

Literature Review for: The United States and China's Energy Security Dilemma

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Realist theories assume the “centrality of states” as the primary players in international politics and that “the world is anarchic” (Frankel xv). These two assumptions are consistent across various realist schools but the question of whether “security in the international system is scarce” divides offensive and defensive realists (Frankel xv). Offensive realists argue that security is scarce, and so nations feverishly pursue offensive strategies which increase their strength and power and inevitably lead to conflict, while defensive realists contend that security is abundant and so nations find that increasing their defensive capacity is the optimal strategy (Frankel xv). Defensive realism puts faith in the “intractability of the security dilemma” as a source of conflict in international politics (Taliaferro 136).

John Herz first used the term “security dilemma” to describe the way groups or individuals act in anarchic environments (Waltz 186). Herz argues that political units, whether they are individuals, families, classes, or countries, living in an “anarchic society” will have concerns regarding “their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals” (Herz 158). For Herz, insecurity and fear compel political units to gain power so that they can “escape the impact of the powers of others” (Herz 158). The theory that in an anarchic system groups seek power as a means of achieving security stands in contrast to offensive realist theories which argue that groups seek power because anarchy in the international system “provides strong incentives for expansion” (Taliaferro 128). In the second part of the security dilemma, Herz contends that the actions taken by groups to achieve security

make other groups feel less secure and so both sides continuously try to “prepare for the worst” in what Herz calls “the vicious circle of security and power accumulation (Herz 158). The security dilemma has broad implications in the field of International politics and can be used to help understand how conflicts between nations arise and the strategies that can defuse these conflicts.

Offensive realism places a premium on the “utility of force” as a strategy for states to fulfill their interests and increase their security (Frankel xvii). From this perspective, nations pursue policies expecting the use of force. This expectation of a fight stands in contrast to the way conflict arises in Herz’s security dilemma. In the security dilemma, both sides have common and compatible goals and interests but due to the structure of the international system the outcome can be tragic (Jervis 66). The security dilemma function in much the same way as the prisoner’s dilemma, that is two actors pursue self-interested policies and in the end are worse off than they would be if they had cooperated. Robert Jervis explains that “the inability to recognize that one’s own actions could be seen as menacing and the concomitant belief that the other’s hostility can only be explained by its aggressiveness” is part of the mechanism that breeds conflict and makes the security dilemma spiral out of control (Jervis 75). Furthermore, Jervis also asserts that the inability to differentiate between offensive and defensive policies and arms can send two nations into a security dilemma (Jervis 186, 1978). Charles Glaser makes two additions to Jervis’s explanation for causes of the security dilemma. Glaser refutes the claim made against the security dilemma that greed is the ultimate source of international conflict (e.g. see Schweller 1994) and argues that greed is a variable that enhances the security dilemma dynamic (Glaser 174). Glaser also reasons that a state can

minimize the scale of the security dilemma by increasing “an adversary’s unit-level knowledge of the state’s motives” (Glaser 174). That is if a state understands the true security enhancing defensive intentions of another state they will not respond as if those actions were offensive or aggressive and the security dilemma will remain minimal.

Charles Glaser makes concrete Jervis’s claim that a nations attempt to increase its own security while decreasing another’s leads to tragic ends (Jervis 169, 1978). Glaser argues that these attempts to increase one’s own security provide incentives for the adversary to expand while they deplete one’s own military’s resources and come at a high cost (Glaser 174). From the perspective of a self-interested nation, actions which threaten the security of others are not the most beneficial (Glaser 174). This argument implies then that there are calculable incentives for a country to search for a way out of the security dilemma.

Kenneth Boulding writes about “real incompatibility,” in which one state achieving its goals inhibits the carrying out of another state’s goals and “illusory incompatibility” which describes the existence of a scenario where both countries can simultaneously realize their goals (Boulding 130). Understanding this distinction has implications for limiting the effects of the security dilemma. A nation that builds up its military to ensure national security does pose a real threat to another country and so the other country will often times proceed to build up its military also. The ends for both countries are security and the means are arms proliferation. A growing military could represent a real threat but the ultimate goal for both sides, security, is an illusory threat. If the ends are compatible and the means are incompatible then discussion and cooperation between the two sides can limit the spiraling effects of the security dilemma. The

constant fear of being exploited by the other side reduces the incentives for cooperation even though both sides will be better off if they cooperate (Jervis: 1978 172).

Cooperation requires that one country recognize that its fear is illusory and take the initiative to make a concession.

While most literature on the security dilemma grounds the discussion in military norms, as globalization brings the world closer together, a new range of interactions between nations provides a reason to examine whether the security dilemma can apply to other types of interactions. During the cold war nuclear proliferation provided a compelling argument for the security dilemma. Herz said that political units are “concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated or annihilated by other groups and individuals” and this explained well the U.S.-Russia nuclear proliferation (Herz 157). Discussions of security in terms of protection from annihilation or attack will undoubtedly address military concerns but Herz’s inclusion of security with respect to domination or subjection permits a departure from the most common type of security dilemma analysis. If the security dilemma is an effective tool in understanding conflict escalation then restricting its use to only military and arms based conflicts and not exploring the range conflicts which result from fear of subjection or domination in their various manifestations limits our ability to describe other scenarios in international politics.

Applying the security dilemma theory on a situation requires proof that security is in fact at stake and a working definition of security. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams challenge conventional understandings of security which focus on military concerns and argue that the “post-Cold War security order” forces us to reexamine and

broaden our definition of security to include a range of threats from “economic and environmental issues to human rights and migration” (Krause and Williams 229). Krause and Williams are part of a growing school of IR theory (e.g. see Crawford 1994, Jessica Tucman Mathews 1989, Theodore Moran 1989, Brad Robert 1990, Richard Ulman 1983, and Myron Weiner 1993) which seeks to redefine the nature of security studies (Krause and Williams 229). Krause and Williams on one hand want to expand the discussion of security while on the other hand they want to ensure “scientific objectivity” and avoid an “anything goes” approach to security which has been a point of criticism for neorealist security analysis (Krause and Williams 235). Krause and Williams do not reach a comprehensive definition of security but rather advocate the importance of keeping definitions of security flexible in the dynamic world of politics (Krause and Williams 249).

In “The New Security Dilemma under International Interdependence,” Beverly Crawford expands the definition of security to include economic threats. Crawford challenges the understanding that a state’s security is contingent solely upon its military prowess, and argues that economic interdependence can take the protection of important military resources away from the state’s control (Crawford 46) While nations are interested in the benefits of economic interdependence, they are also concerned with protecting “dual-use technologies” and so Crawford maintains that nations will try to find a balance between an open market and protecting foreign powers’ access to valuable technologies (Crawford 46). Crawford believes that these protectionist policies instigate a security dilemma characterized by a slippery slope away from economic interdependence

and cooperation (Crawford 50). Crawford explores a new realm of security and in doing so links economic security with traditional military security.

Energy, like high technology, has implications for national security. In the traditional sense, a country cannot be a military threat if it does not have the energy needed to fuel a large scale wartime economy. For import-dependent countries, energy security has broad implication for their foreign policy objectives and the power and leverage they wield in the international political scene. In “Energy Self-sufficiency and National Security” Joan Edelman Spero stretches the definition of national security to include threats that would damage “the functioning of the economic system as a whole” while inflicting political damage as well (Spero 124). As the country’s economic prowess withers and dependence on foreign resources increases, Spero contends that the country will lose its “bargaining position” and will be forced to compromise other policy objectives for access to energy. If energy dependency can reduce a nation’s range of policy choices and autonomy and threaten the functioning of the state, then energy security is inextricably linked to national security.

Crawford describes a situation where nations are forced to decide between policies that foster the free market’s allocation of resources and also the need to protect those resources which are critical for national security (Crawford 47). The competitive free market provides an environment that promotes the creation of new technologies but at the same time nations want to put up protectionist barriers for national security reasons. In energy politics there is an analogous dynamic at play. As the global competition for energy heightens countries simultaneously try to promote trust in the

allocative efficiency of the free market while at the same time attempting to secure resources through increased ownership.

If the argument holds that energy security is in fact a security issue, then the security dilemmas should, as it did for Crawford, provide an enlightening theoretical ground for the dynamics of global energy politics. In the summer of 2006, Andrew Monaghan published an article in which he argues for the existence of an “emerging energy security dilemma” between the EU and Russia (Monaghan 1). Monaghan asserts that Russia-European Union energy relations are beneficial for both actors (Monaghan 5). Specifically, member states of the European Union need Russian energy to run their economies and Russia needs the profits earned to maintain its growth (Monaghan 5). While cooperation is in both country’s best interest, European critiques of Russian reliability and discussion of supply diversification and Russian talk of expanding a pipeline to the east threatens to set off a series of retaliatory measures and compromise the benefits gained through working together (Monaghan 6). While Monaghan describes a producer-consumer realization of the energy security dilemma, recently there has been limited discussion of a growing energy security dilemma between the world’s two largest oil consumers, the United States and China.

There is a large body of literature that addresses the up-and-coming race for energy security between the U.S. and China (e.g. see Erickson 2006, Klare and Volman 2006, Lafargue 2006, Leverett and Bader 2005, Shen 55, Taylor 2006, Zweig and Bi date?) but only minimal work on the issue from the theoretical perspective of the security dilemma. In June of 2004, Paul Roberts wrote an article entitled “The Undeclared Oil War” in which he deemed U.S., China, and other’s efforts to secure

energy resources around the globe as “the real energy-security dilemma” in which these superpower’s unavoidable quest for energy will become even more uncertain as their respective strategies for achieving energy security conflict with each other. More recently in April of 2006, Minxin Pei wrote an article for the Strait Times entitled “China’s Big Energy Dilemma” in which he reasons that the security dilemma “describes nicely how China’s measures to improve its own energy security are causing concerns among other oil consuming nations”, namely the U.S. and Japan. Pei writes off the feasibility of (what does “writes off the feasibility of” mean?) accusations against China that they are trying to lock-up world oil supplies and in doing so discredits the threat China poses as illusory (Pei 2). If China’s efforts are merely illusory, then like a good defensive realist he insists that “they should cooperate, not compete” (Minxin 2).

Stable relations between the U.S. and China are mutually beneficial, but history tells us that they are also dynamic. Both sides have their grievances regarding issues ranging from human rights to trade policy but these two countries have managed to uphold a level of conduct. Regardless of what actions the U.S. and China take in their respective quests for oil, the increasing global consumption of this non-renewable resource will make these two nations’ approach to the energy security dilemma an increasingly important topic. This issue deserves greater examination, particularly because if the theoretical prescriptions for the security dilemma are going to work then it would be prudent to delve further into the policies, actions, and rhetoric coming from both sides to learn just how snugly this issue fits the security dilemma.

Often times during a security dilemma, players recognize mounting tensions and what appear to be threatening advances from the opposing side but fail to examine critically the actions their side has taken which might have caused such advances. In the case of the US-China quest for energy security, rhetoric from both sides indicates an easy rationalization of their own strategies but a difficult time recognizing the other side's concerns. In a speech before the Council on Foreign Relations, Senator Joseph Lieberman, echoing both Henry Kissinger and Robert Zoellick, the Deputy Secretary of State, cites the competition for energy resources as "one of the biggest sources of potential friction between the U.S. and the PRC" (Council on Foreign Relations November 30 2006). Many other voices in American politics have reached such a conclusion and, like Lieberman, they seem to get stuck on the notion that China's efforts around the globe are designed "to lock up energy supplies" and that these aggressive nationalistic policies are of concern for the United States (CFR November 30 2006). The allegation that China's efforts are intended to "lock up" world energy resources is common and one that President Bush has made (Sanger). Senator Lieberman lists actions taken by the Chinese around the world and places the onus on the Chinese to change their policies. Ultimately Lieberman, like so many others, emphasizes the need for cooperation between the U.S. and the PRC but does not examine the actions his own country has taken which have fostered this dangerous competition.

A majority staff report entitled "Securing America's Energy Future" looks at energy security from the same security dilemma perpetuating perspective voiced by Senator Lieberman. The report addresses what China has done to threaten U.S. national security as opposed to the threatening dynamic both sides are fostering. The report

highlights China's "increasingly aggressive tactics to secure long-term access to oil and natural gas" and a reliance on oil equity as a strategy in the "extended 'great game' of geopolitics" (Majority Staff Report May 8, 2006). Representative Christopher Smith of New Jersey voiced a similar fear concerning China's role in oil rich regions of Africa and its attempts "gain a stranglehold on precious African natural resources" and the threat it poses to American efforts to promote democracy on the continent (Klare 623). These opinions expressed in the Majority Staff report and by Representative Smith might be justified but this type of flag-raising rhetoric dangerously disregards the role both sides are playing in the increasingly competitive drive for energy security.

The Council on Foreign Relations released a report entitled "National Security Consequences of U.S. Oil Dependency" which analyses the U.S.-China race for energy security from the perspective of what the Chinese are doing to decrease U.S. security and not from the perspective of what dynamic both the U.S. and China are perpetuating which is threatening U.S. national security. According to this report, "the United states has correctly followed a policy strategy that, in large measure, has stressed the importance of markets" while China has conversely pursued policies around the globe characterized by a "desire to 'lock up' particular supplies for the Chinese market" (CFR).

Rhetoric coming from China indicates a similar fear and skepticism regarding the U.S. actions in places of oil wealth. Just as the U.S. looks with fear upon Chinese oil acquisitions around the globe, the Chinese are very aware of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq. Pan Rui, an international relations specialist from Fudan University in Shanghai, explains: "The Middle East is China's largest source of oil. America is now pursuing a grand strategy, the pursuit of American hegemony in the

Middle East. Saudi Arabia is the number one oil producer, and Iraq is number two. Now, the United States has direct influence in both countries” (Goodman, The Washington Post). U.S. officials would insist that their policy in Iraq is not about oil and would emphasize that Iraqi oil will be traded freely in the global market, but unfortunately as the Chinese are faced with the challenge of ensuring their future energy security the U.S. efforts in Iraq present an immediate obstacle and so the concern is expected. Chinese energy security worries stretch beyond just who controls the wells and include and increasing awareness of the United States’ naval presence in shipping lanes crucial for supplying China with Oil. President Hu Jintao contends that the United States has “all along encroached on and tried to control navigation of the [Malaca] strait” (Zweig 34). Foreign policy experts and government officials in China are weary (wary?) of the actions which their counterparts in the United States reassure were not meant to compromise their energy security.

Both sides find it easy to rationalize their fears and their actions and as a result create dangerous misperceptions which become grounds for justification of further defensive actions. The rhetoric from each nation appears in line with Robert Jervis’ observation that “the inability to recognize that one’s own actions could be seen as menacing and the concomitant belief that the other’s hostility can be explained by its aggressiveness” exacerbates the security dilemma.