The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis

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Critically building upon the work of Herbert Butterfield, John Herz, and Robert Jervis, this article advances a more rigorous definition of the security dilemma. It demonstrates critical implications of the rigorously redefined concept. It examines several influential extensions and expansions of the original concept, showing that most have been inaccurate and misleading, and proposes remedies for correcting the mistakes. Finally, it identifies several areas of future research that may yield important new insights into the dynamics of the security dilemma.

The security dilemma is one of the most important theoretical ideas in international relations.[1] In the years since Herbert Butterfield, John Herz, and Robert Jervis first developed the concept,[2] it has been extended and applied to "address many of the most important questions of international relations

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[1] I differentiate the term "security dilemma" from "security dilemma theory." The security dilemma is a concept for labeling a particular situation in international politics. Security dilemma theory is the body of knowledge that seeks to understand the underlying causes, regulations, and implications of the security dilemma. I also differentiate the security dilemma from its close relative—spiral. Also, we should differentiate a spiral from the spiral model. See section "Toward A More Precise Understanding: Remedies" below for details.

[2] Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951); John Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism: A Study in Theories and Realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

theory and security policy."[3] The security dilemma is arguably the theoretical linchpin of defensive realism, because for defensive realists it is the security dilemma that makes possible genuine cooperation between states—beyond a fleeting alliance in the face of a common foe.[4] For offensive realists, however, the security dilemma makes war inevitable and rational.[5] Realists, moreover, are hardly the only scholars to utilize the concept. Neoliberal scholars argue that one of the functions of international institutions is to alleviate the security dilemma.[6] Liberals claim that democratic institutions facilitate peace precisely because they too alleviate the security dilemma.[7] And constructivists have asserted that alleviating the security dilemma is one of the channels through which reshaping identity can remake anarchy.[8]

Understood correctly, security dilemma theory and the broader spiral model constitute a powerful theory of war and peace via interaction. They capture general dynamics leading to the outbreak of war and the maintenance of peace (that is, by reversing or alleviating the security dilemma). The concept's influence thus extends well beyond theory. The security dilemma has been deployed to help explain major events, such as the First World War,[9] the origins and end of the Cold War,[10] and the outbreak of ethnic conflicts in former republics of the Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, and Africa.[11] More importantly, security dilemma theory and the broader spiral model have been deployed for prescribing policies for some of the most pressing challenges in international politics, including managing arms

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University Press, 1976), chap. 3; and Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167–214.

   [3] Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (October 1997): 171–201, quotation on 172.

   [4] For more, see Shiping Tang, "Fear in International Politics: Two Positions," *International Studies Review* 10, no. 3 (September 2008): 451–70. This is also why Jervis's "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma" is the foundational work of defensive realism.

   [5] Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), chap. 2; and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: Norton, 2001), 35–6.

   [6] Seth Weinberger, "Institutional Signaling and the Origin of the Cold War," *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (2003): 80–115.

   [7] Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, nos. 3 and 4 (Summer and Autumn 1983): 205–35, 323–53.

   [8] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Makes of It," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 391–425.

   [9] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, chap. 3; Jack Snyder, "Perceptions of the Security Dilemma in 1914," in *Psychology and Deterrence*, eds., Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Stein (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 153–79; and Copeland, *Origins of Major War*.

   [10] Robert Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 36–60; Andrew Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Alan R. Collins, "GRIT, Gorbachev, and the End of the Cold War," *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 2 (1998): 201–19.

   [11] Barry Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," *Survival* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 27–47. I address the problem of security dilemma and ethnic conflict in Shiping Tang, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Toward a Dynamic and Integrative Theory of Ethnic Conflict," *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming).

races,[12] designing a lasting peace to ethnic conflicts,[13] and avoiding a possible conflict between a rising China and the United States as the reigning hegemon,[14] to name just a few.

Despite its centrality, many areas of disagreement or confusion exist among international relations theorists about the security dilemma.[15] In this article, I critically revisit the concept of the security dilemma, and some of its most significant extensions, and advance a coherent and systematic restatement of the concept.[16] I accomplish five major tasks. First, I build on the writings of the three original proponents of the concept—Herbert Butterfield, John Herz, and Robert Jervis—to advance a more rigorous definition that provides a complete causal link from anarchy to the security dilemma. Second, I derive key implications of the rigorously redefined concept, thus preparing the ground for clarifying prevalent misunderstandings. Third, I reexamine several prominent extensions, showing that most have been unnecessary, misguided, or wrong.[17] Fourth, I propose two major remedies for eliminating the areas of confusion within the existing literature. Finally, I suggest several directions for future research.

A MORE RIGOROUS DEFINITION OF THE SECURITY DILEMMA

Confusion regarding the security dilemma exists principally because many scholars, including the three original proponents of the concept, have defined the concept in loose ways. By critically examining and then building on the original expositions, this section provides a more rigorous definition of the concept.

The Security Dilemma According to Butterfield, Herz, and Jervis

Herbert Butterfield argued that the security dilemma can drive states to war even though they may not want to harm each other: "The greatest war in

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[12] Charles Glaser, "When Are Arms Races Dangerous?" *International Security* 28, no. 4 (Spring 2004): 44–84.

[13] Chaim D. Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 139–75.

[14] Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 49–80; and Christensen, "The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 7–21.

[15] The presence of disagreements on the security dilemma among scholars is confirmed by a survey of prominent scholars that have either developed some aspects of the concept and theory or have utilized the concept as a major analytical tool. A summary of the results of the survey is available from the author upon request.

[16] As will become clear below, I also critique earlier efforts to provide a full conceptualization, notably Charles Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited"; and Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[17] In addition to the extensions of the security dilemma examined below, there is also a sustained attempt to strip-down the concept in the literature on the security dilemma in ethnic conflict. See Tang, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict."

history can be produced without the intervention of any great criminals who might be out to do deliberate harm in the world. It could be produced between two powers, both of which were desperately anxious to avoid a conflict of any sort." Butterfield's writings contain six propositions about security dilemma: (1) its ultimate source is fear, which is derived from the "universal sin of humanity"; (2) it requires uncertainty over others' intentions; (3) it is unintentional in origin; (4) it produces tragic results; (5) it can be exacerbated by psychological factors; and (6) it is the fundamental cause of all human conflicts.[18]

Note, however, that Butterfield's attribution of the ultimate source of the security dilemma to the "universal sin of humanity" is logically incompatible with his other theses that the security dilemma is unintentional in origin and that conflicts driven by the security dilemma are tragic. If we do harm against each other due to the "universal sin of humanity," then we are programmed to harm (presumably, biologically)—there is no exception to this rule.[19] If so, there is no real uncertainty about each other's intentions: all of us must recognize that each of us is evil. Moreover, the unintentionality within states' (harmful) behavior will be superficial: states are harming each other unintentionally only because each of them is (biologically) programmed to be malign. This contradiction within Butterfield's definition is only resolved when Herz and Jervis attribute the ultimate source of the security dilemma to the anarchical structure of international politics.

John Herz, who originally coined the term "security dilemma," elaborated it as follows: "Groups and individuals who live alongside each other without being organized into a higher unity . . . must be . . . concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attacks, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the effects of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Because no state can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on."[20]

Herz went on: "Whether man is 'by nature' peaceful and cooperative, or aggressive and domineering, is not the question. . . . It is his uncertainty and anxiety as to his neighbors' intentions that places man in this basic [security] dilemma, and makes the 'homo homini lupus' a primary fact of the social life of man. Basically it is the mere instinct of self-preservation which, in the vicious circle [of the security dilemma], leads to competition for ever

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[18] Butterfield, *History and Human Relations*, 19–22. Butterfield's "universal sin of humanity" can be reasonably linked with Machiavelli's *ambizione*, Reinhold Niebuhr's "will to power," and Hans Morgenthau's "lust for power."

[19] Note, however, only by attributing fear, and thus the security dilemma, to the "universal sin of humanity" can Butterfield claim that the security dilemma drives all human conflicts.

[20] Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, 157.

more power."[21] "It is one of the tragic implications of the security dilemma that mutual fear of what initially may never have existed may subsequently bring about exactly that which is feared most."[22] Although Herz initially also believed the security dilemma to be all pervasive, he later explicitly rebutted Butterfield's assertion that the security dilemma is the cause behind all human conflicts by noting that there was no security dilemma between Hitler's Germany and other states.[23]

Herz also spelled out six aspects of the security dilemma: (1) the ultimate source of the security dilemma is anarchy—the lack of "a higher unity"; (2) an immediate cause of the security dilemma is states' uncertainty and fears about each other's intentions to do harm under anarchy; (3) states' means of self-help—trying to escape from the security dilemma by accumulating more and more power—generates a cycle of power competition; (4) states' attempt to escape from the security dilemma by accumulating more and more power may not increase their security at all, becoming self-defeating and even tragic; (5) the security dilemma can cause war, but is not the cause of all wars; and (6) the dynamic of the security dilemma is a self-reinforcing "vicious cycle."

Herz's original exposition was not explicit on whether the security dilemma must be unintentional in origin. Nonetheless, Herz's exposition implies the argument that the security dilemma's origin is indeed unintentional. Herz asserted that the security dilemma arises from states' accumulation of more and more power for their own security due to fear and uncertainty about other states' intentions under anarchy. Moreover, Herz implied that evil intentions nullify the security dilemma by explicitly asserting that there was no security dilemma between Nazi Germany and other states. His emphasis on the paradoxical and self-defeating (thus tragic) nature of seeking security under anarchy also suggests that the security dilemma was unintentional in origin for him.

Robert Jervis has done the most to bring the security dilemma into mainstream (structural) international relations theories, but his writings arguably contain definitions no less casual than those provided by Butterfield and Herz. Indeed, Jervis's writings do not contain a systematic definition of the concept; rather, they treat the concept briefly and inconsistently. In various places, Jervis defined the security dilemma as follows: "these unintended and undesired consequences of actions meant to be defensive,"[24] "many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others," and "one state's gain in security often inadvertently threatens

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[21] Ibid., 3–4.

[22] John Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 241.

[23] Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, 12; and Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, 234n5.

[24] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 66.

others."[25] In other places, Jervis emphasized other aspects of the security dilemma: "The heart of the security dilemma argument is that an increase in one state's security can make others less secure, not because of mispercep- tions or imaged hostility, but because of the anarchic context of international relations"; "Even if they can be certain that the current intentions of other states are benign, they can neither neglect the possibility that the others will become aggressive in the future nor credibly guarantee that they themselves will remain peaceful";[26] and "When determining . . . a true security dilemma, we have to consider whether those actions were purely defensive."[27] Finally, like Herz, Jervis also emphatically denies that the security dilemma is at the heart of all conflicts.[28]

Jervis's various definitions and elaborations stressed seven aspects of the security dilemma: (1) the security dilemma is structural in origin; (2) states' uncertainty and fears about each other's present and future intentions is crucial for forming and maintaining the security dilemma; (3) it is caused by defensive actions, thus unintentional;[29] (4) it tends to produce unintended and self-defeating results—that is, decreases in one's own security; (5) it tends to produce unintended and tragic results—that is, war; (6) the security dilemma can cause war, but is not the cause of all wars; and (7) the dynamic of the security dilemma is self-reinforcing and resembles a spiral.

Finally, in addition to emphasizing these seven aspects of the security dilemma, Jervis also made another fundamental contribution: the severity of the security dilemma can be regulated by both physical/material factors (for example, technology, geography) and psychological/perceptual factors (for example, misperceptions).[30]

To summarize, although there have been significant overlapping areas among the definitions and elaborations by the three original inventors of the security dilemma (see Table 1), none provided a rigorous and coherent

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[25] Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," 169–70. See also, Jervis, "Realism, Game The- ory, and Cooperation," *World Politics* 40, no. 4 (April 1988): 317; "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Coop- eration: Understanding the Debate," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (1999): 49; "Security Regimes," *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 358; and "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" 39.

[26] Jervis, *Perception and Misperceptions*, 62, 76; and Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" 36. This uncertainty about each other's present and future intentions under anarchy is crucial to the formation and maintenance of the security dilemma. Yet, many authors tend to forget this point, resulting in misunderstandings.

[27] Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" 57.

[28] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 75, 80; and Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation," 49.

[29] Jervis, however, has not been consistent. For example, when discussing the Franco-German relationship before World War I, Jervis argued that "the security dilemma here operated not as the unintended consequence of policy but rather as its object." Jervis, "Security Regimes," 361.

[30] "Material regulators" are a more fitting label than "structural modifiers." Jeffrey W. Taliaferro recognized that structural modifiers are "material factors." Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2000–2001): 137.

TABLE 1 The Security Dilemma according to Butterfield, Herz, and Jervis

Aspects of the Security Dilemma	Butterfield (1951, 1960)	Herz (1950, 1951, 1966)	Jervis (1976, 1978, 1982, 1999, 2001)
The ultimate source is anarchy	No	Yes	Yes
Uncertainty over others' intentions	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fear about each other	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lack of malign intentions	Yes, but inconsistent	Yes	Yes, but inconsistent
Power competition	Not explicit	Yes	Yes
Spiral-like situation	Not explicit	Yes	Yes
Unintended tragic results	Yes	Yes	Yes
Unintended (and partially) self-defeating results	Not explicit	Yes	Yes
Regulators of the security dilemma	Only psychological factors were emphasized	Not emphasized	Both material and psychological factors were emphasized
Universal or conditional	Universal	Conditional	Conditional
An important cause of war?	Yes	Yes	Not explicit, although close to a Yes
The cause of all wars?	Yes	No	No

definition of the security dilemma in one place. The lack of such a definition has unfortunate consequences. In particular, it fosters twisting, stretching, and misuse of the concept, resulting in many areas of confusion and contradiction.

Toward a More Rigorous Definition

To obtain a more rigorous and complete definition of the security dilemma, I build on the definitions and elaborations given by all three inventors of the concept. I perform four tasks: (1) retaining common elements that were explicitly or implicitly spelled out by all three; (2) adding elements that were only recognized by only one or two of them, but have now been recognized as an integral part of the overall understanding (for example, Jervis's discussion of the regulators of the security dilemma); (3) eliminating inconsistencies; and (4) adding precision.

I define the security dilemma as follows: Under a condition of anarchy, two states are defensive realist states—that is, they do not intend to threaten each other's security.[31] The two states, however, cannot be sure of each other's present or future intentions. As a result, each tends to fear that the other may be or may become a predator. Because both believe that power is a means toward security, both seek to accumulate more and more power. Because even primarily defensive capability will inevitably contain some offensive capability,[32] many of the measures adopted by one side for its own security can often threaten, or be perceived as threatening, the security of the other side even if both sides merely want to defend their security. Consequently, the other side is likely to take countermeasures against those defensive measures. The interaction of these measures and countermeasures tends to reinforce their fears and uncertainties about each other's intentions, leading to a vicious cycle in which each accumulates more power without necessarily making itself more secure, through a self-reinforcing or positive feedback mechanism. This vicious cycle can also lead to unnecessary thus tragic conflicts—threats of war or war. The severity of the security dilemma can be regulated by both material factors and psychological factors. Because this definition is derived from the original definitions and elaborations of the security dilemma by Butterfield, Herz, and Jervis, I shall call this definition as "the BHJ formulation" hereafter.

Defined as such, the security dilemma has at least eight major aspects:

1. The ultimate source of the security dilemma is the anarchic nature of international politics.[33]
2. Under anarchy, states cannot be certain about each other's present and future intentions. As a result, states tend to fear each other (or the possibility that the other side may be a predator).[34]
3. The security dilemma is unintentional in origin: a genuine security dilemma can exist only between two defensive realist states (that is, states that merely want security without intending to threaten the other).

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[31] Elsewhere, I have proposed that we replace the loose and often ill-informed dichotomies of status quo state/security-seeker versus revisionist state/power-seeker with the more rigorous dichotomy of defensive realist state versus offensive realist state. Shiping Tang, *Defensive Realism: Toward a Coherent Statement* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010), chap. 1. Briefly, defensive realist states do not threaten each other intentionally, and offensive realist states do.

[32] From the very beginning, weapons (as tools of the early humans) have always had dual purposes: to kill and to avoid being killed. Because our ancestors had to confront many powerful nonhuman predators before they came to confront each other, they had to accumulate some (offensive) power before the security dilemma between them was created.

[33] In the context of ethnic conflicts, anarchy can be de facto anarchy (that is, collapse of central authority).

[34] Although logically uncertainty over others' intentions must precede fear: They are ontologically separate and are so closely intertwined that I list them together in Figure 1. See also, Tang, "Fear in International Politics."

4. Because of the uncertainty about each other's intentions (hereafter, uncertainty) and fear, states resort to the accumulation of power or capabilities as a means of defense, and these capabilities inevitably contain some offensive capabilities.
5. The dynamics of the security dilemma are self-reinforcing and often lead to (unintended and bad) spirals such as the worsening of relationships and arms races.
6. The dynamics of the security dilemma tends to make some measures for increasing security–for example, accumulating unnecessary offensive capabilities—self-defeating: more power but less security.
7. The vicious cycle derived from the security dilemma can lead to tragic results, such as unnecessary or avoidable wars.
8. The severity of the security dilemma can be regulated by both material factors and psychological factors.

Among the eight aspects, three are essential: anarchy (which leads to uncertainty, fear, and the need for self-help for survival or security), a lack of malign intentions on both sides, and some accumulation of power (including offensive capabilities). Other aspects are either consequences or regulators of the security dilemma, and they are neither sufficient nor necessary for the rise and continuation of the security dilemma. Put differently, the three essential aspects are what make a situation a genuine security dilemma, and other aspects cannot make a situation a genuine security dilemma, however powerfully they may operate, if the three essential aspects do not operate.

With the more rigorous definition, it becomes evident that the complete causal link from anarchy to the security dilemma, and then to war, is rather lengthy and by no means straightforward. It can be captured as follows: anarchy generates uncertainty; uncertainty leads to fear; fear then leads to power competition; power competition activates a (dormant) security dilemma; and the activated security dilemma leads to war through a spiral (Figure 1).[35]

Immediate Implications of the New Definition

With the security dilemma rigorously defined, six critical points must be stressed at the outset.

First, the upper part of Figure 1 concerns the fundamental and proximate causes of the security dilemma, whereas the lower part of Figure

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[35] Because the complete causal link from anarchy to the security dilemma and then to war is rather lengthy, the thesis that anarchy automatically generates the security dilemma and then conflict is open to question for many. See Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 91–121, 191; Marc Trachtenberg, "The Question of Realism: A Historian's View," *Security Studies* 13, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 174; and Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It." I address the link between the security dilemma and war in Tang, *Defensive Realism*, chap. 3.

Anarchy

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Need for self-help toward survival or security

↓

Uncertainty and fear

↓

Self-help through power competition

The causal link to the security dilemma

↓

The Security Dilemma

Actions and reactions ←→ Material & psychological regulators

↓

A spiral

Potential consequences of the security dilemma

Unintended consequences: War or threat of war (as a tragedy)

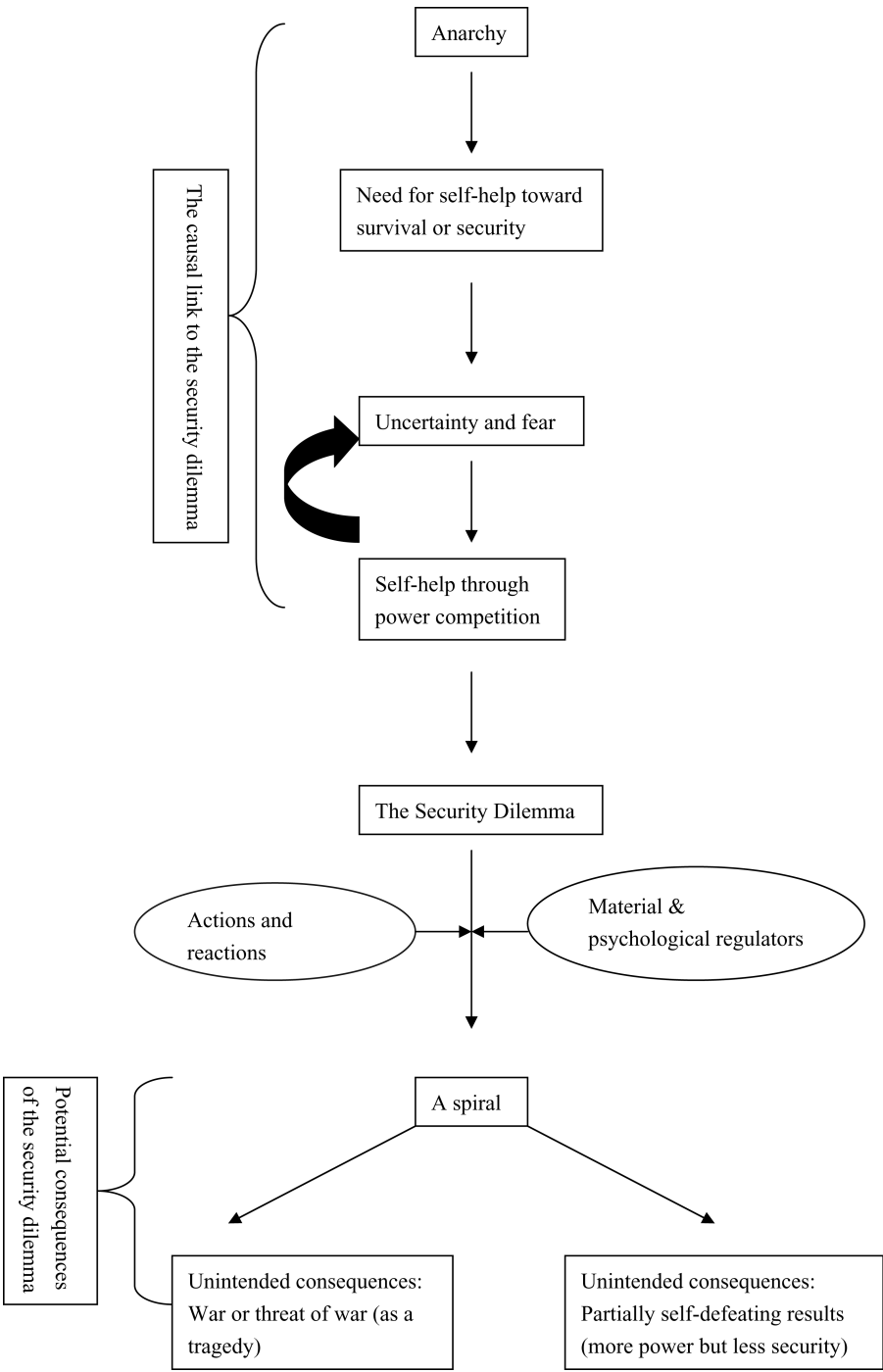Unintended consequences: Partially self-defeating results (more power but less security)

FIGURE 1 The Causal Link from Anarchy to the Security Dilemma and War.

1 concerns the potential outcomes that can be produced by the security dilemma, and these two parts must be understood separately. Although the security dilemma may produce certain types of outcome (for example, spiral, war), not all those types of outcomes are produced by the security dilemma. Thus, while the security dilemma can produce unintended and self-defeating results, not all such results are produced by the security dilemma.[36] Likewise, while the security dilemma can produce (bad) spiral-like situations (for example, a deterioration in relations), not all spirals are caused by the security dilemma.[37] Finally and most critically, while the security dilemma can potentially lead to war, not all wars are caused by the security dilemma.[38]

Second, we should clearly differentiate the causal factors that give birth to the security dilemma (anarchy, uncertainty and fear, and some accumulation of power) from the material and psychological regulators of the security dilemma. Although regulators regulate the severity of the security dilemma, they can neither give birth to nor are they necessary for maintaining the security dilemma.[39] Thus, just because some regulators (for example, misperceptions) are exacerbating a spiral, it does not mean that the situation is a security dilemma. By the same token, the absence of certain regulators does not mean that the situation is not a security dilemma.

Third, we should clearly differentiate the causal factors that give birth to the security dilemma from the potential intermediary outcomes that are induced by the security dilemma but at the same time can come back to reinforce the security dilemma through a feedback mechanism. Thus, although an arms race can reinforce a security dilemma, the arms race is a possible outcome, not a source, of the security dilemma. Likewise, while some state behaviors can generate uncertainty and fear in other states, which can then exacerbate the security dilemma, this uncertainty and fear should not be confused with the original uncertainty and fear dictated by anarchy. Feedbacks are not cause.

Fourth and most critically, three essential aspects (anarchy, a lack of malign intentions, and some accumulation of power) are absolutely necessary for a genuine security dilemma to exist. Neglecting any one of the three essential aspects will inevitably lead to error. One cannot identify a particular situation as a security dilemma just because that situation possesses several nonessential aspects of the security dilemma. Doing so risks making the

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[36] For instance, deterrence policies can and, often do, produce unintended and self-defeating consequences. See Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 81, 90.

[37] See the section "Toward a More Precise Understanding: Remedies" below for details.

[38] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 75; and Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation," 49.

[39] Andrew Kydd, "Game Theory and the Spiral Model," *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (April 1997), 371–400. See also Glaser, "Political Consequences," 507–8; and Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 62–67.

security dilemma "a meaningless and ambiguous term associated with any deterioration in relations."[40]

A fifth point follows immediately: because anarchy and some accumulation of power are usually, if not always, present, this leaves a lack of malign intentions as the most critical ingredient for identifying whether a situation is a genuine security dilemma.[41] When one or two sides in a situation is malign (that is, intentionally threatening), it is not a genuine security dilemma even if it has all other aspects.

Finally, exactly because the security dilemma contains eight aspects, the security dilemma is both extremely inclusive and restrictive. The security dilemma can accommodate many situations and factors (for example, geography, hatred, nationalism), but certain situations and factors simply do not belong to the security dilemma either as a concept or a theory of state interaction (for example, malign intentions).

As will become clear below, the fundamental reason why there have been so many misguided extensions of the security dilemma has been that their proponents neglected some of the principal implications outlined above.

Before I examine those misguided extensions and expansions in detail, however, let me first elaborate on several critical implications of the BHJ formulation of the concept that were either neglected or were only implicit before.

FURTHER ELABORATIONS

Conflict of Interest and the Security Dilemma

With the security dilemma defined rigorously, we can now address the relationship between the security dilemma and conflict of interest—a relationship neglected by the three originators of the security dilemma.[42] This omission provides the grounds for the argument that defensive realism depends on misunderstanding and misperception to drive conflicts among states.[43] That

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[40] Alan R. Collins, *The Security Dilemma of Southeast Asia* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 24.

[41] This, of course, immediately begs the question how to read others' intentions. This problem is beyond the scope of this paper, and I shall merely point out that there are essentially two ways for reading another state's intentions: (1) observing its behavior toward other states; and (2) reassurance, that is signaling one's benign intentions and then gauging the other state's intentions by reading into its reaction toward one's signals of benign intentions. I elaborate on reassurance in Tang, *Defensive Realism*, chap. 5. For a brief discussion, see Shiping Tang, "Correspondence: Uncertainty and Reassurance in International Politics," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 193–97. Kydd and Weinberger both showed that states do deploy reassurance as a means of gauging others' intentions in the real world. See, Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust*; and Weinberger, "Institutional Signaling."

[42] Jervis did briefly allude to this issue in two footnotes. See Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 76n36 and 37. Neither Butterfield nor Herz had said anything explicitly about the relationship.

[43] Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 114–55, at 118–19.

argument is potentially damaging to defensive realism, which, as a strain of realism, must assume that international politics is fundamentally conflictual: real conflict of interest among states is the norm, not the exception. As a linchpin concept of defensive realism, the theory of security dilemma must therefore also start with the assumption that there are often genuine conflicts of interest among states.

Conflict of interest is not actual (violent) conflict. Conflict of interest merely means there is some divergence between two states' interests—that is, they want different things or they cannot have the same thing at the same time. Actual violent conflict means that the two states are actively engaged in war or the threat of war.

What differentiates defensive realism from offensive realism is that defensive realism recognizes that (conflict of) interest has both a subjective side and an objective side[44] and that conflict of interest can be both reconcilable and irreconcilable.[45] These two dimensions make the possible combinations of conflict of interest quite complex. As a result, the relationship between conflict of interest and the security dilemma is also quite complex.

Let us first deal with the situation in which there is no objective (that is, genuine) conflict of interest, but there is subjective conflict of interest between two states.[46] Under this situation, there are two possible scenarios (Figure 2A).

The first scenario is that although the two states mistakenly believe there is an objective conflict of interest between them, they also correctly believe that any potential conflict of interest is genuinely reconcilable. Under this scenario, the security dilemma may operate, but it will be extremely benign. Actual conflict under this scenario is extremely unlikely, partly because the two sides perceive the situation at least partially correctly (that is, misperception here is not severe).

The second scenario is that although no objective conflict of interest exists between two states, one or both states believe that the conflict of interest between them is genuinely irreconcilable. Under this scenario, the

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[44] Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol," *Political Science Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (December 1952): 481–502.

[45] This distinction is only superficially similar to Kenneth Boulding's dichotomy of real incompatibility and illusory incompatibility. In reality, my formulation is very different from and subsumes Boulding's dichotomy. Most fundamentally, Boulding's dichotomy is all subjective: How states define their security requirements determines whether their interests are compatible. As a result, Boulding's dichotomy does not allow the possibility that even if there is subjective incompatibility, there may be no objective, or real incompatibility. In contrast, my formulation allows many possible combinations of objective/subjective, real/illusory, and compatibility/incompatibility. Kenneth Boulding, "National Images and International Systems," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 3, no. 2 (June 1959): 130. For earlier criticism of Boulding's dichotomy, see Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 75–76.

[46] The situation in which there is neither objective nor subjective conflict of interest between two states is of little interest to students of international politics: the world is in perfect harmony, and the challenge for states is how to coordinate for collective benefits. There will be few, if any, active security dilemma in this world.

A. When conflict of interest is objectively illusory but subjectively genuine

<div style="text-align:center;">

Subjective

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No objective conflict of interest, Subjectively reconcilable. A situation of genuine compatibility. Actual conflict is highly unlikely. **The security dilemma may apply.**	No objective conflict of interest, Subjectively irreconcilable. A situation of illusory incompatibility. Actual conflict is likely but highly avoidable. **The security dilemma may apply.**

<div style="text-align:center;">(A)</div>

B. When conflict of interest is objectively genuine.

<div style="text-align:center;">

Subjective

</div>

Objective

Objectively reconcilable, Subjectively reconcilable. A situation of genuine compatibility. Actual conflict is highly unlikely. **The security dilemma applies but may well remain dormant.**	Objectively reconcilable, Subjectively irreconcilable. A situation of illusory incompatibility. Actual conflict is not inevitable, but not unlikely. **The security dilemma may apply.**
Objectively irreconcilable, Subjectively reconcilable. A situation of illusory compatibility. Actual conflict is almost inevitable. **The security dilemma usually does not apply.**	Objectively irreconcilable, Subjectively irreconcilable. A situation of genuine incompatibility. Actual conflict is almost inevitable. **The security dilemma generally does not apply.**

<div style="text-align:center;">(B)</div>

FIGURE 2 Conflict of Interest and the Security Dilemma.

security dilemma may or may not apply, and it critically depends on whether there are malign intentions or not.

If the subjective irreconcilability of interest between the two states is due to one or both sides intentionally defining their interest in an expansive way, then one or both sides are already malign in their intentions, and the security dilemma does not apply. If this is the case, actual conflict is highly likely. If, however, the subjective irreconcilability of interest is due to one or both sides' mistaken (thus unintentional) belief that their interest is incompatible, then the security dilemma will apply. Under this scenario, actual conflict is likely, but tragic, because it is highly avoidable, and misperception will have to play a prominent role if actual conflict is to result. (Apparently, misperception is already severe here).

When there is objective conflict of interest between two states, the situation gets even more complex. Here, we have four possible scenarios (Figure 2B).

The first scenario (the upper left quadrant) is one in which the conflict of interest is both objectively and subjectively reconcilable. The security dilemma operates under this scenario, but may well remain dormant. Both sides correctly recognize that the conflict of interest between them is reconcilable, and neither harbors malign intentions. As a result, the power competition necessary for activating the dormant security dilemma does not have to take place, and the security dilemma can remain dormant. Under this scenario, actual conflict is highly unlikely, most critically because both sides recognize the situation correctly. Nonetheless, actual conflict is still possible because the security dilemma can be easily activated by one or both sides' missteps, and the security dilemma can then propel the two sides into actual conflict.[47]

The second scenario (the upper right quadrant) is one in which the conflict of interest is objectively reconcilable but subjectively irreconcilable. Again, the security dilemma applies only in some situations. When one or both states mistakenly believe that their interests are irreconcilable—the irreconcilability or incompatibility is due to misperception, thus illusory—but neither harbor malign intentions, a genuine security dilemma operates. Here, the subjective irreconcilability may be present at the very beginning or be the product of one or both sides' mistaken belief that is induced by a security dilemma spiral.[48] In this situation, actual conflict is not unlikely but highly

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[47] For instance, although both sides are benign and willing to settle for a compromise, one or two sides try to drive a hard bargaining, and the other side may well end up in believing that the state is malign, thus significantly worsening the security dilemma. I thank an anonymous reviewer of *Security Studies* for this example.

[48] An example of the first possibility is that both sides want to use a water supply, but mistakenly believe there is not enough water for both of them even though the supply could meet both sides' needs through a cooperative water sharing and management scheme. An example of the second possibility is that under de facto anarchy, two ethnic groups that previously lived together peacefully end up believing

avoidable through compromise (that is, cooperation), and much depends on whether the two sides can recognize that their interests are not genuinely incompatible and take steps to signal and learn each other's (benign) intentions. Again, misperceptions must be quite severe if this situation is going to end in actual conflict.

The subjective irreconcilability, however, can also be because one or both sides intentionally define their interest in an expansive manner, thus intentionally creating the subjective irreconcilability. If this is the case, one side's intentions may be already malign, and the security dilemma may not apply. Actual conflict is highly likely in this kind of situation.[49]

Thus, under the second scenario, actual conflict is neither always inevitable nor always avoidable. Most important, actual conflict can be driven by a genuine security dilemma spiral or by one or both sides' malign intentions.

The third scenario (the lower left quadrant) is one in which the conflict of interest is objectively irreconcilable but subjectively reconcilable, a case of illusory compatibility. Under this scenario, misperceptions again loom large, but it goes the exact opposite way of the conventional formulation: one side is already malign, but the other side mistakenly (perhaps only temporarily) believes that their interests are reconcilable and conflict can be avoided.[50] Under this scenario, despite the presence of profound misperceptions, the security dilemma usually does not apply and actual conflict is almost inevitable, because one side already has malign intentions.

The fourth scenario (the lower right quadrant) is one in which the conflict of interest is both objectively and subjectively irreconcilable. The security dilemma generally does not apply because one or both sides likely already have malign intentions, and both sides know it. Under this scenario, actual conflict is almost inevitable (unless one side yields to the other's demands).

To summarize, the relationship between conflict of interest and the security dilemma is quite complex. Nonetheless, several general observations can be made.

First, the security dilemma is indeed compatible with genuine conflict of interest, although the existence of genuine conflict of interest between two states is neither necessary nor sufficient for a security dilemma to exist

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that their security depends on excluding or subjugating each other, due to the fear of being dominated by the other group.

[49] An example of this scenario will be that a chauvinistic (majority) group demands that other (minority) groups be subjugated (for example, the Croats versus the Serbs in Croatia after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia).

[50] This scenario is likely to be rare and unlikely to last long; it is difficult for a true aggressor to conceal its true intention well and for long. See, Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," 153–54. A situation in which both sides are already malign yet both sides also believe that their interests are compatible would be even rarer.

between them. Thus, admitting the security dilemma does not mandate defensive realism to rely solely on misperceptions to drive all actual conflicts in international politics, as Schweller charged. Indeed, defensive realism will readily admit that genuine conflicts of interest often play an important role in driving states into arms races and actual conflicts, but then emphasizes that this is so partly because a security dilemma with genuine conflicts of interest will be far more difficult to manage than a security dilemma without genuine conflicts of interest.

Second, the theory of security dilemma underscores the possibility that two states can end up in actual conflict even if there is no objective conflict of interest between them or the conflict of interest between them is only subjectively irreconcilable, but objectively (that is, genuinely) reconcilable. In other words, defensive realism recognizes the possibility that misperception can drive states into actual conflicts. In contrast, offensive realism posits that all actual conflicts are driven by genuinely irreconcilable conflicts of interest, thus essentially denying any role for misperception in driving conflicts: for offensive realism, actual conflicts are not tragic in the strict sense.

Third, defensive realism does not posit that all actual conflicts are inevitable, because not all conflicts of interest in international politics are genuine and irreconcilable. Defensive realism thus recognizes that at least some actual conflicts are unnecessary—thus avoidable and tragic—especially when the conflict of interest is either illusory or reconcilable despite being genuine. When this scenario occurs and neither side harbors malign intentions, the two states can avoid actual conflict through "cooperation under the security dilemma."

Finally, despite emphasizing the possibility or danger that the security dilemma and misperceptions can drive states into conflict, defensive realism does not necessarily deny the possibility that predators (that is, offensive realist states) have been responsible for most actual conflicts in international politics. Defensive realism merely argues that some, but not all, actual conflicts in international conflicts were mostly driven by the security dilemma and misperceptions.[51]

The Security Dilemma Is Conditional, Not Universal

Many scholars hold that security is an intractable feature of international politics. As Marc Trachtenberg puts it, "the logic of the security dilemma . . . applies to all states in the system."[52] For Taliaferro, defensive realism posits that the security dilemma is the ineluctable consequence of anarchy, while offensive realism denies its existence. Other scholars concur in seeing

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[51] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 75; and Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation," 49.

[52] Trachtenberg, "The Question of Realism," 171.

the security dilemma as universal.[53] But when defined rigorously, it becomes clear that the security dilemma is conditional: it exists only between defensive realist states.[54] When one or two states are intentionally threatening each other, there can be no real security dilemma between them. The security dilemma is conditional, not absolute: it is not an inherent property of anarchy.[55]

The Security Dilemma Is Structural, Not Perceptual, in Origin

The BHJ formulation of the security dilemma explicitly stipulates that the security dilemma is structural in origin: only a competitive, self-help anarchy can give birth to the security dilemma.[56] Yet, because psychological factors such as fear play prominent roles in linking anarchy with the security dilemma, and psychological factors such as misperceptions and ethnocentrism often do play significant roles in driving the security dilemma, some scholars have incorrectly maintained that the ultimate source of the security dilemma is not anarchy, but rather psychological factors.

For instance, Schweller maintains that defensive realism (which he construes as Waltzian neorealism) relies on misperception such as "misplaced fear" rather than structure to drive the security dilemma and conflict in international politics.[57] Schweller's argument fails to recognize that "uncertainty about the aims of others is inherent in structural anarchy."[58] For structural realism, uncertainty about others' intentions is inherent under anarchy thus structural in origin. The ultimate source of uncertainty and fear—as proximate causes of the security dilemma that link anarchy with the security dilemma—is not, as Schweller suggests, psychology alone rather than both structure and psychology.

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[53] Taliaferro, "Security Seeking Under Anarchy," 131, 136. See also Glaser, "Security Dilemma Revisited"; and Wheeler and Booth, "The Security Dilemma," 30.

[54] This raises the empirical question, "How common are the security dilemmas?" I argue elsewhere that this question can only be resolved via a social evolutionary reading into the history of international politics. Briefly, security dilemmas were rare in the pre-1945 world, but have become far more prevalent in the post-1945 world. Shiping Tang, "Social Evolution of International Politics: From Mearsheimer to Jervis," *European Journal of International Relations* (forthcoming).

[55] Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Makes of It," 401–2, 407; and Collins, *Security Dilemma of Southeast Asia*, 174.

[56] I specifically argue that competitive self-help anarchy allows for the rise of the security dilemma because there have been other types of anarchies. By arguing that defensive realism does rely on structure to drive conflicts, I do not necessarily agree that structure alone can drive international conflicts. Human psychology is indispensable.

[57] Schweller, "Neorealism's Status Quo Bias," 117–19.

[58] Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 462n2.

Lack of Malign Intention Is a Necessary Condition of the Security Dilemma

The notion that a lack of malign intentions is essential to the existence of security dilemma is explicit in the BHJ formulation. But decoding other states' intentions is inherently difficult under anarchy. Consequently, when determining whether a situation is a genuine security dilemma, many scholars seek to escape the intractability of gauging others' intentions by simply dropping the lack of malign intentions from their definition of the security dilemma altogether or employing two seemingly equally valid but more tractable concepts (illusory incompatibility and security-seeking motive). Unfortunately, these attempts to escape from the central problem of intentions are invalid and misleading: this central problem cannot be escaped from or ignored.

DROPPING THE LACK OF MALIGN INTENTIONS

A recent instance of dropping the lack of malign intentions from the definition of the security dilemma is provided by Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler. They emphasize weapons, uncertainty (associated with other states' weapons), and fear as the security dilemma's three essential ingredients. Because uncertainty and fear are essential derivates of anarchy according to the structural origin of the security dilemma, and weapons are capabilities in the original BHJ formulation, Booth and Wheeler's definition has only two essential ingredients, neither of which is lack of malign intentions.[59]

Booth and Wheeler overlook the fact that A's uncertainty about B's intentions does not equal the lack of malign intentions on A's part or B's part. One can be malign and yet uncertain about the other side's intentions. Alternatively, one can be uncertain about the other side's intentions even if the other side is really malign. In both cases, there is no security dilemma.

ILLUSORY INCOMPATIBILITY

After Jervis introduced Kenneth Boulding's dichotomy of real versus illusory incompatibility (of security interest) into the literature of the security dilemma and the spiral model,[60] the dichotomy has gained popularity. For many, the logic seems straightforward. When there is only illusory incompatibility, there is a lack of malign intentions, thus a genuine security dilemma; and when incompatibility is real, there is no security dilemma.

For instance, after singling out a lack of malign intentions as one of the three key ingredients of the security dilemma, Alan Collins then asserts

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[59] Booth and Wheeler, *Security Dilemma*, 4–5; and Wheeler and Booth, "The Security Dilemma."
[60] Boulding, "National Images and International Systems," 130; and Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 76, 80. Jervis recognized some of the potential drawbacks of this dichotomy, but did not elaborate.

that "determining whether the incompatibility is real or illusory is critical in determining the applicability of the security dilemma." For Collins, the reason is purely instrumental: it is simply easier to determine whether there is illusory incompatibility than to determine whether there is malign intent.[61]

Replacing a lack of malign intentions with illusory incompatibility is invalid for two reasons. The first is that ontological reason must hold priority over instrumental reason when deciding how to capture a situation. Just because one concept seems to be more tractable than another does not mean that the former is more suitable for determining the nature of a particular situation than the latter: whether a concept is fitting for determining a situation must foremost be determined by whether it can accurately capture the essence of the situation. In this case, while determining whether there is illusory incompatibility may be easier than determining whether there is a lack of malign intentions, illusory incompatibility is an ill-suited concept for determining the applicability of the security dilemma, because illusory incompatibility does not necessarily indicate a lack of malign intentions. The reason is evident in Figure 2 (above): illusory incompatibility may be due to malign intentions, in which case there is no security dilemma. The security dilemma surely does not apply in a situation of illusory incompatibility that is caused by one or both sides intentionally defining their security interests in an expansive way even though their objective security interests are compatible.[62] Hence, the presence of illusory incompatibility does not automatically make a situation a genuine security dilemma.

The second and equally important reason why illusory incompatibility cannot replace a lack of malign intentions for determining whether a situation is a security dilemma is that subjective "illusory incompatibility" (assuming objective compatibility) can also be the result of security dilemma dynamics. According to the BHJ formulation, a security dilemma can potentially lead two states that are originally benign to view each other as so threatening that they come to believe that their security requirements are incompatible. At this stage, a severe illusory (subjective) incompatibility exists between the two states. Yet, this illusory incompatibility is the result of the dynamics of the security dilemma,[63] rather than a reflection of the two states' lack of malign intentions at the very beginning of their interactions. As such, the security dilemma may or may not apply here, despite the presence of subjective illusory incompatibility.

Overall, while identifying illusory incompatibility may indeed be easier than fathoming states' intentions, identifying illusory incompatibility does

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[61] Collins, *Security Dilemma in Southeast Asia*, 18–19, 22–25, 175–76, quotation on 22.

[62] Of course, if the illusory incompatibility is due to one or both sides' misperception that their security interests are incompatible, yet neither side harbors malign intentions toward each other, the situation is a security dilemma.

[63] Indeed, if the security dilemma cannot drive states to severe illusory incompatibility, it will have little role in driving states to actual conflict.

not help that much if we wish to determine whether a situation is a genuine security dilemma.

SECURITY-SEEKING MOTIVES

Security-seeking motives is another concept that has been suggested for determining whether a situation is a security dilemma. The basic notion, introduced by Charles Glaser and then taken up by Jeffrey Taliaferro and Paul Roe, is that when states' motives are security-seeking (that is, when states' behaviors are driven by security interests), the security dilemma applies.[64] In contrast, when states' motives are nonsecurity-seeking (that is, when states' behaviors are driven by nonsecurity interests), security dilemma does not apply or at least its applicability weakens.

To make identifying security-seeking motives a central task for determining whether a situation is a security dilemma is also invalid. To do so, one basically has two options, and neither option can withstand close scrutiny, because both eventually violate the BHJ formulation. The first is to argue, as Glaser did initially, that motive and intention are independent of each other,[65] and yet a lack of malign intentions is no longer central to the security dilemma. This replaces a lack of malign intentions with security-seeking motives as one of the essential ingredients of a genuine security dilemma. Such a practice violates the BHJ formulation at the very beginning. Moreover, as Glaser himself noted, even greedy states may be insecure (that is, they also seek security). If so, then to make identifying security-seeking motive as the central task for determining whether a situation is a real security dilemma, we must accept that the security dilemma is compatible with both nongreedy and greedy states and that the security dilemma is universal rather than conditional.[66]

The second option is to admit that a lack of malign intentions is still central to determining whether a situation is a genuine security dilemma, but then to argue that security-seeking motives and a lack of malign intentions are essentially equivalent.[67] This appears to be the position that Glaser now

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[64] Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategies"; Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy"; and Paul Roe, "Actors' Responsibility in Tight, Regular, or Loose Security Dilemmas," *Security Dialogue* 32, no. 1 (March 2001): 103–16.

[65] Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategies," 499–500, 502. Of course, such a stand means that security-seeking motives do not necessarily equate to benign intention. Glaser, however, is not so sure of this "independence" of motive and intention because he also noted that "they may share a single source." See Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy," 502n6. I partly agree with Glaser that motive (that is, goals) and intention are somewhat independent of each other.

[66] Indeed, this is the position Glaser took more recently, emphasizing that even if a state is greedy, as long as the motive for their behavior is security-seeking, the security dilemma still operates, although in a somewhat weaker fashion. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," 174, 190–91, 199–200.

[67] This, of course, contradicts Glaser's initial position that motive and intention are independent of each other.

holds (perhaps because the first option violates the BHJ formulation). Thus, while Glaser in 1992 emphasized that motives and intentions are independent of each other (and we have to pay attention to both), he still enlisted both motives and intentions in 1994, and he had completely phased out "intentions" by 1997.[68] As a result, Glaser engineered a conceptual replacement: determining security-seeking motives replaced determining a lack of malign intentions as the central problem for identifying a security dilemma. This, however, is too incompatible with the BHJ formulation, simply because security-seeking motives do not necessarily indicate a lack of malign intentions: security-seeking motives and benign intentions are not equivalent.

To begin with, equating security-seeking motives with a lack of malign intentions is implicitly or explicitly based on the dichotomy of security-seeking states versus (relative) power-maximizing states that can supposedly capture the fundamental differences between defensive realist states and offensive realist states. Offensive realist states are power-maximizing states (thus malign), while defensive realist states are security-seeking states (thus benign).

Yet this dichotomy of security-seeking versus relative power-maximizing rests on shaky ground. Because every state is insecure under anarchy, every state also seeks security under anarchy. Because power remains an important foundation of security under anarchy for all states, and because power and security interact, "there is no possibility of drawing a sharp line between the will-to-live and the will-to-power."[69] Consequently, the dichotomy of security-seeking versus relative power-maximizing does not help in differentiating states with malign intentions from states without such intentions.

Some (defensive) realists may counter that their definition of security-seeking is different from the offensive realists' definition of security-seeking: their definition really means seeking security with a defensive approach (that is, not intentionally threatening others). If so, then security-seeking motives will be equivalent to a lack of malign intentions. But this is not the way those (defensive) realists apply their definition of security-seeking motives. For instance, to bolster the case that the security-dilemma had been a major cause of war in history, Taliaferro lists many preventive wars as security-driven expansions, thus implying that they were largely driven by the security dilemma.[70] Taliaferro suggests that as long as a war or an act of

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[68] Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," 67; Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited"; and Glaser, "When Are Arms Races Dangerous."

[69] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner' Sons, 1960 [1932]), 42. Indeed, some offensive realists argue explicitly that their theory starts with the assumption that states seek security, and it just happens that their theory leads to the conclusion that maximizing relative power, which mandates offensive or intentionally threatening behavior, is the best and the only sure means toward security. See Eric Labs, "Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims," *Security Studies* 6, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 4–5, 11; and Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 29, 34.

[70] Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy," 147–49.

expansion was driven by insecurity (that is, security-seeking was the motive behind it), it is a war or an expansion driven by a security dilemma. Yet, of all the ten cases identified by Taliaferro as security-driven expansions, one can reasonably argue that only China's intervention in the Korean War was largely driven by a security dilemma. In all the other cases, one or both sides in the conflict were intentionally threatening (that is, they were not defensive), and the security dilemma cannot possibly apply in those cases, if the security dilemma is to mean the security dilemma according to the BHJ formulation.[71]

Second and equally important, as Arnold Wolfers recognized long ago, security has an objective side and a subjective side.[72] This fact further exacerbates the problem of equating security-seeking motives with a lack of malign intent. If a state defines its security in a way that requires it to intentionally threaten other states, would anyone argue that this state is still security-seeking, if security-seeking denotes a lack of malign intentions? Surely no one would label pre–World War II Japan, which abhorred its lack of natural resources and thus was determined to achieve autarky by invading Korea, China, and eventually the whole of East Asia, as a security-seeking state, if the security-seeking motive is to denote a lack of malign intentions. But this is exactly what Taliaferro has done.

Hence, to make identifying the security-seeking motive the central problem for determining whether a situation is a security dilemma is also invalid. Even if we are sure that two states are motivated by (in-) security—and we can be sure, because all states under anarchy seek security—we still cannot be sure that a genuine security dilemma exists between them. One still has to make sure that the states are not threatening each other intentionally.

SORTING OUT THE WEALTH OF LABELS AND NOTIONS

As Jervis has observed, when a good idea comes along, scholars tend to expand and apply it widely without considering its problems and limitations.[73] Thus, it is not surprising that so many scholars have expanded and applied it to "address many of the most important questions of international relations theory and security policy."[74] Unfortunately, most of these expansions have been misguided because they violate one or several aspects of the BHJ formulation.

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[71] I discuss these cases and Taliaferro's errors in greater detail in Tang, *Defensive Realism*, chap. 3.
[72] Wolfers, "National Security," 485–89.
[73] Jervis, "Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation," 318.
[74] Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," 172.

Structural Versus Perceptual Security Dilemma?

Jack Snyder differentiated four possible explanations for aggressive behavior and conflicts: the structural security dilemma, the perceptual security dilemma, imperialist's (security) dilemma, and deadlock.[75] Snyder's "structural security dilemma" depicts a security dilemma in which only material regulators are present, while his "perceptual security dilemma" depicts a security dilemma in which both material and perceptual/psychological regulators are present. Because states in the "structural security dilemma" and the "perceptual security dilemma" are benign, both labels do deal with genuine security dilemmas that are consistent with the BHJ formulation.

Nonetheless, what Snyder terms two different kinds of security dilemma are really two different types of regulators—material and psychological—of the security dilemma. Snyder's terminology generates two misconceptions. First is the idea there are two fundamentally different types of security dilemma: one structural in origin, one perceptual in origin.[76] In reality, as argued above, the security dilemma can only be structural in origin, although the security dilemma can indeed be regulated by two types of regulators. The second misconception is the notion that misperception is a necessary condition of the security dilemma. Yet, as noted above, because the security dilemma is structural in origin, neither its generation nor maintenance requires misperceptions.

Imperialist's (Security) Dilemma?

Snyder coined the term "imperialist's security dilemma" to describe a situation in which "at least one of the states in the system desires to expand, even if this entails some risk to its security." According to Snyder, imperialist "security dilemmas arise from the dynamics of limited competition over non-security interests" and are a "by-product of the competition over non-security interests." "In order to achieve its expansive political, economic, or ideological goals, the aspiring imperialist develops offensive military forces for the purpose of conquest or intimidation, and when resistance is met, a test of will and capabilities ensures. An arms race then occurs as the imperialist and its opponent both try to prove that they have the capabilities to achieve their goals." For Snyder, the "imperialist's security dilemma" constitutes a genuine security dilemma because "both competitors may prefer some compromise to a major war."[77]

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[75] Snyder, "Perceptions of the Security Dilemma." Snyder's "deadlock" captures the situation between two offensive realist states, and Snyder was correct in not labeling it as a sort of (security) dilemma.

[76] This misconception informs Stuart Kaufman's problematic application of the security dilemma to ethnic conflict. See Tang, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict."

[77] Snyder, "Perceptions of the Security Dilemma," 155–56, 165–66.

The concept of an "imperialist's security dilemma" clearly violates the BHJ formulation that a security dilemma can only apply when neither side harbors malign intentions. To make his "imperialist security dilemma" work, Snyder requires the imperialists merely to possess some "willingness to compromise."

Deliberate Security Dilemma?

Wheeler and Booth coined the label "deliberate security dilemma" to explicitly differentiate it from the unintentional or "inadvertent" form of security dilemma as originally defined by Butterfield, Herz, and Jervis. Wheeler and Booth listed two possible scenarios for "deliberate security dilemma."[78]

The first scenario arises when "a militarily status quo state adopts deliberately 'offensive' strategies in order to deter another, because it sees itself in an adversarial relationship with it." This is simply confusing a potential outcome of the security dilemma with the source of the security dilemma. The BHJ formulation explicitly allows the possibility that a security dilemma can drive two status quo states (that is, defensive realist states) to view each other as so threatening that they adopt deliberately "offensive" strategies to deter each other (and eventually to launch preemptive or preventive war against each other). Thus, the situation depicted by Wheeler and Booth's first scenario of "deliberate security dilemma" is not a distinctive form of security dilemma, but merely a possible outcome of the security dilemma dynamics (that is, a deep or much exacerbated security dilemma).

The second scenario for the "deliberate security dilemma" denotes a situation in which a revisionist or revolutionary state (an offensive realist state) "adopts a posture designed to lull the target state into a false sense of security." Such a scenario is again not a security dilemma because one side is already malign in its intentions although it tries to conceal its true (malign) intentions. The situation merely represents a cognitive challenge (and a genuine strategic threat) for the target state to fathom correctly the true (and malign) intentions of the aggressor.

State-induced Security Dilemma?

Alan Collins recognizes that both Snyder's "imperialist security dilemma" and Wheeler and Booth's second type of "deliberate security dilemma" are not genuine security dilemmas because one side is already malign. Collins nonetheless tries to salvage the enterprise of "deliberate security dilemma"

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[78] Wheeler and Booth, "The Security Dilemma," 10. To their credit, Booth and Wheeler have dropped this misleading label in their new book. Because their new definition of the concept does not contain the lack of malign intentions, however, their new definition still allows the possibility of "deliberate security dilemma." See the discussion above.

by juxtaposing the first version of Wheeler and Booth's deliberate security dilemma with a hegemonic power and then relabeling it as a "state-induced security dilemma." For Collins, a state-induced security dilemma arises "when a status quo (but aspiring hegemonic) power pursues a deliberately aggressive policy vis-à-vis its neighbors in order to intimidate them. The aim is not to overthrow the existing status quo, but rather to consolidate it by making others too frightened to challenge it. This aggressive policy is not a precursor to war; instead it is designed to provide the state with security by requiring others to feel insecure. The state is seeking a position of hegemony, and the security dilemma can arise in this situation because the other states are unlikely to be able to distinguish this approach from a revisionist state that harbors malign intent."[79] Collins believes that a security dilemma can still operate between an aspiring hegemon that is aggressively seeking hegemony and its neighbors if the hegemon does not seek war but merely submission from its neighbors.

This label of hegemonic state-induced security dilemma is again mistaken. Because Collins's formulation is a hybrid of Snyder's "imperialist security dilemma" and Wheeler and Booth's "deliberate security dilemma," it suffers from the same flaw: positing as a security dilemma an interaction between an offensive realist state and a defensive realist state. In addition, Collins' formulation suffers from three related problems. First, Collins adopts an overly narrow definition of malign intentions and an offensive realist state (or revisionist) state by identifying only "overthrowing the existing status quo" as being expansionist or aggressive. In reality, when a state seeks hegemony by intentionally making other states feel insecure, it is an offensive realist state, regardless of its tactical means and intermediate goals.

Second, the adjective "state-induced" adds no descriptive value. Although the ultimate origin of the security dilemma is anarchy, the existence of a security dilemma requires the presence of states and interactions among states. In other words, the security dilemma requires both anarchy and state-to-state interaction (for example, power competition, action, and reaction) to exist: anarchy without interacting units within will be an empty shell. Finally, other than the fundamental conceptual issues, Collins's "state-induced security dilemma" is almost impossible to operationalize, as Collins himself came very close to admitting: "Given how aggressive the hegemon appears, they (other states) are much more likely to interpret its action as hostile."[80]

An "Always Secure" State?

In an influential article, Charles Glaser expanded on the spiral model and the deterrence model to understand the political consequences of military

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[79] Collins, *The Security Dilemma of Southeast Asia*, 10–13.
[80] Collins, *The Security Dilemma of Southeast Asia*, 12.

strategies. Arguing that Jervis's elaborations on the two models focused only on states' intentions and gave insufficient attention to states' motives for expansion, Glaser insists that we should pay equal attention to intentions and motives. Glaser thus introduces a seemingly more fine-grained differentiation of states' motives along two dimensions. First, Glaser asks whether a state is interested in nonsecurity expansion: if yes, then a state is "greedy;" if no, then a state is not greedy. Second, Glaser asks whether a state is interested in security- (or fear-) driven expansion: a state is a potentially insecure state (or insecure state for short) if the answer is yes and an always-secure state if the answer is no.[81] By combining these two dimensions of motives (greedy versus not-greedy, and always-secure versus insecure), Glaser claims, states can be categorized into four types, providing the spiral model and the deterrence model with more fine-grained explanatory power and generating more calibrated prescriptions for states' military strategies.

Glaser invented the dichotomy of greedy state versus not-greedy state to avoid the pitfalls associated with the dichotomy of revisionist state versus status quo state.[82] This dichotomy essentially recaptures states' intentions: greedy states are malign and not-greedy states are less likely to be so. The dichotomy of greedy state versus not-greedy state thus also centers on states' intentions. As such, this dichotomy is at least partly compatible with the BHJ formulation.

The same, however, cannot be said for Glaser's other dichotomy of an always-secure state versus an insecure state. Glaser defines an always-secure state as a state that "recognizes that the defender is interested only in protecting the status quo and would employ its military capabilities only in response to aggression. As a result, unlike a potential insecure state, an always-secure state is not made insecure by the deployment of capabilities that threaten its ability to protect the status quo."[83]

Such a situation, while not unthinkable, must be extremely rare. Because intentions can change, a state cannot be absolutely certain of the defender's intentions tomorrow, thus cannot be "always secure" even if it can be absolutely sure of the defender's benign intentions today (that is, being "secure" for now). Fundamentally, because uncertainty about others' intentions is inherent in structural anarchy, and there is no central authority to enforce commitments, no state can be absolutely or always secure.[84] Under anarchy, all states are insecure one way or the other. Only the degree of their security varies: the always-secure state has rarely, if ever, existed. As a

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[81] Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy," 499–508.

[82] Ibid., 501n4.

[83] Ibid., 502.

[84] Glaser appears to recognize this elsewhere, as he repeatedly emphasizes that uncertainty is critical for security dilemma and that insecurity is predicted by the structure of international politics. See Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategies," 507; and Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," 189–93, 195.

result, the differentiation of an always-secure state and a potentially insecure state is not viable.

When Glaser introduces the notion of an always-secure state, he implicitly assumes that there can be certainty about intentions under anarchy, thus nullifying much of the impact of anarchy on state behavior. By eliminating uncertainty, Glaser severs the crucial link between anarchy and the security dilemma.

Why Have We Been So Wrong?

From the proceeding discussions, we can detect six common errors in the "expansionist" understanding of the security dilemma: (1) omitting one or more of the three essential elements of the security dilemma, especially a lack of malign intentions; (2) replacing a lack of malign intentions with some seemingly equivalent but more tractable concepts (that is, illusory incompatibility and security-seeking motive); (3) conflating regulators of the security dilemma with the essential elements of the security dilemma, which often leads to over-psychologizing the concept; (4) conflating outcomes that can be produced by the security dilemma (and the broader phenomenon called the spiral) with essential aspects of the security dilemma; (5) severing or shortening the causal link from anarchy to the security dilemma; and (6) unnecessarily expanding the security dilemma to accommodate situations that the security dilemma model has already accommodated.

Each of the expansions and extensions of the security dilemma examined committed at least one or several of the seven errors (see Table 2 for details). The net result is a general tendency to identify any situation that

TABLE 2 Common Errors About the Security Dilemma

Authors Errors	Snyder (1985)	Wheeler and Booth (1992)	Collins (2000)	Glaser (1992, 1997)
1. Omitting	+	+		+
2. Replacing	+		+	+
3. Conflating regulators with essential elements, including over-psychologizing the concept	+	+		+
4. Conflating possible outcomes with essential elements	+	+		+
5. Shortening the causal link		+		+
6. Unnecessary expansion	+	+	+	+

resembles a spiral or any (unintended and usually self-defeating) outcome that seems to have been produced by a spiral with a security dilemma. More often than not, these expansions and extensions have contributed nothing but confusion.

TOWARD A MORE PRECISE UNDERSTANDING: REMEDIES

The upshot of discussion thus far is if scholars want to use, not abuse, the security dilemma as an analytical tool they must remain faithful to the original BHJ definition. That definition covers many of the situations that scholars thought could only be accommodated by expanding and extending the concept.

For instance, the BHJ formulation explicitly underscores that the severity of the security dilemma can be regulated by both material and psychological factors. As a result, Snyder's labels of "structural" or "perceptual" security dilemma add little. Likewise, the BHJ formulation explicitly allows the possibility that the security dilemma can drive two defensive realist states to view each other as so threatening that they deliberately adopt offensive military postures to deter each other and thus end up exacerbating the security dilemma between them. Consequently, there is no need for the first version of Wheeler and Booth's "deliberate security dilemma." Finally, the BHJ formulation can easily accommodate a situation in which a (regional) great power and its neighbors cannot be sure of each other's intentions, so there is no need for Collins's "state-induced security dilemma."

At the same time, however, some situations that cannot be accommodated by the BHJ formulation simply do not belong to the security dilemma and should not be squeezed into the concept. Instead, these situations should be captured by more accurate and appropriate labels.

Most obviously, Snyder's "imperialist security dilemma," Wheeler and Booth's second version of "deliberate security dilemma," and Collins's "state-induced security dilemma," as defined, all depict the situation between an offensive realist state (that is, an imperialist or an aggressive hegemon) and a defensive realist state. Such a situation is not a genuine security dilemma, and it is best captured by a label of "imperialist or expansionist threat" from the point of view of the imperialist's potential victims.

Hence, the problem with the BHJ formulation has not been that it is too rigid, but rather that it is underspecified and underdeveloped. As a result, its full potential has yet to be fully realized and appreciated, and many have then mistakenly believed that they have to expand—or more precisely, to stretch, bend, and twist—the concept. What we urgently need is not more loose and misguided expansions and extensions of the security dilemma, but a more precise understanding of the concept.

Two tasks are most urgent toward such an understanding.

Maintain the Distinction Between the Security Dilemma and the Spiral

The first and perhaps the most urgent task is to clearly differentiate the security dilemma (both as a phenomenon and a theory) from the spiral (both as a phenomenon and a model/theory).

In his classic treatise, Jervis recognizes that the process through which a security dilemma drives states to actual conflict resembles a spiral. Jervis thus put his discussion on the security dilemma under the "spiral model," without ever being explicit whether a security dilemma and a spiral are equivalent, or whether the security dilemma theory and the spiral model are the same.[85] Jervis's unfortunate omission laid the ground for much confusion. As a result, many tend to believe that the security dilemma and the spiral model are the same: the security dilemma produces spirals, and all spirals are caused by the security dilemma. In Glaser's words, the security dilemma "provides the rational foundation for the 'spiral model.'"[86]

This notion that the security dilemma and the spiral are the same, however, is misleading. To begin with, a spiral is generally defined as "a continuously accelerating increas[e] or decreas[e]," "a process of progressive deterioration," or simply "a situation that gets worse and worse."[87] Translated into strategic language, an (upward) spiral merely denotes a situation in which tension between two states is continuously increasing because the process is driven by a self-reinforcing mechanism. Such a definition says nothing about the nature of the forces that drive the process. This effectively means that an upward spiral can be driven by a genuine security dilemma between two defensive realist states or by a genuinely irreconcilable conflict of interest between one defensive realist state and one offensive realist state, or between two offensive realist states. If this is so, then while it is wrong for offensive realists to assume that all spirals (for example, arms races and actual conflicts) are driven by irreconcilable conflicts of interests, it is equally wrong for defensive realists to assume that all, or even many, spirals are driven by the security dilemma.

A clear differentiation between the security dilemma (theory) and the spiral (model) brings two critical benefits.

First, it clarifies many areas of confusion in the application of the two concepts and allows us to apply them more precisely. For instance, it becomes evident that some of the situations discussed in Jervis's "Cooperation

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[85] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, chap. 3. Indeed, Jervis never defined the spiral and the spiral model, nor did he define the security dilemma rigorously.

[86] Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisted," 171. See also Copeland, *Origins of Major War*, 52; Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy," 499; Jervis, "Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation," 49; Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust*, 50; Schweller, "Neorealism's Status Quo Bias," 117; and Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy," 147–50.

[87] *American Heritage Dictionary* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1983), 638; *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 10th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1,384; and *McMillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (London: McMillan, 2002), 1,377.

Under the Security Dilemma" are not security dilemmas, but spirals driven by malign intentions. The scramble for colonies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries among the European powers, despite being a spiral, was not caused by the security dilemma, contrary to what Jervis asserted.[88] Rather, it was caused by sheer expansionist ambitions among the imperialist powers, and among imperialist powers there is no genuine security dilemma because they are offensive realist states that intentionally threaten one another. Meanwhile, the situation in which "statesmen believe that their security requires the threatening or attacking of others" can arise from two possible scenarios: (1) a scenario in which one or two states believe that their security requires the threatening or attacking of others at the very beginning; and (2) a scenario in which one or two states come to believe that their security requires the threatening or attacking of others because of the dynamics of security dilemma. Jervis failed to realize that only the second scenario is a genuine (vicious or deep) security dilemma, whereas the first is not.[89]

Second, the differentiation makes it clear that many extensions of the security dilemma were attempts to accommodate spirals rather than genuine security dilemmas. Recognizing this allows us to reintegrate many insights that were generated from the problematic extensions of the security dilemma into the broader spiral model. For instance, building upon Jervis, Glaser advanced a fundamental insight that "analyses that fail to consider political consequences risk prescribing either too much or too little military capability, and often more important, the wrong kind, which can reduce states' security."[90] An equally important insight is Snyder's thesis that neither pure threats (measures advocated by the deterrence model) nor pure concessions (measures advocated by the security dilemma model) could handle a situation like 1914, because it was not a genuine security dilemma but more likely an "imperialist security dilemma" or a "deadlock" in Snyder's terminology.[91] Both insights are critical for defensive realist states to formulate their security strategies, and they can and should be fruitfully integrated into the broader spiral model.

Third and perhaps most crucially, the differentiation makes the security dilemma (and the broader spiral) truly dynamic. Essentially, the differentiation makes it apparent that a security dilemma can be transformed into a spiral when one or both sides become malign (for example, one or two sides may become so frightened that they may decide that their security now requires them to pursue aggression). In other words, whenever one or both

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[88] Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," 185–86. One may argue that these imperialist states only threatened each other on interests beyond survival and security (that is, colonies). Yet, exactly because they were willing to risk war on nonsecurity interests, they were offensive realist states.

[89] Ibid., 185; and Snyder, "Perceptions of the Security Dilemma in 1914." Jervis thus actually alluded to Snyder's ill-informed labels of "imperialist security dilemma" and "deadlock" without labeling them.

[90] Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy," 499.

[91] Snyder, "Perceptions of the Security Dilemma in 1914," 154–55.

sides within a security dilemma decide that their security now requires them to pursue aggression, the security dilemma ceases to exist: the dynamics of security dilemma are not only potentially destructive (that is, leading to war) but also self-destructive.

This rigorous differentiation of the spiral and the security dilemma enables more fine-grained understandings of international politics, thus providing more fine-grained policy recommendations for managing international politics today.

A Reversible and Graduated Continuum

After differentiating the security dilemma and the spiral model, the logical next step is to make it explicit that both a security dilemma and a spiral can be better understood as a reversible and graduated continuum (see Figure 3).

When two defensive realist states initially interact, a dormant and largely benign security dilemma exists between them. This benign security dilemma, however, can be easily exacerbated into a vicious or deep security dilemma in which both sides fear each other because of the uncertainty and fear generated by the states' behaviors (partly because anarchy prevents states from completely trusting each other's intentions under most circumstances) and by the self-reinforcing cycle of action and counteraction.

In a deep security dilemma, one or both sides may become so frightened (or provoked by the other side, objectively or subjectively) that they may decide that their security now requires them to pursue aggression. At this stage, one or both sides' intentions changes from benign to malign: one or both states have metamorphosed from a defensive realist state into an offensive realist state. As soon as this change occurs, the security dilemma stops operating, and a spiral takes over: a security dilemma is now transformed into a spiral.[92] Here, the spiral can take two possible forms: "imperialist or expansionist threat" (when only one side becomes malign) and "mutual threat or deadlock" (when both sides become malign).

A deadlock is almost impossible to unwind because it would require both sides to change their mind-set. An expansionist threat is also difficult, but not impossible, to unwind. When the expansionist state decides it no longer wants to expand, the situation is then changed into a genuine, but still deep, security dilemma.

The utility of this graduated continuum can be illustrated by the history of the Cold War.[93] At the beginning of the Cold War (up until the Turkey

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[92] Thus, there is a gray area between a "deep" security dilemma and a spiral, and this may make it difficult to differentiate the two in practice. This difficulty we cannot escape.

[93] I address the nature of the Cold War through the lens of the security dilemma and spiral in detail in Tang, *Defensive Realism*.
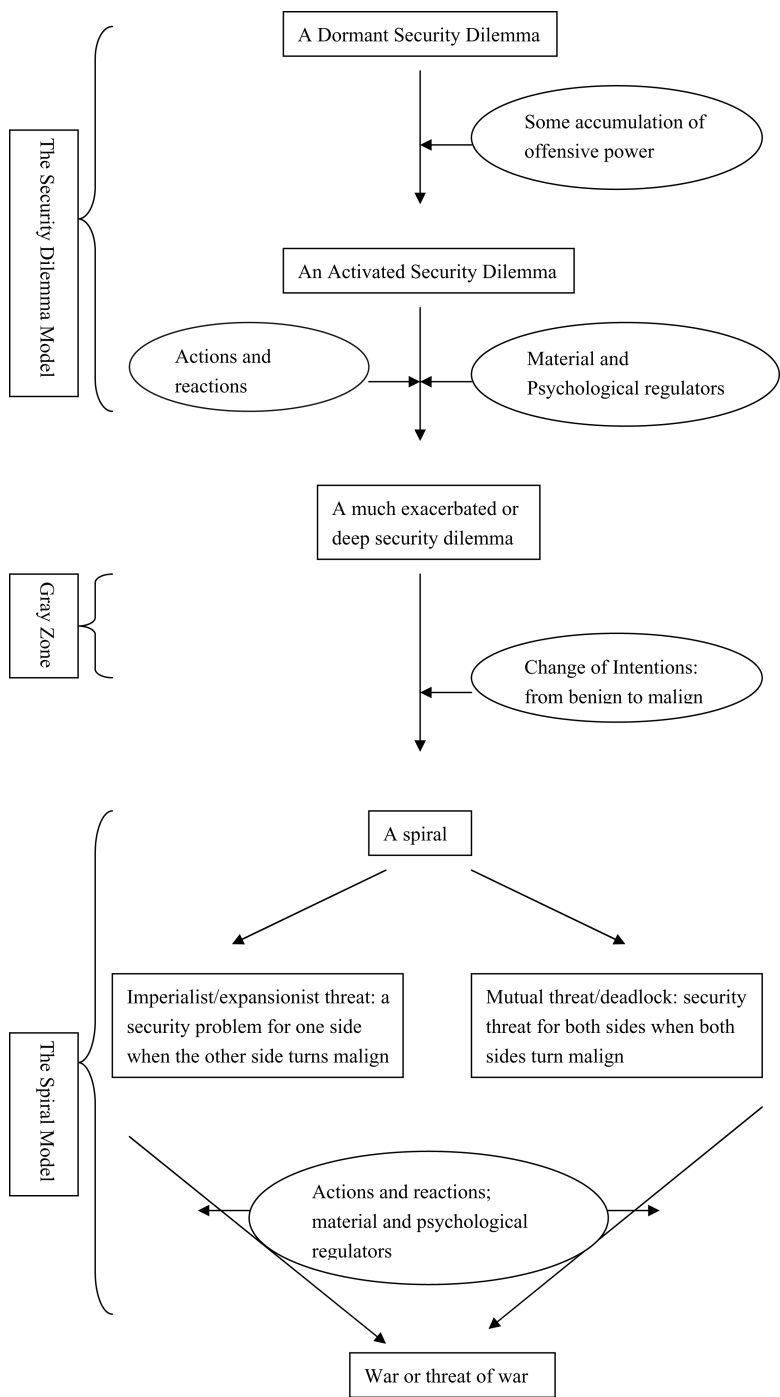
FIGURE 3 The Continuum: From a Security Dilemma to a Spiral.

crisis in 1946), many American decision makers had a generally benign image of the Soviet Union under Stalin and worried about the dangers of an avoidable confrontation between the two superpowers driven by a security dilemma—there was only a spiral but no real security dilemma between the two superpowers because Stalin was a genuine expansionist. After Stalin's death in 1953, especially after Nikita Khrushchev consolidated his power and repudiated some of Stalin's expansionist policies, the Cold War was then perhaps transformed into a genuine security dilemma. Yet, because the security dilemma emerged from a spiral of "expansionist threat," the security dilemma inherited by Khrushchev and Dwight D. Eisenhower (and later, John F. Kennedy) was very "deep." In light of such a dynamic process, the right question to ask may not be whether the Cold War (or some other conflict or conflictual relations) was a security dilemma, but rather when the Cold War was and was not a security dilemma.

A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA: UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATION OF THE SECURITY DILEMMA

As I have attempted to show elsewhere, our world has firmly evolved from an offensive realism world in which almost every state is a wolf to a defensive realism world in which most states are defensive realist states.[94] Today, offensive realist states are few, and most states are defensive realist states. As a result, the possibility that the vicious dynamics of the security dilemma will drive two defensive realist states into actual conflict becomes too important to be discounted. If so, then to educate statesmen so that they can more appreciate the danger of the security dilemma is a major task ahead for defensive realists, for the sake of our present and future.[95] To do so, we need a new research agenda.

Most importantly, once we have obtained a precise understanding of the security dilemma and spiral model, we can then carry on with the research tradition of understanding the regulation of security dilemmas (and spirals).[96]

Since Jervis's seminal contribution, only four material regulators of the security dilemma have received sustained attention in the literature: geography, polarity, military technology (that is, the objective offense-defense balance), and the distinguishability of offensive and defensive weapons.[97] I

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[94] Tang, "Social Evolution of International Politics."

[95] Making policy makers realize the danger of inadvertent war driven by the vicious dynamics of the security dilemma and showing them the way out may well reduce the unlikelihood of such wars. Hence, our educational exercise will actually act as a self-denying prophecy. But this is a small scientific price worth paying.

[96] Because regulators do not require a lack of malign intentions to operate, I do not differentiate the security dilemma and the spiral in this part of the discussion.

[97] Monica Duffy Toft singled out the concentration of minority groups as another material regulator of the ethnic spiral or security dilemma. Because concentration of minority groups is essentially an

believe three additional factors should be added to the list of material regulators: asymmetric power, external actors (allies), and concentration or mixing of ethnic groups.

Considering that the distribution of power is central for realism, and asymmetric distribution of power between two states is common, asymmetric distribution of power should be treated as an important material regulator of the security dilemma. Understanding how asymmetric distributions of power regulate the security dilemma will provide some much-needed insight into how to manage the relationship between a great power and its smaller neighbors, and the relationship between a reigning hegemon and a rising power (for example, the United States and China).

Our understanding of the impact of external actors—especially allies and alliance—upon the security dilemma seems to have stagnated after Snyder's contribution.[98] Here, the more recent application of the spiral or the security dilemma to ethnic conflicts may have just provided the necessary impetus for more research in this area. There seems to be strong evidence that having real allies or even perceived support from potential allies can considerably exacerbate the ethnic spiral.[99] A more systematic understanding of external actors' role in regulating the security dilemma may provide the international community with some important lessons for managing interethnic conflicts.

Another potentially important material regulator, the mixing of ethnic groups, has also been explored in the ethnic conflict literature.[100] Mixing of ethnic groups can also regulate interstate security dilemmas: the presence of one country's major ethnic group in another country as a minority group (for example, ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and Malaysia, or ethnic Russians in Ukraine) may pose a very sensitive challenge for the two states in managing their relationship. Real or perceived ill-treatment of the minority group by its host state may provoke a public outcry in the state in which the group is the major group. Such a dynamic can easily exacerbate the security dilemma between the two states. Worse yet, the deteriorating relationship between the two states may then come back to exacerbate the tension between the two ethnic groups.

Meanwhile, despite the fact that psychological factors have long been noted to regulate the security dilemma and have received increasing attention from scholars, the literature on psychological factors in IR has generally proceeded separately from the literature on the security dilemma after

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un-mixing of minority groups, concentration and mixing are two sides of the same coin. I thus group the two as one variable. Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and Territory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[98] Snyder, "Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics."

[99] Stuart J. Kaufman, "Spiralling to Ethnic War," *International Security* 21, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 108–38.

[100] Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict."

Jervis's groundbreaking studies[101]—the sole exception being the connection between nationalism and the security dilemma in ethnic conflict.[102] With a growing and more sophisticated literature on psychological factors in international politics, now it may be high time to rekindle the ties between psychological factors and the security dilemma.

To begin with, it will be extremely interesting to explore whether some well-documented mentalities, such as concern for reputation or credibility[103] and analogical reasoning[104] can influence the severity of the security dilemma or the spiral.

A particularly prominent psychological factor is fear. Fear has featured prominently in realist theories, and it has long been argued to be a critical link between anarchy and the security dilemma—and a key accelerator of the security dilemma.[105] Yet, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to understanding how fear really drives the security dilemma, other than Jervis's brief discussion.[106] It is perhaps time for a change.

The general aversion to loss as captured by prospect theory may be another major regulator of the security dilemma.[107] This general aversion to loss may apply not only in interstate situations but also in intrastate situations. For instance, an ethnic group that traditionally enjoys a privileged position in a society will deem any possibility of lessening its status as fundamentally threatening. As a result, such a group has great incentives to seek secession or some kind of special arrangement for itself if the central authority breaks down. This fear of losing one's privileged position certainly has the potential to exacerbate the security dilemma to such a degree that one or both sides may come to believe that their security depends on excluding the other group through ethnic cleansing or secession.[108]

In addition, it will be extremely interesting to explore how the psychological factors listed by Wheeler and Booth—which includes ethnocentrism,

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[101] Only one psychological regulator of the security dilemma—the perceived (that is, subjective) offense-defense balance—has received sustained attention from IR scholars.

[102] Kaufman, "Spiralling to Ethnic War"; and Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict." See also, Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," *International Security* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1994): 5–39.

[103] Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Daryl Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threat During Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Shiping Tang, "Reputation, Cult of Reputation, and International Conflict," *Security Studies* 24, no. 4 (October 2005): 34–62. One can certainly argue that concern for reputation among U.S. leaders during the Cold War has played an important role in driving the spiral between the United States and the former Soviet Union. Robert McMahon, "Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 455–71.

[104] Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[105] See Tang, "Fear in International Politics," and references cited there.

[106] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 372–78.

[107] For a good review on prospect theory, see Jack S. Levy, "Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1997): 87–112.

[108] The Dniestr region in Moldova may be one such case. See Kaufman, "Spiralling to Ethnic War."

doctrinal realism, ideological fundamentalism, worst-case forecasting, implicit enemy imaging—can potentially aggravate the security dilemma.[109] For example, the ideological debate between the Soviet Union and China after Khrushchev's denouncing Stalinism in 1956 and advocating "peaceful co-existence" with the Western camp was perhaps a major cause behind the collapse of the Soviet Union-China alliance.[110]

Finally, a most intriguing possibility is how domestic politics, including regime types, influences the security dilemma. While the growing attention paid to the role of domestic politics in shaping states' behavior has generated a distinctive literature of neoclassical realism;[111] the neoclassical realism literature has yet to make any substantial connection with the security dilemma theory. Meanwhile, other than Kydd's brief discussion, the literature on democratic peace has also yet to make any real connection with the security dilemma (or the larger realism) literature, although proponents of democratic peace theory have long argued that democratic institutions prevent war among democracies via alleviating the security dilemma.[112] For instance, it is believed that the secrecy of decision making within nondemocratic states exacerbates the security dilemma. Yet, while democracy's signaling of resolve (to stand firm and fight) may be more credible because its decision-making process is more transparent,[113] will the open policy debate in a democracy also exacerbate the security dilemma between a democracy and another state because the other state is likely to pay more attention to the rhetoric that signals hard-line positions?

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[109] Wheeler and Booth, "The Security Dilemma," 40.

[110] Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), chap. 5. I thank Li Mingjiang for bringing this case to my attention.

[111] Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (October 1998): 144–72.

[112] Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," 129–39.

[113] James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994): 577–92.