

## Chapter 1

# THE POLITICAL SCIENTIST AS HISTORIAN: REFLECTIONS ON THE LINK BETWEEN CULTURE, 'STATUS ANXIETY' AND THE AMERICAN DECISION FOR WAR, APRIL 1917

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### *Introduction*

Recent years have witnessed a resurgence in scholarly inquiries into the relationship between the cultural construct of 'emotion' and foreign policy decision-making, with much of this attention being accorded to choices of states to go to war. One emotion in particular is often said to occupy pride of analytical place: 'status anxiety'. This chapter draws upon recent scholarly research into the postulated connection between emotion and war, in a bid to assess whether the American decision to enter the First World War might be said, at least in part, to have been contingent upon status considerations, and if so, how.

This particular case is chosen for three reasons. First is the April 1917 decision's obvious importance to the global balance of power, as this latter would be made manifest throughout the ensuing century, down to the present time. Second, and related to this, is the impact that America's entry into the war would come to have upon the eventual establishment of the geostrategic institution that became the 'Anglo-American special relationship', one of the core intellectual foci of Alan Dobson's scholarly corpus. Third, discussions of status, while they may not compel a reliance upon 'history', certainly are bolstered by such a reliance, and this too reflects Dobson's epistemological approach to his own discipline of international relations (IR), one in which diplomatic history is given prominence, in keeping with broader trends in the field.<sup>1</sup>

America's decision to enter the war that had begun nearly three years earlier constituted a jettisoning of its long-standing and revered grand strategy of aloofness from the European balance of power, otherwise known as isolationism.<sup>2</sup> Although the decision has been studied and debated from a variety of perspectives, not much attention has been allocated to the impact of status anxiety upon the choice for intervention. Usually, when status anxiety is under examination by IR scholars, the focus is squarely on the level of analysis that Kenneth Waltz so famously labelled

the 'third image'. This chapter will be no exception to the tendency to situate status anxiety within the third image.

Waltz introduced this and two other analytical images in his first and in some ways most influential book of the late 1950s, *Man, the State, and War*, which had been based upon his Columbia University doctoral dissertation from earlier in the decade.<sup>3</sup> His objective was to contribute to the systematic study of the causes of war, by disaggregating the numerous explanations of war's origins into 'three levels of analysis', which he called the first, second and third images. Respectively, those images anchored the main cause(s) of war in the quality of individual leaders, attributes of domestic state and society, and systemic arrangements and processes. Waltz clearly, even in those early years, preferred to lodge his understanding of causality mostly at the systemic level – that is, the third image – in which the ultimate source(s) of international conflict would be traceable to the international distribution of relative capability, or 'power', within an international system characterized by anarchy and energized by the principle of self-help on the part of states questing after security. In a later, and more famous – or at least, more controversial – work he would express so robustly this preference for third-image explanations of international phenomena that henceforth his brand of IR theory would become known, properly, as 'structural realism', and less properly as 'neorealism'.<sup>4</sup>

Thinking about status and political action is nothing new among the IR professoriate, for whom it has regularly popped into and out of fashion. But, as noted above, over the past couple of decades, it has come roaring back, in keeping with a more general scholarly interest in the role that 'emotion' might be said to have in state decision-making.<sup>5</sup> The particular emotional trait known as status anxiety has garnered a heightened amount of attention, and not just on the part of scholars who concentrate upon relations between the great powers. Indeed, it might even be remarked that status anxiety, like SARS-CoV-2, is ubiquitous in the international system. Unlike the novel coronavirus, however, most of the time status anxiety is fairly inconsequential. Things are otherwise, however, when status anxiety can become linked to certain foreign policy aims of great powers.

Take just the contemporary discussion swirling around the prospects of a future war between the United States and China, in no small measure for reasons derivative of the logic of 'power transition theory'. One claim made by theorists of power transition is that 'rising' powers almost always prove troublesome for international peace and security, as they pursue policies fuelled by 'hubris', which is a short-hand way for expressing the thought that they are recklessly anxious to enhance their status in the eyes of the peer competition. The implication is that their anxiety grows in proportion to the growth of their power, with war in the offing unless some means of 'accommodating' or otherwise assuaging their status anxieties can be arranged.<sup>6</sup>

But one need not conjure up hypothetical future wars, or even be a power-transition theorist, to connect status anxiety with state decisions to go to war. There have been many occasions on which it could be and has been said that states were 'fighting for status'.<sup>7</sup> None of those occasions have come remotely close to matching, in magnitude and consequence, the First World War, this chapter's focus

I pursue my inquiry in two subsequent sections, each staying within the confines of the third image. One examines an aspect of the debate over intervention that leaves little if any room for the insertion of status anxiety into the analysis; it is the contention that the 1917 decision represented the first instance in which America chose to act as an ‘offshore balancer’. The other continues the third-image focus, only this time what is being demonstrated is just the opposite of what the offshore-balancing perspective maintains; in that section, it will be shown how status anxiety can be argued to have had a ‘causal’ significance in the war decision, even if it so rarely portrayed in this light.

But before getting to those two third-image discussions, it is necessary to address the explanatory (and even normative) context for assessing the American intervention by introducing other hypotheses, drawn from other levels of analysis.

### *The debate over American intervention in 1917*

Although more than a century has passed since President Woodrow Wilson made his historic decision to ask congress for a declaration of war upon Imperial Germany in early April 1917, questions continue to be raised as to why he did this. Among the questioners are those whose interest lies in trying to demonstrate the unwisdom of the decision. They are more interested in the normative than in the explanatory side of the debate, and to a large extent they are carrying on an earlier normative tradition prompted by anti-war sensibilities at the time the decision was made. Illustrative of this more normatively charged discussion was an opinion piece published by the *New York Times* in April 2017, on the hundredth anniversary, to the day, of the declaration of war. In it, Michael Kazin made some important, even if counterfactual, points that are worth quoting here:

[M]ost Americans know little about why the United States fought in World War I, or why it mattered. The “Great War” that tore apart Europe and the Middle East and took the lives of over 17 million people worldwide lacks the high drama and moral gravity of the Civil War and World War II, in which the very survival of the nation seemed at stake .... But attention should be paid. *America’s decision to join the Allies was a turning point in world history.* It altered the fortunes of the war and the course of the 20th century – and not necessarily for the better. Its entry most likely foreclosed the possibility of a negotiated peace among belligerent powers that were exhausted from years mired in trench warfare .... How would the war have ended if America had not intervened? The carnage might have continued for another year or two until citizens in the warring nations, who were already protesting the endless sacrifices required, forced their leaders to reach a settlement. If the Allies, led by France and Britain, had not won a total victory, there would have been no punitive peace treaty like that completed at Versailles, no stab-in-the-back allegations by resentful Germans, and thus no rise, much less triumph, of Hitler and the Nazis. The next world war, with its 50 million deaths, would probably not have occurred.<sup>8</sup>

To say the least, Kazin's is a powerful normative indictment of Wilson's decision to take his country into the war, and it is surely possible that in the absence of that decision, European and global security affairs would indeed have progressed on a far more happy and irenic course during the remaining decades of the twentieth century. But maybe they would not have, because resorting to counterfactuals necessarily opens the door to other, competing, counterfactuals. For when we start to experiment with one version of the past that we never did have, we need always to realize that other plausible paths can also be injected into the argument. For instance, if one were to substitute a different counterfactual antecedent for Kazin's preferred antecedent (i.e., of no intervention in April 1917), it would still be possible to arrive at the same counterfactual consequent: no German revanchism, no rise of Hitler, no Second World War, no Holocaust, no 50 million dead overall. This alternative counterfactual antecedent (no armistice in November 1918) would have featured the continual counter-offensive that military officials such as General John J. Pershing, who commanded the American Expeditionary Force, had been promoting following the failure of the Germans' final offensive in July 1918.

This counterfactual antecedent would assume the war's prolongation for at least a year, with the launching in 1919 of a great offensive into the very heart of Germany itself, propelled by an American military force that by then would have swollen to four million soldiers. In this alternative counterfactual antecedent, Germans would have come to understand in the clearest manner possible that they had been thoroughly beaten, rather than 'stabbed in the back' by dastardly socialists and Jews, as the revanchist legend of the interwar years insisted. That knowledge of utter defeat would, presumably, have had the same impact in the counterfactual past that the knowledge of utter defeat of *Stunde Null* (May 1945) had upon German thinking in the real post-1945 past.<sup>9</sup> It would have led sentient German policymakers, and masses alike, to develop a radically different understanding of the role of military force in their country's grand strategy. Thus one reading of the no-armistice counterfactual is that it would have eliminated the problem of German militarism, and would have led to the socialization of Germany into the Western political order a generation earlier, without all the horrors of the 1930s and 1940s.

Of course, we understand only too well what the 'real' past implied for subsequent generations in Europe and elsewhere. Equally, there can be no dissenting from Kazin's claims about the real-world significance of the American entry into the war. It truly did represent a 'turning point in world history'. But as important as is the normative debate, no less important is the *explanatory* debate, upon which the following two sections focus. Why did America go to war? Over the years since the decision was made, there have been countless attempts to answer this question. At the risk of overgeneralizing, we can say that these attempts fall into four major clusters of explanation, located within all three Waltzian images.

Only one of these clusters puts security considerations front and centre in the president's decision-making. The other three concentrate on other 'causal' considerations. Much scholarly ink has been spilled trying to demonstrate the

impact of economic forces upon the choice for intervention.<sup>10</sup> The same can be said for the claim that Americans were simply hoodwinked by clever allied propagandists, who made them believe that the war was nothing short of a crusade for morality and civilization.<sup>11</sup> And then there are the explanations that trace the war decision to flaws in Woodrow Wilson's psyche.<sup>12</sup> It would require a long book rather than a short chapter to begin to do justice to these three clusters. Accordingly, my approach in these pages is a much-restricted one, in which I only examine a competing pair of third-image arguments. Each of these links security rationales to the intervention decision, but only one of them leaves room for incorporating status anxiety into the explanation. These competing arguments will be outlined in the following two sections.

### *The intervention decision as offshore balancing?*

In the scholarly writing on US foreign policy, systemic variables have figured regularly in the assessments of many realist analysts, especially as they might be pigeonholed as 'structural' realists. And among this latter group, no political scientist has attained greater prominence, some say notoriety, than John Mearsheimer. In his view, the understanding of America's (or any country's) foreign policy starts with the recognition that the overarching objective of decision-makers is survival. For a great power such as the United States became by the early twentieth century, this goal has entailed the prevention of any rival great power's gaining regional 'hegemony' over its own neighbours, which if obtained would render it, inevitably, a worrisome problem in locales closer to the American homeland. Thus the objective has been to keep the danger as far away as possible. Doing this obliged America to act as an 'offshore balancer'.

In Mearsheimer's own words,

Every great power would like to dominate the world, but none has ever had or is likely to have the military capability to become a global hegemon. Thus, the ultimate goal of great powers is to achieve regional hegemony and block the rise of peer competitors in distant areas of the globe. In essence, states that gain regional hegemony act as offshore balancers in other regions.<sup>13</sup>

And this logic is what drove the United States, the world's only 'regional hegemon' according to Mearsheimer, into the First World War, just as it impelled it once again to play the part of offshore balancer a generation later, during the Second World War. He may well be correct insofar as concerns the latter war, but it is highly doubtful that offshore-balancing precepts prompted the intervention decision in 1917.

There is nothing new about the argument that the April 1917 decision had to have had security concerns – meaning, physical security concerns – as its motivating condition. Even during the neutrality months between August 1914 and April 1917, there had been numerous enthusiasts insistent upon augmenting

America's 'preparedness' in the likely event of a conflict with a country few of them needed to bother identifying by its name, Germany.<sup>14</sup> Some of these enthusiasts' successors a generation later, as the world once more descended into a war in which Germany featured centrally, contemplated retrospectively the April 1917 decision, and with their minds concentrated upon the predicament facing America in the early 1940s, concluded that the earlier decision simply *must* have been taken for reasons of national security.

Whether they dressed up their case in the conceptual garb of offshore balancing or not, it only made sense to these later policy analysts and advocates that intervention in the First World War at Britain's side had been the sole course of action imaginable if the nation's vital interests were to be protected. Walter Lippmann, writing during the midst of that second global upheaval, was certain that, just as during the current crisis, so too in 1917 did an American president understand the necessity for entry into the European balance of power, because in 1917 America's physical security depended upon the Royal Navy every bit as much as it came to do in 1941. Take the Royal Navy out of the equation, and water would turn out to have no stopping power, at all.<sup>15</sup>

But if a certain structural logic seems to be on the side of the Mearsheimer thesis regarding the April 1917 decision, the same cannot be said of the evidence. Here is the problem: there simply exists no solid evidentiary basis, archival or otherwise, to substantiate the argument that policymakers in Washington *perceived* a threat to American security in 1917 so grave as to have compelled the United States to play the role of offshore balancer. It is not as if, over the years, no one had ever tried to find such evidence. Foremost in this regard has been Daniel Malloy Smith, who, in an important review article published at the time of the Vietnam War, drew readers' attention to some accounts of Wilson's decision-making that had appeared 'recently' in print, meaning since the 1950s. Smith's search for a clear security rationale had been motivated, in part, by a desire to debunk claims about Wilson's having been a clueless idealist, oblivious to the realities of power politics in April 1917, a criticism not infrequently made of the twenty-eighth president, both during his lifetime and after his death.<sup>16</sup> Notwithstanding his intuitive sympathy for the security explanation, Smith still drew back from fully endorsing the claims by scholars who thought they had found, in threat perception, the answer to the question of why America intervened in April 1917. Instead, he concluded that the 'hypothesis that the United States went to war in 1917 to protect its security against an immediate German threat lacks persuasiveness.'<sup>17</sup>

In this conclusion, Smith was seconding results that a fellow diplomatic historian, Richard Leopold, had published a decade and a half earlier, in the pages of the IR journal, *World Politics*. Although he could hardly employ our contemporary term of art, offshore balancing, to account for decision-making in Washington, Leopold was dismissive of the notion that preventing the rise of a European regional hegemon setting out to challenge the United States was what determined the issue. For while deductive logic seemed to be on the side of this security paradigm, where was the evidence supporting it? Leopold found none, and did not expect much ever to turn up. His pessimism was reflected in a

comment made in one of his article's footnotes, to the effect that 'a member of my graduate seminar at Harvard in 1947, Robert E. Osgood, was unable to discover in a semester's search any substantial amount of contemporary evidence to support the Lippmann thesis'.<sup>18</sup>

Much more recently, another scholar has cast a critical glance at the notion that Woodrow Wilson asked for intervention because he worried that Germany would attain regional hegemony in Europe. That scholar is the political scientist Galen Jackson, who, like fellow political scientist Alan Dobson, actually has spent a great deal of time doing archival research. What Jackson's study of the documents of the period showed him – or more accurately, *failed* to show him – is troubling for the Mearsheimer/Lippmann theses. For those theses to be sustainable empirically, there would have to be a documentary trail of presidential thinking revealing that by April 1917 Woodrow Wilson regarded the situation of the British and French as being particularly parlous; that he believed Russia's revolution of the previous month would detract from the Allied war effort rather than support it; that he was convinced that the situation in Germany and Austria-Hungary was especially favourable to the strategic interests of both those powers; and that he believed only a massive American injection of force on the side of the Allies could save the day.

Jackson found evidence for *none* of these suppositions in the documents he examined, leading him to conclude:

Regardless of what the true balance of power in Europe was in early 1917, from Washington's perspective there did not appear to be any reason to think Germany was on the verge of achieving a position of regional hegemony on the continent. To put it in somewhat different terms, there was a world of difference between Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt – 1917 was not 1941.<sup>19</sup>

The offshore-balancer argument does not have a monopoly on third-image accounts that invoke security as a motivation. Other security-related arguments have also been made, and as we are about to find out, one of these can be made to fit comfortably with arguments about the causal prowess of status anxiety. Let's see what this entails, by adverting to a scholarly dispute over Wilson's leadership that erupted in the decade following the Second World War's ending.

### *Security, status anxiety, and April 1917*

If this scholarly dispute of the 1950s drew obvious attention to the president's post-1918 vision (as it had to have done), it was no less concerned with the question of why Wilson took his country into war in the first place. It was a controversy unleashed by analysts associated with an innovative IR paradigm imported from Europe, one that came to be called realism, albeit shorn of such more current modifiers as 'structural' or 'neo'. This earlier variant of the paradigm is usually termed 'classical' (sometimes 'liberal') realism. Prominent among this

realist cohort was Robert Endicott Osgood, the very same Harvard graduate student whom Richard Leopold recalled as having spent an entire semester looking in vain for evidence that security rationales had prompted Wilson's decision for war. After receiving his doctorate from Harvard, Osgood took up a teaching position in the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago, whose press brought out his first book, based on the Harvard dissertation. That book, focused as it was upon a keen debate in IR theory circles during the 1950s about the ethical basis of American foreign policy – should it be predicated upon the country's ideals, or upon its interests? – set the standard for much of the early Cold War discussion of Wilson's intervention decision.

Wilson's policymaking was faulted because it betrayed far too much idealism and hardly enough self-interest for it to have served as an adequate safeguard for America in the international anarchy at a particularly momentous time. 'Wilson's conception of foreign relations', wrote Osgood, 'was remarkable not so much for its neglect of the problems of power as for its conscious subordination of national expediency to ideal goals.' Wilson was too much of a dreamer and do-gooder to ensure that America's legitimate physical security interests could be protected. Worst of all, Wilson 'coveted for America the distinction of a nation transcending its own selfish interests and dedicated in altruistic service to humanity'.<sup>20</sup>

For Osgood and other classical realists, the Wilson who emerges from their research is unrecognizable to latter-day cousins such as Mearsheimer. Far from seeking to balance power from 'offshore', the classical realists' Wilson wanted to abolish the balance of power completely, replacing it with a novel arrangement known as collective security.<sup>21</sup> It is for this reason that so many of them consider Wilson to have been such a disaster for American foreign policy. They think that had he been more attentive to global power realities during the war itself, he would have intervened sooner than he did, and for the right reasons instead of intervening later, and for the wrong reasons. Even more, had he been attentive to global power realities of the early post-war period, he would have realized that at the Paris peace conference in early 1919 he should have been prioritizing the promotion of a healthier European balance by committing America to an ongoing alliance with Britain (and France), rather than propagating the misguided idea that stable peace required replacing that balance with collective security.<sup>22</sup> He gambled on the will-o'-the-wisp of collective security, they say, and in the bargain ended up losing American 'internationalism' for another generation. He was, therefore, a victim of his own preening ambition for an impossible world order, a tragic figure in a Shakespearian sense, of having been responsible for his own undoing.<sup>23</sup>

The charge that Wilson ignored security interests in favour of altruism is understandable, even if it is not completely fair. For if it is true that Wilson's war decision was not intended to assure America's security through its action as an offshore balancer, it does not follow that security interests did not figure in the president's decision-making. Importantly, they did so, and in a way that, ironically, testified to more than a little status anxiety in Washington. The latter is revealed in respect of two other claims about why Wilson took the decision to intervene in the fighting. Neither of these other two claims is new. One is that Wilson had to ask for a declaration of war upon Germany in April 1917 (he would not make a similar



request in respect of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of the same year) because Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare shortly before had forced his hand, leaving him no option but war. The other argument is that he took his country to war because he wanted it to be the key actor in the post-war peace negotiations. Each can be said to have security implications, even if not those contained in the offshore-balancing contention. Both can also be connected with status anxiety, the second one much more than the first. Let us take the two claims, in turn.

The first claim is that the president felt himself to be honour-bound to declare war on Germany once Berlin resumed unrestricted undersea warfare on 1 February 1917. Even if this did not directly endanger America's own physical security, it assuredly could and did pose mortal peril to individual Americans, and therefore constituted an affront to the country's sense of honour. No president, in this view, could turn a blind eye to such an affront, not even one so dedicated to pacifism as Wilson was often considered to be. Those scholars (and they are many) who have Wilson being, ultimately, forced by events to take the United States into war, rely on one of the oldest and most widely accepted causal arguments about April 1917, namely that the U-boat brought America into the fight.

This explanation for the war decision would have needed no amplification for Americans in April 1917, but during the revisionist onslaught launched in the early interwar period what has become known as the 'submarine school' appeared to have sunk without a trace from popular discourse. Of course, the submarines never did slip entirely beneath that era's explanatory waves among specialists in diplomatic history; they remained important staples of analysis for some professional historians and political scientists largely owing to a study published in 1934 by one of the twentieth century's leading scholarly authorities on Wilsonian diplomacy, Charles Seymour.<sup>24</sup> This work may not have swayed the public debate at a juncture when isolationist sentiment was at fever pitch, but it certainly did make a lasting mark among diplomatic historians, many of whom heralded it as the most definitive study of American entry published up until then.

By and large, the submarine school, which stresses the importance of Wilson's determination to protect America's 'neutral rights'<sup>25</sup> (not the same thing as protecting its physical security by balancing anyone's power), continues to hold pride of place among interpretations of American involvement in the war. In the words of Robert W. Tucker:

[The] oldest explanation of America's entrance into World War I remains the most satisfactory. It was the challenge of the submarine to America's right as a neutral that left no alternative save war. In the absence of that challenge, the country would in all likelihood have remained a nonparticipant ... despite the prospect of being excluded from the peace settlement and despite the prospect of Allied defeat.<sup>26</sup>

The other credible security-related argument concerns Wilson's determination to preserve (or re-establish) America's credibility as the last best hope for peace. According to this argument, Wilson understood that only America could make

possible the transformation of world politics from a zone of war to one of peace, but – tragic as it was ironic – for this to happen, the United States must first enter the war. Wilson, it has been said, realized America's credibility needed to be preserved, not just in a military sense, but perhaps even more importantly in a moral one, if the country was to be able successfully to leverage its consummate ethical capital at the post-war peace table. But to be at that table, the United States, in this view, had to have some skin in the game, and that implied intervention in a winning cause.<sup>27</sup>

Of this pair of security-related contentions, it is the second that can be most closely associated with status anxiety. Of course, it might be claimed that if the submarine thesis is the most compelling explanation, and if honour is simply one aspect of status anxiety, then the case should be an open-and-shut matter: this emotion drew the United States into the war. Alas, things are a bit more complicated, for if status anxiety is clearly an 'emotion', not all emotions take the form of status anxiety. Honour and status anxiety might be similar, but they are hardly identical constructs. The latter is a *positional* attribute before it is anything else. This means that to assert, as I do in this section, that Wilson's decision-making was shaped in no small way by status anxiety, it is really to the salience of the post-war peace that our attention should be drawn, rather than to the wartime combat on the high seas.

Woodrow Wilson had his own clear sense of America's 'rightful' place in the construction of a new and better international security system. His challenge was to convince leaders of the other great powers to envision America's status in the international hierarchy the same lofty way that he did. In brief, as Wilson was wrestling, at the beginning of April, with the intervention question, he knew one thing: should the United States continue to absent itself from the fighting, it would inevitably suffer a status diminution in the sight of its great-power associates – and this diminished ranking would doom the president's noble dream of a reconstructed world, from which war itself would be expunged. Thus, persuasive as the submarine thesis of American intervention might otherwise be, it is incomplete.

The competing account of April 1917 introduced in the above two paragraphs speaks more directly to the impact of status anxiety upon Wilsonian diplomacy. This account also presupposes that the president sensed America occupied – or at least deserved to occupy – an exalted place in the international pecking order, as nothing other than *primus inter pares*. However, in order for there to be a reconciliation between what America deserved to be able to do and what it actually might be able to do, as the president imagined things, it had to enter the war. For without being involved in the war-making, America would have little chance of dominating the peace-making. And on the issue of peace-making, Wilson, no one would deny, had some very lofty goals in sight.

In this version, Germany did not so much take the war decision out of Wilson's hands as it provided the rationale he needed for realizing his newly emergent, inspirational goals. What were these? Nothing other than to enshrine a 'new

diplomacy',<sup>28</sup> from which would be banished the timeworn and, to the president's thinking, highly dangerous mechanisms of power balancing and alliances, to be replaced with a startlingly new vision for lasting peace. Now, all realists, no matter how they might otherwise choose to interpret, qualify, or even 'redact' their favoured paradigmatic catechism, would agree that power balancing remains the fundamental tenet of the faith, the mechanism that enables the continued functioning of the international anarchic system.

This is why the periodic debates over the meaning of Wilsonianism for America's foreign policy have routinely pitted, in one corner, realists against, in another corner of the ring, liberals and much more lately, constructivists. Wilson's image has risen and fallen on at least three separate occasions since April 1917, each time triggering debates over whether he was a great, or a disastrous, president.<sup>29</sup> He has not lacked for defenders, among whom Arthur Link has been the most prepared to fire back against the realists that it was they, not the twenty-eighth president, who suffered from delusionary, hence un-realistic, visions. In this retort, Wilson was presented as someone with preternatural insight into the 'true' structural preconditions for peace. Seeing him in this manner, Wilson's defenders argue he was actually quite a realist in his own right, and not at all the 'utopian' of caricature. Admittedly, Wilson's represented a 'higher' realism,<sup>30</sup> which has even been likened by one scholar to a kind of Waltzian structural realism *avant la lettre*, save that unlike Kenneth Waltz, who saw in the bipolar balance of power a structural remedy for the dangerous defects of multipolarity, Woodrow Wilson would go the whole hog and solve the world's structural dilemma by replacing the balance of power altogether with the apparatus of collective security.<sup>31</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Status anxiety, as argued above, has frequently been associated with two things. The first of these is rising powers. And the second is motivation for mounting a military intervention. Because the United States has for so long (close to eighty years) been so evidently the strongest power in the international system, it has been easy for scholars to overlook the pull exerted by status anxiety upon its foreign policy decision-making. But as this chapter has argued, the decision to cast aside a venerated tradition of eschewing involvement in the European balance of power, while it can be traced to numerous factors, certainly deserves to be examined from an emotional perspective. Specifically, that emotion was status anxiety, highlighting the objective of enhancing America's status so that following the war, the world could be made 'right'. That Woodrow Wilson failed so spectacularly in this undertaking is not a reason to overlook the importance of his vision, or the contribution of status anxiety to his intervention decision. In this case, the United States truly was, to use Renshon's words, fighting for status.<sup>32</sup>

## Notes

- 1 See Dennis Kavanagh, 'Why Political Science Needs History', *Political Studies* 39 (September 1991): 479–95; and Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds., *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).
- 2 See Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935–1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); and Charles A. Kupchan, *Isolationism: A History of America's Efforts to Shield Itself from the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- 3 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Also see J. David Singer, 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations', *World Politics* 14, no. 1 (October 1961): 77–92.
- 4 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979). 'Less properly', because neorealism is a marvellous example, in IR, of the application of what economists call Gresham's Law, save that in the case of the political scientists it is a good word rather than good money that ends up being driven out by the bad. That original good word, neorealism, has become debased to such an extent that it now ends up standing for the virtual opposite of what it had originally been intended to represent, which was the disaggregation rather than the aggregation of 'capability'. That this debasing was in some large measure the doing of Robert Keohane, one of the pioneers of 'complex interdependence' theory, only adds to the curiosity. For early applications of neorealism as a means of assessing the relative merits of a variety of 'power assets' (including 'soft power' ones) in an era in which *aggregate* capability was said to have lost relevance, see Robert Lieber, *No Common Power* (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1988); Richard Feinberg, *The Intemperate Zone: The Third World Challenge to US Foreign Policy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983); and David B. Dewitt and John J. Kirton, *Canada as a Principal Power* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1983). The work most often associated with the distortion of the concept was Robert Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- 5 For instance, Neta C. Crawford, 'The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships', *International Security* 24 (Spring 2000): 116–56; Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison, 'Fear No More: Emotions and World Politics', *Review of International Studies* 34 (January 2008): 115–35; and, especially, Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).
- 6 See Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).
- 7 See, especially, Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). Also see Michelle K. Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); and Tudor A. Onea, 'Between Dominance and Decline: Status Anxiety and Great Power Rivalry', *Review of International Studies* 40 (January 2014): 125–52.
- 8 Michael Kazin, 'The Great Mistake in the Great War', *New York Times*, 6 April 2017, A28 (emphasis added).
- 9 For the impact of *Stunde Null* on subsequent German attitudes towards the use of force, see Thomas F. Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

- 10 See Benjamin O. Fordham, 'Revisionism Reconsidered: Exports and American Intervention in World War I', *International Organization* 61 (April 2007): 277–310. Earlier instances of the economic explanation include John Kenneth Turner, *Shall It Be Again?* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1922); Edwin Borchard and William Potter Lage, *Neutrality for the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937); and Alice Morrissey, *The American Defense of Neutral Rights, 1914–1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939). For a contemporary critique of this hypothesis, see Denna Frank Fleming, 'Our Entry into the World War in 1917: The Revised Version', *Journal of Politics* 2 (February 1940): 75–86.
- 11 See Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1938; orig. pub. 1927); Horace C. Peterson, *Propaganda for War: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914–1917* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939); Charles Callan Tansill, *America Goes to War* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1963; orig. pub. 1938); James M. Read, *Atrocity Propaganda, 1914–1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941); and Stewart Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914–1918* (London: McFarland & Company, 1996).
- 12 Examples include Sigmund Freud and William C. Bullitt, *Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Twenty-Eighth President of the United States: A Psychological Study* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967); and Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York: John Day, 1956). For a hearty endorsement of the latter's findings, see Bernard Brodie, 'A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Woodrow Wilson', *World Politics* 9 (April 1957): 413–22. Much less exuberant is Robert C. Tucker, 'The Georges' Wilson Re-examined: An Essay on Psychobiography', *American Political Science Review* 71 (June 1977): 606–18. A judicious summary is Dorothy Ross, 'Woodrow Wilson and the Case for Psychohistory', *Journal of American History* 69 (December 1982): 65–8.
- 13 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 236–7. For a recent combined restatement of the assumed strategic merits of offshore balancing, see Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, 'The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy', *Foreign Affairs* 95 (July/August 2016): 70–83. Individually, the two structural realists have championed this grand strategy in Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018); and Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).
- 14 On those campaigns of the neutrality years, see John Patrick Finnegan, *Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914–1917* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1974); George C. Herring, Jr., 'James Hay and the Preparedness Controversy, 1915–1916', *Journal of Southern History* 30 (November 1964): 383–404; and Michael Pearlman, *To Make Democracy Safe for America: Patricians and Preparedness in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). On the singling out of Germany as the foe against whom one needed to be prepared, see Alfred Vagts, 'Hopes and Fears of an American-German War, 1870–1915: I', *Political Science Quarterly* 54 (December 1939): 514–35; and more generally, Clara Eve Schieber, *The Transformation of American Sentiment Toward Germany, 1870–1914* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1923). German activities in the United States, including espionage, propaganda and sabotage initiatives, did little to win a place of affection for the country in the hearts of preparedness advocates,

- always more than 'prepared' to put those initiatives in the most sinister possible light, as not just annoying (which they were), but also endangering. For a critical assessment of German attempts to influence developments in the United States, see Reinhard R. Doerries, 'Imperial Berlin and Washington: New Light on Germany's Foreign Policy and America's Entry into World War I', *Central European History* 11 (March 1978): 23–49; and Idem, *Imperial Challenge: Ambassador Count Bernstorff and German-American Relations, 1908–1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).
- 15 Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1943). Also see Forrest Davis, *The Atlantic System: The Story of Anglo-American Control of the Seas* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941).
  - 16 See John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1983).
  - 17 Daniel Malloy Smith, 'National Interest and American Intervention, 1917: An Historiographical Appraisal', *Journal of American History* 52 (June 1965): 5–24, quote at pp. 23–4. Also see Idem, *The Great Departure: The United States and World War I, 1914–1920* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965).
  - 18 Richard W. Leopold, 'The Problem of American Intervention, 1917: An Historical Retrospect', *World Politics* 2 (April 1950): 405–25, quote at p. 423, n52.
  - 19 Galen Jackson, 'The Offshore Balancing Thesis Reconsidered: Realism, the Balance of Power in Europe, and America's Decision for War in 1917', *Security Studies* 21 (July 2012): 455–89, quoting from pp. 488–9.
  - 20 Robert Endicott Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations: The Great Transformation of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 175.
  - 21 Collective security is often, sloppily, used as a synonym for a different, and competing, sort of security dispensation, collective defence. The biggest difference between the two security arrangements concerns the place of alliances, forbidden in the former, essential in the latter. A good analysis of the concept remains Inis L. Claude, Jr., 'Collective Security as an Approach to Peace', in Claude, *From Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization*, 4th edn. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 353–64. Also see Roland N. Stromberg, 'The Idea of Collective Security', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17 (April 1956): 250–63.
  - 22 Lloyd E. Ambrosius, 'Wilson, the Republicans, and French Security after World War I', *Journal of American History* 59 (September 1972): 341–52. Wilson agreed, reluctantly, that the tripartite alliance so desired by France should be incorporated into the Versailles treaty, but when the US senate failed to ratify the latter, the former also became a dead letter. See Louis A. R. Yates, *The United States and French Security, 1917–1921: A Study in American Diplomatic History* (New York: Twayne, 1957); and Walter A. McDougall, *France's Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914–1924: The Last Bid for a Balance of Power in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
  - 23 Thomas A. Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1963).
  - 24 Charles Seymour, *American Diplomacy during the World War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934). A generation later, at a time when criticism was again mounting against Wilson's legacy as a diplomatist, this same historian would continue to fight the good fight on behalf of Wilson's strategic acumen. On the occasion of the centenary of the president's birth, he published an account praiseful of Wilsonian diplomacy, writing that '[e]ven those who today believe that only a compromise

- peace would have provided the base for a permanent settlement admit that Wilson's hand was forced and that the Germans left him no alternative but to enter the war'. Seymour, 'Woodrow Wilson in Perspective', *Foreign Affairs* 34 (January 1956): 175–86, quote at p. 179.
- 25 See John W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: The United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1899–1915* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).
- 26 Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering America's Neutrality, 1914–1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 204. Also see Justus Drew Doenecke, *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of American Entry into World War I* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 249: 'Germany's public announcement of unrestricted submarine warfare marked the beginning of the end of peace with the United States'; and Gideon Rose, 'The Fourth Founding: The United States and the Liberal Order', *Foreign Affairs* 98 (January/February 2019): 10–21, where it is asserted that '[u]nrestricted submarine warfare was designed to squeeze the Allies into submission. Instead, it pulled the United States into the war, and the world, for good' (p. 12).
- 27 Arguing that Wilsonian decision-making was motivated by idealism born of moral certainty rather than any power-based calculations is Robert H. Ferrell, 'Woodrow Wilson: Man and Statesman', *Review of Politics* 18 (April 1956): 131–45. 'The immediate occasion for American entrance into the war was the German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, which to Wilson's way of thinking was a criminal act. He seems to have gone into the war under the feeling that the balance of justice in the world was being sacrificed to the unjust Central Powers. There is no proof as yet that Wilson led the country into war with a clear determination to preserve the balance of power in Europe .... The "new diplomacy" – a weighing of good against evil, rather than power against power – dictated his decision for war in 1917' (quote at pp. 143–4).
- 28 Robert W. Tucker, 'Woodrow Wilson's "New Diplomacy"', *World Policy Journal* 21 (Summer 2004): 92–107.
- 29 On this cyclical pattern, see Lloyd E. Ambrosius, 'Woodrow Wilson, Alliances, and the League of Nations', *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 5 (April 2006): 139–65. The three cycles of rise and decline in his image were: (1) from the earliest days of the post-First World War period to the onset of interwar revisionism; (2) from America's entry into the Second World War to the commencement of the Cold War; and (3) from the ending of the Cold War to the current angst regarding the shaky future of the 'liberal international order' (or LIO). Recent survey data indicates that Wilson is today recognized by scholars as neither great nor disastrous, but simply fair-to-middling, a president ranking alongside William McKinley and John Adams as second-tier leaders, good but not great; see 'C-Span Presidential Historians Survey 2021', available at <https://www.c-span.org/presidentssurvey2021>.
- 30 Arthur S. Link, *The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971). Also see William G. Carleton, 'A New Look at Woodrow Wilson', *Virginia Quarterly Review* 38 (Fall 1962): 545–66.
- 31 For this intriguing claim, see Ross A. Kennedy, 'Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and an American Conception of National Security', *Diplomatic History* 25 (Winter 2001): 1–31. Also see Idem, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009).
- 32 Renshon, *Fighting for Status*.

