferred policy in this department. It could explain why the US was not more protective of its latent power, a fact which is hard to understand from an offensive realist perspective.

The DoC also had an economic perspective on the relationship between the US and China. The department believed China to be a threat for the national security from 2007 onwards. At the same time, the DoC was very clear about its belief that the solution for this problem lay with

engagement. China should be involved in international matters instead of being balanced against, since this exclusion would lead to them becoming a real threat. The balancing which the US actually showed from 2008 onwards cannot therefore not be explained by the DoC's perceptions.

Therefore we have to conclude that the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism has limited explanatory power when it comes to US foreign policy towards China during the period 1991-2012. In 2008, balancing behavior from the US towards China started taking place, but this behavior does not connect with expectations from the departments included in this research. The reality seems to be a mixture of preferences from different departments at different times. In other words, there is no real similarity between preferences of one department and the policy executed in reality. Of course the process of internal struggle leading to actual policy has not been investigated. This means it is possible to argue that actual policy is in fact a mixture of preferences of different departments. This however would make the test for neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism too easy to pass. Therefore, we must conclude that just as is the case with the theory of offensive realism, the inconsistencies found are too great to speak of real explanatory power of this theory in our case.

## **Chapter 6: conclusion**

In this research, the expectations of two theories were compared with the actual foreign policy of the US during the period 1991-2012. Chapter four and five, which were the chapters in which the hypotheses introduced in the theoretical chapter were tested, already contained a conclusion regarding the explanatory power of the theories under investigation. In this conclusion, the final remarks concerning the results found as well as a consideration of future research will be given.

As discussed in Chapter four, the theory of offensive realism cannot explain the US foreign policy towards China in the period under investigation. In our first subcase, which ranges from 1991 until 2001, we expected no balancing behavior from the US towards China based on the prediction of offensive realism. This is indeed what has occurred in reality: the US did not wage a policy of balancing against China's power. In the second subcase, ranging from 2002-2012, balancing behavior should have taken place when following the predictions of the theory of offensive realism. Balancing was indeed taking place, but there were some problems for the theory.

First, the balancing was not as full-blown and aggressive as offensive realism expected. The theory was very clear: a regional hegemon would always want to prevent another state from becoming a regional hegemon as well. In order to do so, the existing regional hegemon would execute a policy of balancing or buck-passing against any state which was likely to become a regional hegemon as well. It was already discussed in chapter two as to why buck-passing was not considered to be appropriate policy in our case. This leaves us with the expectation of balancing behavior. In general, we can indeed observe the US executing behavior which can be considered balancing against China, when measured according to Mearsheimers three categories of possibilities for balancing. First, the US was forming alliances/coalitions against China, second it put diplomatic pressure on some countries in the Asian Pacific Region, and third it was expanding its resources in Asia in order to form a counterweight against China's rising power.

However, the theory faces a serious problem when it comes to the timing of the balancing behavior executed by the US. The US started to form alliances/coalitions against China from 2008 onwards. When it came to an expansion of their resources, this form of balancing behavior set in around the year 2010. This was not what was expected according to our theory however. Mearsheimer said in 2000 that he not yet expected balancing behavior from the US towards China taking place. This claim was taken into account in the delineation of our subcases. Although it is arguable that the US should have balanced against China in the year 2000, we defined the case in which we expected balancing behavior to take place to range from 2002 until now, which is 2012. This year is chosen because Mearsheimer's statement had to be taken into account and a correction

had to be made since his book was released in 2001. Besides that, our test would also become too strict when we would state that in 2000 balancing did not had to take place, but in 2001 it did. The year 2002 is chosen to give the theory a fair chance of explaining our case. However, balancing did not occur before the year 2008, which is years after China's power increase became so large that the US should have feel threatened. This means a problem for the explanatory power of the theory of offensive realism. The theory seems again to face the problem of having 'trouble explaining why any leading power would ever permit another state to catch up' (Walt, 2002, p. 209) because it cannot explain why China's rising power was permitted until the year 2008.

What is also remarkable, is the fact that the US was not enforcing its policy of balancing behavior through its latent power. Economic or latent power is believed to be convertible into military power and therefore an important factor in power calculations. If the US would balance against China's rising power while at the same time expanding its latent power independent of China, this would increase US options to influence the balance of power in its own advantage. The US is economic interdependent with China, of which it is aware. It could be argued that this interdependence is an unfortunate fact which has to be taken for granted. But even if this argumentation is followed, this does not explain why the US is not trying to diminish the amount of interdependence and tries to avoid further interdependence in the future. The US is working together with China in the economic field instead of limiting the damage. This means that what Mearsheimer describes as latent power, which is wealth which can be converted into military power, is not used to balance against China. On the contrary, it can be argued that economic cooperation leads to a weakening of the US power since the resulting interdependence makes it harder for the US to balance against China. If the US would end up in a conflict with China, this would economically damage them in such a way that they face economic downturn which means a diminishing of their power. The argument of latent power on itself is not enough to conclude that offensive realism cannot explain our case, since balancing behavior is mostly defined by military power on which latent power is only an addition. From the other side, it is striking that the US does not believe it to be problematic to be economic interdependent with China while this diminishes their possibilities for balancing behavior against them because conflict would damage the US power position.

Concluding, what is investigated leads to the conclusion that the theory of offensive realism does not have a problem explaining balancing per se when it comes to the ambiguity in its military versus economic policy, since Mearsheimer's balancing is defined as being the formation of coalitions/alliances, diplomatic pressures and an expansion of resources without measuring the developments in latent power. It must be kept in mind however that this does make balancing less clear cut and full blown as would be the case when the US was improving its latent power.

The lack of explanatory power of the theory of offensive realism leads to the conclusion that a theory which only takes the international anarchy into account in explaining foreign policy of states is not sufficient in explaining this case. Considering the US foreign policy towards China, current developments cannot be deduced by the imperatives coming from international anarchy which makes states striving for survival through power maximization. This means that an alternative must be sought which takes other variables into account. The theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism seemed to be a good alternative for doing so.

This hope of neoclassical realism with constructivist elements being the theory to help us understand our case has resulted in a disappointment. Unfortunately, this theory faced serious problems in explaining reality as well. The perception and associated preferred policy which came closest to describing reality was that of the Department of Defense. Based on the perceptions this department held of China, balancing behavior was expected to take place from 2009 onwards. This is largely in accordance with policy in reality. Apart from this, the department also stated that China's rising power should be used to the advantage of the US interests whenever possible, which could explain the US economic policy of cooperation towards China.

However, there were also problems for this theory in explaining reality. First, the department already observed China to be a threat in the years 2004-2005. This leaves us with the question why balancing behavior was not executed before the year 2008 and why the US foreign policy was only directed at balancing behavior after 2008. If the perception and resulting policy preference of the DoD was really the basis for US foreign policy, the reality should have been that balancing started earlier than 2008. One could argue that implementation of plans can take some time which would have delayed balancing behavior, but it is not the purpose of this research to prove neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism right at all costs. Therefore we do assume that new plans would have resulted in new policy in the short run. Apart from this problem, the perception of it being desirable to use China's rising power whenever in the US interest is also a very broad directive which does not necessarily dictate that the DoD prefers the US to work together with China in the economic field. This might be possible but cannot be determined based on the research executed in this paper.

Considering the other departments included in this research, their preferences for foreign policy were even more different from actual US behavior. The Department of State has the perception of China being some kind of partner with which some kind of relation of trust could be built, which makes balancing behavior a very unlikely preference for policy. The Department of Commerce has an even more peaceful preference for policy, since it believes that inclusion and engagement are the best ways to protect the US from Chinese rising power since this would make them more positive in the face of cooperation with the US, which is the only way for the US to

remain ahead of China, by using this relation to their own advantage. This was an interesting interpretation of the best policy option, since balancing behavior is very probably based on these preferences from an offensive realist point of view. It seems that although China is viewed as a threat and not trustworthy, engagement and inclusion is preferred over balancing behavior. This is contradictory to what would be expected based on the theory of offensive realism, and means it is possible that although countries are indeed observed to be a threat, balancing behavior is not to be considered the most appropriate behavior in all cases. This also means that it is possible to experience more situations in which countries observe each other to be a threat without them choosing balancing behavior as the most appropriate approach towards these states.

What could be concluded from these diverging preferences for policy and the absence of one preference translated into policy is that the actual policy is a mixture of the preferences of the separate departments. In this way, one could argue that actual policy is in fact determined by preferences based on perceptions of the Self & Other but that the process of internal struggle in the US government has transformed these preferences into actual policy. This is not a line of argumentation that I believe to be true in reality. If we would follow this line of thought, the test for neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism becomes too easy since it would enable us to explain a whole lot of events with limited corresponding data. Based on this research, it is neither possible to make the claim that changes in identity actually follow changes in power relations. This way of thought neither can explain the diverging policy preferences found, which would mean that again the process of struggle should be taken into account. This would again be an adjustment which makes it too easy for neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism to pass our test.

This all being said, we cannot claim that the US foreign policy towards China is indeed determined by the image of China among state departments, which determines the perception of the best policy to secure survival of the US through power maximization. We must conclude that based on the results of this research, the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism is not able to explain the current US policy towards China. This can be due to two limitations of this research. First, it could be possible that there actually is a state department which perception of China dictates the US foreign policy, but that this department is unfortunately enough not included in this research. This option seems unlikely since the departments which are expected to have the largest influence on US foreign policy towards China are included. Nevertheless, it is a possibility. Second, the actual policy executed could be a mixture of the preferences of different state departments which are blended together and result in a compromise just like what we call the 'poldermodel' in the Netherlands. This is not exactly what the theory assumes to take place in reality, but it is a possibility in which perceptions could still play a dominant role in foreign policy.

What I would therefore like to do is to make some recommendations for future research. The theory of offensive realism is not likely to be tested in a manner which would lead to totally different results than found in this research, since the theory provides pretty clear guidelines for the measurement of power and balancing behavior. This means that the theory of offensive realism is simply inadequate in explaining our case or that there are disagreements in the way that power is measured in this research. I do not believe the latter to be the case, since the measurements executed in this research were clear cut and explicitly in accordance with Mearsheimer's guidelines. This is a different case with the theory of neoclassical realism supplemented with constructivism. Perceptions are always hard to measure, which compels us to make some important decisions concerning the measurement executed in this research. Apart from this, one is always confronted with practical implications considering the available resources and limited means. This means that more in-depth future research to the perceptions of China among state departments, based on sources which at this moment might not be available for research, could lead to different conclusions. It could also be useful to take other state departments into account since it is still possible that there is a dominant US department whose perception of China is decisive in the choice for foreign policy towards this state. This could well be investigated in the future.

Another possibility for future research which I believe would be very interesting is to map the process of policy formation after the policy preferences of the different departments are determined based on perceptions of Self & Other. By this I mean the process of struggle whereby the different departments with different preferences for policy try to get their preference actually accepted and implemented. Unfortunately it was impossible to investigate this process in this research due to a limited amount of time and resources, but this does not mean that this process is not highly interesting. A further study of this process could also lead to a different conclusion because it is possible that the actual US foreign policy is a blend of the policy preferences existing in the different state departments of the US government. This means that opportunities for further knowledge and useful information could result from research directed at the process of internal struggle within governments, at which different government departments try to get their preferred national policy option which is based on perceptions of the Self & Other translated into actual policy.

In the theoretical chapter of this research, it was explained that this paper tried to compare the explanatory power of the two theories under investigation in order to determine which theory was best able to explain reality. Unfortunately, this comparison leads to the conclusion that both theories must be falsified; they both cannot explain real US foreign policy towards China. Based on their expectations, we should observe other behavior from the US than what we are actually observing at this time. There is not one theory having more empirical content than the other by being able to explain more, since they both cannot explain what is occurring 'out there'.

It is an interesting thought that China with its rising power versus the US being already a regional hegemon is the first of a new series of relations among superpowers taking a form we have never observed before. It could be possible that one day states no longer demonstrate balancing behavior and aggression when another state is likely to become bigger than you. The current US policy towards China could be a first indicator of such an era. However, as a scientific school, we are not going to resign with such a conclusion. Therefore I plead for further research at current US policy towards China, since this response is likely to determine our nearby future. China is indeed catching up on the US when it comes to military and economic power. This means that the unipolar world as we know it, might change in the nearby future. Knowledge about the current developments is very well usable if this is the case. This means that the school of international relations must act together in order to improve its theoretical knowledge and expand its possibilities in predicting the future.

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