Status Competition and Territorial Aggression: Evidence from the Scramble for Africa

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Abstract: When are states willing to engage in behaviors of little material or strategic value in order to assert their status? This article demonstrates that states are more likely to engage in acts of status assertion if their international standing has been called into question. Such status-challenged states seek opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities as well as their intention to maintain their current status. Status assertions often challenge the status and security of other states, leading these states to engage in more frequent acts of aggression. Evidence for these claims comes from detailed analysis of the Scramble for Africa at the end of the 19th century. France and Germany adopted expansionary policies in Africa because their great power status had been called into question. These policy shifts directly led Italy and Britain to adopt expansionary policies, leading to the eventual conquest of 95% of the African continent.

Clear material and strategic rationales sometimes motivate state behavior in the international system. To a surprising degree, however, states are willing to engage in actions which require them to pay material costs and whichrender them strategically more vulnerable. Scholars have focused on domestic political explanations of behavior that appears irrational at the systemic level. Yet, domestic political explanations do not account for many puzzling cases of international behavior. Detailed case analysis demonstrates that many important, seemingly puzzling instances of international behavior are best understood largely as assertions of status, often at the cost of immediate strategic or material interests.

States do not, however, engage in the same degree of status seeking at all times.
This article demonstrates that states are likely to engage in status competition if their status has been called into question by an instance of disrespect or by a humiliating international event. Humiliated and disrespected states, usually great powers or potential great powers, are likely to engage in competitive practices such as the development of advanced weaponry, competition over spheres of influence or influence within international organizations, or, as demonstrated here, the acquisition of vast amounts of territory. ¹ Status-challenged states engage in these competitive acts in order both to signal that they possess characteristics and capabilities which distinguish them from lesser powers as well as to signal their willingness to vigorously exercise the prerogatives associated with their desired status. These competitive measures have a significant impact on international behavior because they often challenge the status, interests and security of other states in the international system, leading those states to adopt competitive behaviors they likely would not have otherwise.

The evidence for this set of claims resides in the detailed analysis of the first acts of territorial expansion within the Scramble for Africa between 1881 and 1884. Analysis of the decisions made by France and Germany to adopt expansionary policies during this period indicates that the Scramble for Africa would not have occurred as it did if the great power status of these two states had not been previously challenged.\textsuperscript{2} France, for instance, first adopted its forward policy in Africa as a direct result of humiliations suffered in the previous decade that had called its great power status into question. The relatively new German state dramatically altered its colonial policy in direct response to disrespect it believed it had suffered at the hands of the British. Leaders within both states adopted expansionary policies in an effort to assert their state’s great power status and in spite of their expectations of high associated costs and heightened strategic vulnerability. French and German status-motivated expansion generated status and security concerns among other states and for Italy and Britain in particular, leading both states to adopt expansionary policies which they likely would not have otherwise. Far from isolated instances of territorial expansion, the expansionary policies adopted by France and Germany during the early 1880s led to the eventual conquest of roughly 95% of the African continent over the following three decades.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{2} The Scramble for Africa spanned the period from 1881 until 1912. France was the first to adopt a forward policy in Africa in 1881. Germany’s official policy shift followed in 1884. Though Britain expanded into Egypt in 1882, it did so reluctantly and had no intention until 1885 of expanding elsewhere. Leopold of Belgium did set out to personally claim the Congo in 1876, though his claim was not recognized until 1884. Belgium did not formally annex the land until 1908.

\textsuperscript{3} Other states participated, but were far less active. Belgium engaged in one act of expansion, though a relatively large one of 2,344,858 km\textsuperscript{2}. Portugal during this time added 909,000 km\textsuperscript{2} to the few holdings it had maintained for over a century. These figures are taken from data on all instances of territorial change between 1816 and 2008. See Jaroslav Tir, Philip Schafer, Paul F. Diehl and Gary Goertz, “Territorial changes, 1816–1996: Procedures and data,” \textit{Conflict Management and Peace Science} 16, no.
Historians have presented numerous accounts of the Scramble for Africa, focusing on broad explanations rooted in the material, strategic, or social contexts of the time. These explanations have often been based on imperial rhetoric employed after the act of conquest as leaders attempted to sell skeptical publics with rational myths of colonial expansion even when the act of conquest originally lacked a material or strategic rationale. This article, alternatively, roots its novel explanation of the Scramble for

1 (Spring 1998): 89.


5 Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), argues that economic arguments were usually “adduced as afterthoughts to justify territorial gains that had already taken place,” (p. 102). See also D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973); and Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism, 1871-1914: Myths and
Africa in the detailed analysis of the key factors leading up to the initial adoption by France and Germany of expansionary policies in Africa in the early 1880s, prior to the point at which they perceived they were participating in a race of any sort. These expansionary policies precipitated a competitive race for territory that eventually penetrated every corner of the continent. To say that status concerns shaped these early decisions is not to say that such concerns guided every instance of conquest throughout the Scramble for Africa or that leaders during this time were never guided by domestic, material or strategic motivations. Rather, the analysis demonstrates that without the impetus provided by status challenges, the conquest of Africa, if it occurred at all, would likely have assumed a very different form.

This article proceeds in three sections. It begins by laying out the theoretical argument and placing it within the context of existing literatures. It then presents the detailed analysis of why France and Germany decided to adopt forward policies in Africa when they did, starting with the French decision to acquire Tunisia and territory in the Congo in 1881 and 1882 and then addressing Bismarck’s surprise decision to join the colonial fray in April of 1884, a decision which involved the annexation of 83% of Germany’s eventual colonial holdings in Africa.\footnote{Snyder in Myths of Empire argues that over expansion is driven by parochial rather than national interests in cartelized political systems. Snyder himself notes however that Germany in the early 1880s was not governed by cartels but was strongly unified under Bismarck, who repeatedly ignored special interests unless they corresponded with his own (pp. 67, 78 - 79, 99). Snyder asserts that Bismarck’s acts of expansion were intended to assertively defend German prestige.} Within each case, I address alternative arguments based on political, economic, strategic and social factors and then

\begin{itemize}
  \item[6] Germany acquired over 1.2 million km\(^2\) in 1884 and early 1885. It acquired an additional 182,000 km\(^2\) over the rest of the Scramble.
\end{itemize}
demonstrate that instances of humiliation and disrespect prompted the countries’
actions. The article concludes by briefly addressing the significant impact that these acts
of status assertion had on the international system more broadly as well as the
implications of the analysis for status seeking in contemporary international politics.

The Nature of Status and Status Seeking

Humans are hard-wired to care about their status as individuals and about the status
of groups with which they identify.7 Numerous scholars have demonstrated the significant
degree to which status concerns drive international behavior.8 International status is

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7 See Jonathan Dvash, Gadi Gilam, Aharon Ben-Ze’ev, Talma Hendler and Simone G Shamay-
(November 2010): 1741–1750; Donald H. Edwards and Edward A. Kravitz, “Serotonin, Social Status and
Aggression,” Current Opinion in Neurobiology 7, no. 6 (December1997): 812–819; Klaus Fliessbach,
Bernd Weber, Peter Trautner, Thomas Dohmen, Uwe Sunde, Christian E Elger and Armin Falk,
“Social Comparison Affects Reward-Related Brain Activity in the Human Ventral Striatum,” Science
demonstrates experimentally that actors are willing to pay costs in pursuit of status even without the
promise of long-term tangible rewards. See also Robert H. Frank, “The Demand for Unobservable and
Heffetz and Robert H. Frank, “Preferences for Status: Evidence and Economic Implications,” in
Handbook of social economics Vol. 1A , ed. Jess Benhabib, Alberto Bisin, Matthew Jackson (July 2008). 69–
91; Christoph Loch, Michael Yaziji and Christian Langen, “The Fight for the Alpha Position:
Channeling Status Competition in Organizations,” European Management Journal 19, no. 1 (February
Brooks Cole, 1979; Henri Tajfel, Social Identity and Intergroup Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2010).

Interests (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Deborah W. Larson and Alexei Shevchenko,
“Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to US primacy,” International Security 34, no. 4 (Spring
2010): 63–95; Richard Ned Lebow, A Cultural Theory of International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2008); Daniel Markley, “Prestige and The Origins of War: Returning to Realism’s
International Organization 49, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 229–252; T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson and
William C. Wohlforth, Status in World Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014);
and Military Leaders”, International Organization, Forthcoming 2015; Stephen Peter Rosen, War and
Status Competition, and Great Power War,” World Politics 61, no. 01 (January 2009): 28–57; Ayse
Zarakol, After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West, (New York: Cambridge University
based on the collective beliefs of others about a state’s rank on admirable characteristics such as military capability, wealth, demographic position, or diplomatic influence. 

Because objective rankings of status dimensions are often impossible, a state’s rank is rooted in social perception. International status seeking is therefore the process of attempting to shape other states’ perceptions about one’s rightful position in the international hierarchy.

Status seeking may be an innate human trait, but actors do not seek status at all times. States are particularly inclined to engage in status competition under the following conditions – when their status has been called into question by an instance of disrespect or by a humiliating international event. To show ‘respect’ is to behave in a manner consistent with another state’s status; to show disrespect is to deny another state the degree of esteem or consideration it feels entitled to, thereby implicitly refusing to recognize the state’s desired status. Disrespect therefore depends upon a state’s

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10 Objective rankings of army size or GDP may be possible. Measures of resolve or influence rely upon social perceptions. Perceptions even play a role even in the relative assessment of tangible characteristics like one’s strategic arsenals, where subjective estimations must be made of how the sheer number of weapons interacts with capacity or reliability in determining superiority.

11 The degree to which a state’s domestic elite attempts to signal its expectation that the state will hold higher status depends significantly on the status they themselves ascribe to their state. In that way, status depends both on the perceptions of others as well as on one’s perception of self.

12 This definition is taken from Reinhard Wolf, “Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition,” International Theory 3, no. 1 (February 2011): 105–142. Wolf presents a detailed theory of the role of disrespect in international relations and calls for plausibility probes to assess the degree to which disrespect may impact state behavior. See pp. 106 - 107, 112. As Wolf notes, disrespect is particularly relevant in international relations exactly because of its relationship with status. As Wohlforth notes, one’s position within the status hierarchy is hard to measure without feedback from others. See William C. Wohlforth, “Status Dilemmas and Interstate Conflict,” in Status in
expectation of how much consideration and deference it believes others should show it, an expectation that is derived from the state’s identity.\textsuperscript{13} Disrespect may assume an evaluative form in which others clearly acknowledge but disregard a state’s interests or a non-evaluative form in which others ignore the state’s interests, rights and concerns altogether.\textsuperscript{14} An act of disrespect may occur within the public sphere for all to see or may occur privately between two states.

A state is humiliated when it believes that its position has been lowered in the eyes of others and that this lowered estimation will result in a future decline in respect and deference.\textsuperscript{15} Humiliation may be an intended act.\textsuperscript{16} It may also, however, be self-inflicted when a state fails to live up to the expectations of the international community. Defeat in

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\textsuperscript{14} As Wolf notes, a state may also be disrespected if its physical integrity, social importance, ideas and values, achievements, efforts or rights are ignored or disregarded by others.


conflict to a ‘weaker’ state, for instance, or the involuntary loss of territory to a lower status state will likely cause the international community to question the state’s position within the international status hierarchy. Humiliating events occur on the world stage and thereby threaten to generate common knowledge within the international community of the state’s decline.17

Humiliated or disrespected states which have the capabilities to do so will likely engage in competitive acts with the intention of signaling the status they expect to hold in the international system.18 Such competitive acts may occur within a bilateral environment as a disrespected state attempts to signal to a particular rival that it expects to be treated with a greater degree of deference. They may also occur within more multilateral environments as states that have been humiliated or disrespected on the world stage attempt to shape the perceptions of the international community of their right to heightened status.19 Competitive status-seeking acts may include efforts to gain membership into elite clubs through the acquisition of symbols of great power or


18 Humiliated and disrespected states commonly possess relatively high status. They are those states which expect a certain degree of success and deference within the system. See Lebow, A Cultural Theory of International Relations. This is supported by research in psychology that shows that those with high self regard are more likely than those with low self esteem to act aggressively towards those attempting to challenge their self-image. See Roy F. Baumeister, Brad J. Bushman and W. Keith Campbell, “Self-esteem, Narcissism, and Aggression: Does Violence Result from Low Self-esteem or From Threatened Egotism?,” Current Directions in Psychological Science 9, no. 1 (2000): 26–29; Brad J. Bushman and Roy F. Baumeister, “Threatened Egotism, Narcissism, Self-esteem, and Direct and Displaced Aggression: Does Self-love or Self-hate Lead to Violence?,” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 75, no. 1 (1998): 219.

regional status. They may also include direct military confrontation or competition over spheres of influence, the size of weapons arsenals or the extent of territorial holdings.

Finally, states may attempt to demonstrate their existing influence over international outcomes in an effort to minimize the appearance of influence by the superior state.

Status-challenged states are likely to adopt competitive status-seeking strategies aimed at asserting their ‘rightful position’ in the international system for two primary reasons. First, both humiliation and disrespect engender strong emotional responses such as anger which increase the likelihood that a state will behave in an aggressive manner towards others. Such emotional reactions to humiliation will lead states to

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23 Social psychologists have demonstrated the existence of group-based emotions relating to the fate of one’s group. The degree to which an individual feels such emotions depends upon the degree to which
first and foremost desire revenge upon the state that directly or indirectly threatened their status. Second, leaders of disrespected and humiliated states will desire to protect the state’s self-image for fear that if they do not, the state will face demotion within the international status hierarchy. This demotion has both instrumental consequences, in that a decline in status is a decline in influence, but also emotional consequences as well in that states, like individuals, seek to have a voice and to be respected by those in their community. Such states therefore seek clear and effective ways to establish common knowledge within the international community of their state’s distinctive capabilities, their intention for the state to be perceived as high status and their expectation that others within the international community will treat it accordingly.

Humiliated or disrespected states may choose to engage in a number of different


25 Such acts may also reestablish the collective esteem of the state as well as shape the beliefs of others. See Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia’s Resurgence*.

26 Mario Gollwitzer, Milena Meder and Manfred Schmitt, “What Gives Victims Satisfaction When They Seek Revenge?,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2011): 364–374 notes that revenge is often not about disrespect by seeking getting back at the wrong-doer, but may also be intended to send a message to third party observers about the costs of infringing on an actor’s rights.
competitive status-seeking measures at the same time, though the exact competitive measures a state chooses in response to status threat depends in part on the capabilities of the state. Status-challenged states with sufficient resources are ideally able to respond to their emotional and instrumental concerns in the most satisfying and convincing way possible – by successfully taking revenge on the actor responsible for the status decline. Revenge may be impossible, however, for states with fewer resources. In such cases, the preferred response of leaders and the public may diverge. The masses, unconstrained by concerns about capabilities, are able to focus their attention on the emotional repercussions of status threat and on revenge against the state responsible for one’s humiliation or sense of disrespect at all costs. Leaders, however, who deem revenge too risky must still manage the instrumental implications of threats to status, about which they are likely to care more than does the general public. Leaders may therefore engage in competitive status-seeking measures against third-party states aimed at influencing the perceptions of other states even when those measures lack the backing of the people.

This article addresses one particular response to humiliation and disrespect: territorial expansion. States are most likely to respond to humiliation and disrespect by

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27 This may be especially true in the case that the humiliation involves the loss of territory within the homeland.
28 As will be shown below, French and German leaders were concerned foremost about altering the perceptions of other states rather than those of their own publics. They therefore often disregarded the publics’ preferences, which were often anti-imperialist.
29 While this article focuses on cases of imperial expansion, the argument is not limited to discontiguous expansion or only to those states vying for great power status. Contiguous territorial gains may also be used to demonstrate a state’s capabilities. Alfred LeRoy Burt, *The Evolution of the British Empire and Commonwealth, from the American Revolution* (Heath, 1956) notes that Russia and Austria had unclaimed contiguous territory upon which to assert their status in the 19th century whereas
seeking territory under two conditions. First, they will be more likely to do so when
territory is a symbol of status within relevant status hierarchies. The ability to conquer
and administer vast swathes of territory has served as a symbol of high international
status for much of international history, distinguishing those states with unusual military
capabilities and with the intention to maintain a sufficiently vigorous foreign policy as
would befit preeminent states. Support for the norm of territorial integrity by
Western powers, and in particular by the United States, after World War II, however,
rendered colonization and conquest unacceptable forms of behavior for a majority of the
international community. Concurrently, technological development enabled the rise of

the European powers did not. States may also engage in numerous competitive status-seeking acts at the
same time.

30 France’s ‘policy of prestige’ during the 18th century, for instance, mandated territorial expansion in
North America for the sake of disputing British claims to naval superiority and announcing French
grandeur to the world. See Peter J. Marshall, The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and
America c. 1750-1783 (USA: Oxford University Press, 2005), chap. 1; David G. Boyce, Decolonisation
and the British Empire, 1775-1997 (Palgrave MacMillan, 1999). The Duc de Richelieu noted in 1816
that France would retake its former colony of French Guiana from Portugal “not because of any real
advantage we derive from [it]... but because it would be harmful to the dignity both of the King and
of the State to concede anything to Portugal to which she has no sort of claim.” Quoted in Henri
Brunschwig, Mythes et Rélités de L’impérialisme Colonial Français 1871-1914, (A. Colin, 1960), 14-
15. Russia’s acquisition of extensive amounts of territory in the mid-19th century was motivated by its
humiliating loss of territory in the Crimean War and its desire to reassert its status vis-à-vis Britain.
See Karl E Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race
for Empire in Central Asia (Basic Books, 2009). Much of this expansion occurred even after leaders had
concluded that on average the benefits of colonialism did not outweigh the costs. Anthony Pagden’s Lords
of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800 (New Haven, CT:
Yale University Press, 1995) describes how by the late 18th century Spain, Britain and France had
come to view their colonial enterprises as disastrous experiments. See Thomas J. Volgy, Renato
Corbetta, J. Rhamy, R. Baird and K. Grant, “Status Considerations in International Politics and the Rise
of Regional Powers,” in Status in World Politics, ed. Paul, et al., 62 for a definition of great powers
which includes, in part, the demonstration of willingness to pursue expansive foreign policies beyond
one’s region independent of other states.

31 See Mark W. Zacher, “The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of
Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation (Princeton, NJ: Princeton
University Press, 2007).
new status symbols such as nuclear weapons, space missions and aircraft carriers. That Putin’s recent acts of territorial aggression in the previous Soviet sphere appear to be motivated in large part by a desire to reassert Russian status following humiliating and disrespectful treatment by the West, however, suggests that some states continue to view territorial expansion as an effective means of asserting great power status. While a majority of states still prescribe to the norm of territorial integrity, alternative status hierarchies arguably exist which maintain more traditional status models in which territory remains a viable path to preeminence. Putin’s determination to pursue expansion in the face of strong Western opposition suggests that he may be signaling his expectation of heightened status to those states that doubt the legitimacy of the current Western normative structure.

Second, the likelihood that states will pursue territorial expansion following a threat to status depends on whether or not territory played a role in the initial instance of


34 As Larson and Shevchenko’s “Status Seekers,” 74 notes, numerous status hierarchies may exist at the same time.
humiliation or disrespect. The loss of territory is a source of significant international humiliation; states which have been humiliated through the loss of territory are likely to respond by engaging in territorial aggression aimed at reacquiring lost domains, if they are able, or at taking territory elsewhere in order to signal their intentions of maintaining the expansive foreign policy of a high status state. Similarly, if a state’s sphere of influence has been disrespected, the disrespected state will likely assert the right to claim territory, either disputed or otherwise, as would befit a state of its desired status.

Alternative Theories of Status-Seeking

This theory of status assertion overlaps to some degree with other status-based theories of behavior. Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that groups want to maintain positive, distinctive identities and that an unfavorable comparison with a reference group engenders a desire to enhance one’s position. While states may choose to seek status through less competitive strategies such as imitation and social creativity, they are more likely to seek status through a strategy of social competition when the borders between groups appears to be ‘impermeable.’ Disrespect can be understood as a signal of impermeability – as a sign that higher status states are unwilling to accept new members into their ranks. Impermeability, however, suggests a sustained state of restricted access over time, not solely in the form of disrespect. I argue instead that a single instance of disrespect may be sufficient to lead states to engage in competitive assertions of status. Instances of humiliation also increase the likelihood of competitive

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35 Tajfel, “The Psychological Structure of Intergroup Relations.”
36 Social competition is the attempt to gain status at the expense of a particular rival by attempting to outdo the superior state along dimensions of status on which they excel. The definition therefore is more specific than the concept of status competition examined in this paper.
strategies, though they are not signals of boundary impermeability. I also argue that status-challenged states with sufficient capabilities are likely to first pursue competitive strategies over imitation or social creativity for a number of reasons. First, as suggested above, because humiliation and disrespect engender anger, they serve as a trigger for aggressive action.\textsuperscript{37} Second, because competitive strategies rely upon established bases of status, they are less risky than a strategy of creativity with which a state may or may not succeed in establishing new dimensions of status. Finally, competitive strategies also enable status-threatened states to send a more targeted signal to states that have disrespected it than do imitation or creativity. This signal often involves vigorously exercising the right or pursuing the exact interest that the disrespected state was originally denied.

Wohlforth (2009) presents an alternative model, arguing that a state will compete for status when it matches higher status states in some but not all of the key material dimensions of status.\textsuperscript{38} He argues that periods of power transition create the conditions for status ambiguity in which states have an incentive to strive for preeminence. I argue, however, that while instances of humiliation and disrespect may be more likely to occur during shifts in relative capabilities, states also experience humiliation and disrespect when the distribution of capabilities is relatively stable and unambiguous.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{37} Mackie et al., “Intergroup Emotions and Intergroup Relations” notes that whether or not this is true depends upon the relative strength of the humiliated party. In “Humiliation and the Inertia Effect,” Ginges et al. demonstrate that humiliation amongst Palestinians led to passivity rather than action, but under experimental conditions in which there is no lag between the humiliating prime and one’s reaction. Logically, actor’s responses to humiliation change over time as they regain their sense of power.

\textsuperscript{38} See Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War,” 38 - 40.

\textsuperscript{39} Instances of humiliation will be more likely as states experience relative decline in capabilities. Disrespect may be more likely as states capabilities rise relative to others and dominant states are reluctant to acknowledge the shift. The European conquest and dominance over China in the middle of the 19th
Because of the difficulty of objectively measuring how one’s characteristics rank relative to others, states obtain estimates of their status through the amount of consideration they receive from others. Instances of disrespect allow for such estimates and therefore serve as triggers for status seeking, whether the underlying distribution of forces is shifting or not. Finally, realist analyses of status competition (e.g. Gilpin 1981) view military aggression as arising from inconsistency between a state’s degree of influence and its military power as states seek to demonstrate relative military capability.\footnote{According to Gilpin, ‘prestige’ is the reputation for power; it rests in relative military capability, though you know you have it when you can achieve your aims without using power. See Robert Gilpin, \textit{War and Change in World Politics}, (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 30 - 34. See also Michael D. Wallace, “Power, Status, and International War,” \textit{Journal of Peace Research} 8, no. 1 (1971): 23–35; and Thomas J. Volgy and Stacey Mayhall, “Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change,” \textit{International Studies Quarterly} 39, no. 1 (March 1995): 67–84 on status inconsistency.} I argue, in contrast, that status is partly but not wholly based on relative capabilities and that direct military conflict is one among many status-seeking strategies. States need not engage in direct conflict with rivals or in costly displays of capability or resolve in order to demonstrate their ranking relative to others. Numerous less risky and less costly status-seeking strategies, such as the extension of imperial control or the adoption of policies opposed to dominant states, are available to humiliated and disrespected states which allow them to signal the status they expect to hold in the international system.

In summary, I argue that states which have been disrespected or humiliated and
which possess the capability to do so are likely to engage in acts that befit states of their desired status. Status-threatened states do so in order to demonstrate their existing influence in the international system and their intention to hold high status in the future. This theory is demonstrated below through analysis of the initial acts of conquest in the Scramble for Africa.

These cases were chosen for several reasons. First, territorial expansion, and imperial expansion in particular, is so often attributed to material logics. Thus, the cases of French and German expansion provide a hard test of the theory that fears of declining status drive international behavior. Second, substantial documentary and secondary source material is available on all facets of these cases, which is not true for more contemporary instances of expansion. Third, these acts of conquest are of inherent historical interest. They represented significant policy shifts for both France and Germany. Expansion into Tunisia was France’s first act of conquest on the African continent in over 20 years. The flag planted by Germany in South West Africa in 1884 was its first planted abroad. Understanding the motivation behind these consequential policy shifts is essential to understanding the flurry of imperial conquest that occurred in the years that followed.

**The Scramble for Africa, 1881 - 1884**

Over the seven decades prior to the Scramble in Africa, European states had shown relatively little interest in establishing colonies in Africa. Prior to 1881, France and Britain, the dominant powers of the time, held just under 4% of African territory, mostly
in the northern and southernmost tips of the continent.\textsuperscript{41} In the four-year period between 1881 and 1884, France, Germany and Britain annexed approximately four times that amount. France acted first, annexing Tunisia in April of 1881 and then territory in the Congo in November of 1882. In both cases, French leaders were motivated to reassert French membership in great power club by international events which they believed cast France’s long-standing great power status into doubt.\textsuperscript{42} The relatively new German state, prompted by perceived British disrespect of its rights as an emerging power within the great power club, then decided to acquire its first colonies ever, taking land in South West in and East Africa between April and June of 1884. The adoption of expansionary policies by France and Germany set off a series of policy shifts by Britain and Italy that eventually led to the conquest of the continent.

**The First Cases of French Expansion, 1881 - 1882: Tunisia and Congo**

On April 28, 1881, thirty-six thousand French troops arrived on the shores of Tunisia in what is considered to be the first act of expansion in the Scramble for Africa.\textsuperscript{43} By May 8th, French troops had acquired Tunis and the second largest city Bizerta and established a formal protectorate over Tunisia. For decades prior, the French had lacked

\textsuperscript{41} See Table 1. Data taken from Tir et al., “Territorial changes, 1816–1996: Procedures and Data.” Of this expansion occurring prior to 1881, just 156,473 km\textsuperscript{2}, or 13\%, were taken at the hands of the British around South Africa while 87\% was taken by the French, primarily in Algeria over a period of 40 years.

\textsuperscript{42} From November 1882 on, France actively pursued territory in Africa, taking land in Benin, Djibouti and Gabon by the end of 1884.

any clear colonial calling or policy. Nevertheless, the French government, led by Jules Ferry and Léon Gambetta, opted to conquer over 116,000 km² of Tunisian territory. This section will show this significant shift towards a forward policy in Africa was motivated not by material, strategic or domestic considerations, as previous explanations of imperial expansion in Africa suggest, but by the fear that other states would perceive a permanent decline in French status if France did not act to reassert its intention to remain a great power following its humiliating loss in the Franco-Prussian War and the loss of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.

Though France and Britain had competed around the globe for international preeminence throughout the 18th century, their fates diverged in the 19th century. Britain prevailed as the paramount seafaring and colonial power throughout the century.\textsuperscript{44} France, on the other hand, had been defeated in the Napoleonic Wars and struggled in its attempts to found a Second French Empire in Mexico and Algeria.\textsuperscript{45} In 1871, ‘l’année terrible’, the country experienced its deepest humiliation yet: its shocking defeat and the loss of 15,000 square kilometers in Alsace and Lorraine to a supposedly weaker Prussia.\textsuperscript{46} While Prime Minister Émile Ollivier had entered the Franco-Prussian war ‘with a light heart,’ failing to recognize the shortcomings of France’s

\textsuperscript{44} Britain controlled roughly 8 million square miles with major colonial holdings in Canada, Australia, India and South Africa in 1871.


\textsuperscript{46} The humiliation of quickly losing to Prussia was arguably greater than losing after years of fighting against many other powers. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery (New York: Picador, 2003). As Michael Howard, The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871 (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1981) notes, the blow to French self-esteem was particularly intense since the French had announced its importance to their image and then lost, suffering a larger blow than they might have without such a declaration.
military preparedness in the face of a larger, modernized Prussian force, the war ended with Paris occupied and with Wilhelm I crowned German Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. The defeat called into question France’s very existence as a Great European power. Disraeli, for instance, commented in 1875 that he did “not see any prospect of the revival of France as a military puissance. She is more likely to be partitioned than to conquer Europe again.”

The 1870s was a period of withdrawal and retrenchment for France as it struggled to recover both economically and militarily from the war. While France managed to return to its pre-1871 military capabilities by 1881, it remained humiliated by the loss of the war and in particular by the loss of the provinces. Prime Minister Léon Gambetta famously remarked that the French should ‘think of [the loss of the territories] always, but speak of it never.’ The French people demanded revenge against Chancellor Bismarck and the newly crowned German Emperor; they demanded the return of the provinces. Germany ten years later however had become even stronger. Attempting to exact revenge, French leaders realized, would risk further humiliation however and the solidification of France’s decline in the eyes of others.

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47 Elements of the treaty, such as the parade of Prussian soldiers down the Champs-Elysées, were written in with the clear intention of humiliating the French. Alice L Conklin, Sarah Fishman and Robert Zaretsky, *France and Its Empire Since 1870* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 31.


49 The claim about relative military capabilities is supported by CINC data from *Territorial Changes, 1816–1996.*

50 As James Cooke puts it, following the humiliation of 1871, “Any offense to the national honor of the Third Republic simply could not be tolerated by patriotic Frenchmen.” James J. Cooke, *New French Imperialism, 1880-1910: The Third Republic and Colonial Expansion* (David & Charles, 1973): 15 - 17. Jules Ferry in particular had emphasized the need for caution. France needed to rebuild before reengaging in international affairs or else it would face a worse defeat.
sought not only the psychological satisfaction of revenge, but also the opportunity to reassert France’s status as a first ranked power within the international community. French Chamber member Chaillé-Bert described it most clearly, stating: “We had been beaten in 1870. We had been demoted … from our position as the dominant power in Europe and almost master of the world to the status of a second-class power. We were dreaming of some event or effort through which we should later seek to recover our position as a first-class power.” French leaders desired to prove that France maintained the stamina to remain a great nation and by 1881, they had become convinced that the annexation of Tunisia offered the means to do exactly that.

Why then did France focus its efforts to reassert its status on Tunisia? Territorial expansion abroad allowed France to remind the European community of its ability to project imperial power abroad, as befit a Great Power, as well as its strength as a seafaring nation. The act of expansion, however, also signaled France’s intention to remain active in world affairs and to assert the rights it had long been afforded as a great power. A failure to do so would equate to an implicit acceptance of a lesser position. As Prime Minister Jules Ferry put it, “Should we steer French policy into a blind alley with our eyes transfixed on the Vosges Mountains, leaving everything to be done, managed,

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51 See Brunschwig, Mythes et Réalités, 176. See also pp. 55 - 58.
52 Quoted in Ibid. p. 177.
54 France did not perceive status to be gained only with expansion in Africa, but also in Asia from Saigon to Cochin China. See Brunschwig, French Colonialism, 75 - 88.
55 As Gabriele Hanotaux, later Minister of Foreign Affairs, put it, France engaged in Tunisia to prove its ‘savoir-faire et son energy.’ See Gabriel Hanotaux, Histoire de la France Contemporaine 4, Furne (1903), 639.
and decided on without us and around us? This would lead to the bankruptcy of our
dev(
ights."

While the annexation of Tunisia came ten years following France’s defeat, the
subject of a French Tunisia did not first emerge in 1881. Rather, the idea was first
planted in the minds of French leaders three years earlier at the Congress of Berlin.
While it is unclear who first proposed the idea, both Bismarck and Salisbury advocated
a free hand for France in Tunisia at the 1878 meeting. Recognizing the building French
demand for resurgence and revenge on Germany amongst the French people, Bismarck
attempted to divert ‘the ambitions’ of the French away from Germany by offering French
Foreign Minister Waddington the opportunity for territorial expansion along the shores of
North Africa. British Lord Salisbury desired the annexation of Cyprus; an unchallenged
march into Tunisia was thought to be compensation for French acquiescence. That
France’s two most recent military rivals supported France’s actions in Tunisia did not
undermine France’s attempt to reassert its great power status both to the international
community as well as to itself. Both Bismarck and Salisbury expected French status
concerns to trigger a need for France to engage in a vigorous display of its great

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56 Quoted in Ibid., p. 79.
57 For a thorough relevant history of the events prior to and in Berlin, see Thomas Francis Power,
58 Bismarck was also motivated by the fear that French enmity for the Germans would lead to a
disastrous Franco-Russian Alliance. Bismarck had a plan to satisfy the ambitions of each European power
at the Congress by providing them territory equivalent to their perceived esteem. He encouraged
England to take Egypt, Russia to take Bulgaria, and France and Italy to carve out influence around
the Mediterranean. See William L. Langer, “The European Powers and the French Occupation of Tunis,
1878-1881, I,” The American Historical Review 31, no. 1 (1925): 59-60 and Roberts, The History of
French Colonial Policy. While Waddington happily returned home from the Congress with Tunisia in
his pocket, he was nearly as delighted that France once again was received at the tables of the Great
Powers of Europe. See Power, Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism, 37.
power status and merely sought to channel these aggressions away from the European continent.\textsuperscript{59}

France did not immediately send troops into Tunisia, however. While Waddington, who became the Prime Minister of France in the following year, had immediately been attracted to the idea of a resurgent French Empire, he realized he first needed the support of the French public.\textsuperscript{60} The French people, weary from the long fight in neighboring Algeria, became suspicious upon hearing that expansion into Tunisia was being considered at the urging of Bismarck.\textsuperscript{61} Was he trying to distract them from a surprise attack? Was he trying to divert their attention from the stolen provinces?\textsuperscript{62} Bismarck addressed these exact concerns quite directly to Saint-Vallier, the French Ambassador to Berlin, disavowing the first possibility, but fully acceding to the second. He had no Machiavellian intentions, he claimed. He did however want to distract France from the pain caused by that “hole in the Vosges,” arguing that a ‘grand pays’ like France deserved satisfaction for and distraction from her lost lands. While he could not offer to return Alsace and Lorraine, he did believe that the conquest of

\textsuperscript{59} Both European leaders recognized the humiliation associated with France’s loss of territory. Bismarck had opposed the annexation of the provinces for fear that French humiliation would come back to bite him. Salisbury stated in 1871 that the ‘ceded [French] territory would be a constant memorial of humiliation.’ Quoted in A.L. Kennedy, Salisbury, 1830-1903: Portrait of a Statesman (J. Murray, 1953): 71. He further predicted that the French would act in response to the loss.

\textsuperscript{60} Waddington requested that the French General Counsel in Tunisia Theodore Roustan draft a protectorate treaty for Tunisia four days after he returned home from Berlin. Before Roustan was able to present the treaty to the Bey of Tunisia, Waddington called him to stop, citing domestic concerns. Commission de publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre de 1914. Documents Diplomatiques Francais, 1ère Serie, Paris, 1929, Vol. III. Nos. 337 and 339. This series will be referred to as DDF from here on.

\textsuperscript{61} Upon hearing this news, protests filled the streets of Paris. Even those French statesmen who had worked closely with Bismarck assumed the worst of Bismarck’s intentions.

Tunisia would help ‘soothe France’s *amour propre* and satisfy its natural and legitimate need for expansion.’\(^{63}\)

In addition to his concern about the attitude of the French public, Waddington was concerned about how the Italian government would react to a French move on Tunisia. France had long been competing with Italy for influence in the territory.\(^ {64}\) Upon hearing rumors that France had been offered a free hand in Tunisia in 1878, Italy began a series of diplomatic moves intended to counter French influence there.\(^ {65}\) Prime Minister Freycinet became particularly worried in 1879 when the Italian government paid more than four times the asking price for a Tunisian railway. Convinced by Roustan, his man on the ground, that France could not allow a lesser-ranked Italy to enhance its status before France reestablished its own, Freycinet prepared to send troops into Tunis.\(^ {66}\) French action in Tunisia stalled, however, when Jules Ferry replaced Freycinet on September 23, 1880.

At the time that Ferry took office, neither Ferry, who would later become France’s most ardent imperialist, nor Léon Gambetta, the leader of the opposition, showed any interest in engaging in military action in Tunisia. Saint Vallier, Ambassador to Berlin, had entreated Foreign Minister Saint Hillaire on January 26, 1881, imploring:

> Save our country from the new humiliation, the new ‘amoindrissement’

\(^ {63}\) DDF, Vol. III. Nos. 304, 307. As noted in Baumgart and Mast, *Imperialism*, 59-60, the practice of allowing an adversary to overcome the sting of defeat was seen frequently in the 19th century. In Bismarck’s private correspondence, he emphasized the need to avoid a clash with France. Contrary to standard realist arguments, Bismarck was most concerned that another military engagement would thoroughly annihilate France now that Germany was so much stronger. See Pakenham, *Scramble for Africa*, 118.

\(^ {64}\) The number of Italians in Tunisia was as high as 30,000 in 1880, while the number of French at the time was closer to 3,000. The Italians engaged in the vast majority of trade there as well. See Luigi Villari, *The Expansion of Italy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930), 57-58.

\(^ {65}\) For a full description of the diplomatic competition in Tunisia between 1878 and 1881, see Power, *Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism*, 38 - 42.

(lessening) that threatens us... We have our backs to the wall and Europe is watching us to judge if we are still something; one act of firmness, or energetic will... and we will resume our place in the good opinion of other nations. 67

Failure to act, he added, could relegate France to the ranks of Spain. 68 Convinced by the plea, Saint-Hillaire approached Ferry who expressed concern about domestic and parliamentary opposition. 69 The decision to invade, therefore, depended largely on the position of Gambetta, whose change of heart on the matter can be pinpointed to a conversation he had on March 23 with the Director of Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Baron de Courcel. A career diplomat, Courcel had never taken an interest in commercial or financial matters. Rather, he was long interested in the need to protect French honor and standing in the world. According to his memoirs, Courcel pled his case for French expansion into Tunisia to Gambetta exactly along these lines. 70 Great power status was ephemeral, he argued; action in Tunisia would bring honor to France and would stabilize France’s international position. At no point in this pivotal conversation did Courcel mention commercial or financial motivations in Tunisia. Gambetta was said to have

67 Ibid., No. 376.
68 Sanderson, “The European partition of Africa: Coincidence or conjuncture?,” 9.
left the meeting a convert, later that week announcing that “In Africa, France will take the faltering first steps of the convalescent.”

After Gambetta pressed his followers into conversion, Jules Ferry quickly came on board, requesting authorization to send troops immediately. In the eyes of his domestic opponents, Ferry had played into the hands of Bismarck, had cost France the friendship of Italy, and had provoked the British. His government was immediately overthrown. Yet despite the opposition of the masses, French statesmen believed that France was on course to reestablish itself in the eyes of other nations. Gambetta wrote Ferry privately upon the signing of the treaty with the Bey of Tunis that “there will be people everywhere who will not like it, but they will have to put up with it. France is becoming a Great Power again.” That France had retrieved her status as a first-ranked power by adopting a vigorous and expansive policy in Tunisia became a part of national rhetoric.

Alternative Explanations for the French Occupation of Tunisia

Not only did the key discussions amongst French leaders leading up to the invasion of Tunisia in April of 1881 contain remarkably little consideration of the material, strategic or social benefits that Tunisia might provide, the annexation lacked logical rationales along these lines. First, France had little reason to expect any material windfall. While El

72 Years later, Ferry attested the immense influence Courcel had in these affairs. See Power, Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism, 52. While raids of the Tunisian Kroumir tribes into Algeria were presented as the primary cause, the documents clearly attest that this was merely pretext for the intervention. Ibid., 51.
74 Quoted in Estournelles de Constant, La Politique Française en Tunisie, 1891, p. 182.
75 See Brunswig, French Colonialism, 1871-1914, chaps. 8 - 12.
76 Power in Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism remarks that references to raw
Dorado myths about Sudan were pervasive at the time, there were few such myths about Tunisia. French experience in neighboring Algeria had not engendered dreams of profit or natural abundance. Rather, as one French explorer put it in 1870, the only thing of plenty in Algeria was the desert and the only thing ‘plentiful in the desert was air.’ Moreover, by 1870, over 300,000 lives had been lost attempting to quell unrest in neighboring Algeria. While the different domestic and demographic features of Tunisia suggested that it would likely be easier to quell than had been Algeria, this did not alter expectations about the degree to which North African colonies would materially benefit the French state.

Moreover, there is little evidence that the French state engaged in expansion in Tunisia at the behest of French coalitions of colonialists or entrepreneurs with parochial interests. As Andrew and Kanya-Forstner (1976) describes, French business remained largely indifferent to colonial expansion throughout the 19th century and largely clashed with the interests of the small and relatively inchoate colonial parties. While French entrepreneurs with significant interest in Tunisian markets did campaign for financial protections, there is no evidence that they had interest in or campaigned for full

materials, to potential markets, or other economic factors were ‘conspicuously lacking from Ferry’s creed.’ See pp. 196-198.

78 Roberts, The History of French Colonial Policy, 1870-1925, p. 177. French President Grévy argued at the time that Tunisia was not worth ‘un cigar à deux sous.’ Quoted in Ibid., p. 28. Tunisia in the 1870s was in bad financial and domestic straits. Twenty percent of the population had perished in famines in 1867 and 1868. The government was essentially bankrupt. Upon annexing the country, France assumed responsibility for Tunisia’s mounting international debts. Wesseling et al., Divide and Rule, 18.

occupation of the territory.80 Even if special interests had petitioned French leaders for expansion, the near-unanimous opposition of the French public to colonial expansion and its suspicion that colonial enterprise benefited the few while costing the many made support for special interests in an election year extremely costly while providing little electoral advantage for French leaders.81

Additionally, the annexation of Tunisia made little strategic sense for France. Most importantly, it did not serve France’s primary security imperative of maximizing its continental security.82 Since France’s shocking defeat in 1871, France had become isolated on the European continent while Germany had continued to grow in power. French strategic concerns would have been better served by consolidating French economic and military resources in order to shore up its defenses within Europe, rather than engaging in far-flung colonial exploits with few perceived material benefits, as many argued at the time.83 To many French politicians, colonies were more than a mere distraction;

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80 See Wesseling et al., Divide and Rule and Andrew et al., French Business and the French Colonialists. None of the large French companies with significant interests in Tunisia appear to have applied any pressure on French politicians for military action. This included the two companies with the largest financial investments in Tunisia as well as the railway company that had received concessions to build in Tunisia. A representative of a smaller company, the Compagnie Coulombel, which dealt in esparto grass, did urge the French consul-general towards military action, though this request remained unknown to Jules Ferry prior to invasion. For more detail on the role of private interests, see Brunschwig, French Colonialism, 52 - 53. Moreover, while industrial production was increasing in France at this time, industrialists did not expect to find a market for these goods in Tunisia. See Power, Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism, 197.

81 Ibid., 27.

82 Burt, The Evolution of the British Empire and Commonwealth, From the American Revolution, 510 argues that the French did expand into Tunisia in effort to meet their strategic goals. France confronted demographic disadvantages and could make up for them by acquiring Tunisian men to fight Germany. There is little evidence however that France ever planned to incorporate or train Tunisian men within the French military. William Roger Louis, “The Berlin Congo Conference,” in France and Britain in Africa, eds. Gifford and Louis notes that any talk of adding men to the French military was placed in the context of reestablishing French status as a great power rather than in the context of existential security. See pp. 174 - 175.

83 See Cooke, New French Imperialism and Agnes Murphy, The Ideology of French Imperialism, 1871-
they were a liability. As one prominent Bonapartist argued, colonies were ‘costly in peacetime and dangerous in wartime.’\textsuperscript{84} Conquest and colonial administration would dissipate the country’s strength just when she was most concerned with her continental security.\textsuperscript{85} France also did not expand out of a concern about relative gains or a desire to balance recent territorial gains by others. The annexation of Tunisia followed a period of relative calm amongst the European powers; no state had acquired African territory outside of South Africa in more than ten years.

Finally, French leaders were not swayed to expand into Tunisia by domestic considerations. As stated above, protests broke out in the street upon word that Bismarck was in support of the move and the government was quickly overthrown following the invasion. The public, driven by an emotional desire for revenge and unconstrained by thoughts of relative military capabilities, desired the return of the lost provinces at any cost and viewed expansion into arenas farther afield as attempts to divert their attention away from France’s rightful revanchist goals against Germany. If anything, the French masses viewed colonies as a luxurious and costly distraction, providing little commercial, economic or strategic benefit.\textsuperscript{86} As one newspaper described at the time, “There has never been an epoch nor a country more indifferent to distant adventures than the Third French Republic.”\textsuperscript{87} French leaders, on the other hand,
confronted more instrumental concerns about French demotion in the eyes of others and viewed the move into Tunisia to be a clear signal to the international community that France intended to remain in the great power club.

*French Expansion in the Congo, November 1882*

In mid-1882, French leaders were generally satisfied with the statement made by their larger footprint on the North African shore; they had no plans for a sustained march through Africa. Another humiliating international event occurred, however, this time diplomatic in nature, which would lead France to fully adopt a forward expansionary policy in Africa, starting with an act of annexation in the Congo. Though French leaders had long expressed disinterest in the Congo, on November 12, 1881, Duclerc submitted for ratification an agreement signed by French explorer de Brazza and Makoko, chief of the Batek, in which the chief promised to “cede his territory to France... and his hereditary rights of supremacy.”

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1871 (JB Lippincott, 1941). Also, while French leaders had expressed belief in the ‘safety valve’ function of colonies, such a desire to stave off domestic unrest through expansion fails to explain why France expanded when it did. Civil unrest had existed for more than a decade. See Wesseling et al., *Divide and Rule*, 17 - 18.

88 The French government had stated it had no interest in the Congo in 1880 when de Brazza set off. When de Brazza returned in 1881 with the signed treaty, Prime Minister Freycinet indicated it was a matter for the AIA, the charter company which had supported the trip, and not for the French government, which was officially not interested in the interior of Africa. See Jean Stengers, “King Leopold and Expansion in the Congo,” in *France and Britain in Africa*, ed. Louis and Gifford, 474. This again provides support against the theory that French leaders engaged in expansion at the behest of special interests, as Snyder in *Myths of Empire* might suggest. In September 1882, de Brazza informed the Belgian Foreign Minister that he was convinced that “neither the [French] government nor the Chambers would do anything [with regards to his treaty].” *Ibid.* De Brazza’s expeditions into the Congo coincided with those of Leopold II of Belgium, who cherished hopes of increasing Belgian prestige through colonial expansion. Leopold perceived colonies as ‘a means of giving us a more important place in the world’ – as a means to greatness. See V. Viaene, “King Leopold’s Imperialism and the Origins of the Belgian Colonial Party, 1860–1905,” *The Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 4 (2008): 741–790; Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1996): 54. The desirability of the land in and of itself was secondary. As stated in Galbraith et al., *The British occupation of Egypt*, “Leopold wanted an empire anywhere. He wanted to
without considering the impact of the Egyptian Crisis, which had played out in the months prior, on French attitudes.\textsuperscript{89}

In the late 1870s, the British and French had assumed direct control over Egyptian finances in an effort to protect the substantial financial investments of their citizens in the face of a series of Egyptian economic crises. This gradual encroachment of Europeans in Egyptian affairs engendered an Egyptian national movement that targeted British and French bondholders in particular. Over the course of 1882, nationalist efforts to eradicate European influence and to oust Egypt’s European-backed leader led to British and French reprisals and a cycle of escalating violence. By mid-July, Gladstone became convinced that direct military intervention was necessary.\textsuperscript{90} While his true motivation for initiating an attack on the nationalist leader Urabi has been debated,\textsuperscript{91} we do know that Gladstone initially proposed a joint attack on nationalist forces by both Britain and France.\textsuperscript{92} Freycinet supported quelling the dissent, but wanted to avoid direct action in Egypt, fearing the backlash of public support at the mounting costs of intervention.\textsuperscript{93} In


\textsuperscript{90} Worried about angering the other European powers, Britain wanted to act only with their consent. On July 23, 1882, the six European powers agreed that the Suez Canal should be protected at whatever cost. See DDF, Vol. III, No. 455.

\textsuperscript{91} Robinson et al., \textit{Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism}, vol. 131 argue that the British were protecting the Suez Canal amidst the ‘anarchy’ of the nationalist revolt. Hopkins in \textit{The Victorians and Africa} however argues that the British were prompted by the desire to protect the economic interests of British citizens and to achieve domestic political gains for the Liberal Party. See also Galbraith et al., \textit{The British Occupation of Egypt}, D. Halvorson, “Prestige, Prudence and Public Opinion in the 1882 British Occupation of Egypt,” \textit{Australian Journal of Politics & History} 56, no. 3 (2010): 423-440.

\textsuperscript{92} DDF, Vol. III, No. 408.

\textsuperscript{93} Freycinet had proposed the naval bombardment of Alexandria in May, but they increasingly
lieu of an all-out invasion, Freycinet proposed joint intervention to protect access to the Suez Canal. Even this more limited plan, however, failed to win the support of the French Chamber, leading to Freycinet's resignation the following day on July 30, 1882. In August, 40,000 British troops entered Egypt alone, quickly occupying Cairo and Alexandria and taking control of the Suez Canal. By October, the status quo in Egypt had been irreparably altered; Gladstone requested a renegotiation of the distribution of influence in the country, effectively omitting a role for France. The era of French influence in Egypt was officially over. British troops, however, would remain on the ground until 1936.\(^{94}\)

The primary point of interest of this case for the purpose of assessing the role of status concerns in the Scramble for Africa is less the British motivations for occupation than the impact of the event on the French. France had considered itself as having rights in Egypt superior to those of the other European Powers since the time of Napoleonic.\(^{95}\) Though the blame for French inaction lay solely with the French people and French Chamber, Egypt quickly became synonymous with an almost intolerable affront to French self-esteem.\(^{96}\) The loss of Egypt was spoken of by some

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\(^{94}\) Britain ended up in Egypt through ‘muddleheadedness’ and miscalculation rather than an intentional expansionist colonial policy. The British Foreign Secretary Lord Granville claimed that the conquest of Egypt had been ‘forced’ upon them and bemoaned to Lord Spencer that the British takeover of Egypt was “a nasty business, and we have been much out of luck.” Quoted in Chamberlain, The Scramble for Africa, 33.

\(^{95}\) This was according to an American consul in Cairo. See Sanderson, England, Europe & the Upper Nile, 114.

in the same sentence as the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, referred to as the “second disaster” with consequences almost as disastrous for France as the war of 1871.\(^97\) This humiliation, though self-imposed, engendered within France a renewed desire to assert France’s status for fear that France would otherwise be reduced to the level of Italy or Spain.\(^98\) While French leaders had not initially planned any expansion beyond Tunisia, the notion that further annexation in Africa could compensate France for any decline in status resulting from the Egyptian affair started to take root shortly after the British invasion.\(^99\) A few weeks after Gladstone’s October request to renegotiate the status quo in Egypt, the French government ratified de Brazza’s treaty in an act of ‘patriotic grandeur.’\(^100\) King Leopold of Belgium recognized that this new instance of French humiliation would impact French colonial policy, informing Queen Victoria, “In Paris they are raging; they seek a twofold revenge, against the Germans and for the success of the British in Egypt. They want to expand in every direction. Tunis is not enough; they want the Niger and the Congo in Africa.”\(^101\) French inaction in Egypt had called into question France’s


\(^98\) Stengers, *L’Imperialisme Colonial de la fin du XIX-Siècle* lays out the stages of French reaction to the Egyptian crisis leading to the annexation of the Congo. Also Baumgart and Mast, *Imperialism*, 60.


\(^100\) Journalists and leaders alike perceived that the annexation of the Congo arose out of a hit to French self-esteem. The French regarded expansion into the Congo “as an enterprise of great patriotism” with France wanting “to recoup her eviction from the Nile by the English by evicting the Belgians and the Portuguese from the northern parts of the Congo territory,” said The *Koelnische Zeitung*. Quoted in Stengers, *King Leopold and Expansion in the Congo*, p. 165. The French press played a role in publicizing the French humiliation in Egypt and the nationalist need for France to assert itself elsewhere. In this case, unlike in Tunisia, the French public was largely supportive of expansion in the Congo, though they had heard little to nothing about the material or strategic advantages of taking land there.

\(^101\) Quoted in *Ibid*, 166.
intentions to once again be a preeminent seafaring power with unmatched influence.

Action in the Congo would serve to reiterate these intentions to both a domestic and an international audience.\textsuperscript{102}

Importantly, this move to ratify the annexation of the Congo in an effort to repair France’s image was in all other ways rash. The government did so without at all examining the financial or international implications of the treaty. Not only were leaders not guided by material or strategic interests in ratifying the treaty, they knew virtually nothing about the whereabouts or the characteristics of the annexed lands. As Stengers has put it, “Never has a government submitted to parliamentary ratification a treaty of the reality and results of which it knew so little.”\textsuperscript{103} To date the French government had also taken great care to not provoke the British in their quest for greater influence. The British up to this point had expressed little interest in west Africa, a region its leaders acknowledged as having little material or economic value, leaving Duclerc convinced that it’s annexation provided the least costly way for France to signal its intention to maintain great power status.

\textbf{Early German Expansion, 1884: Angra Pequena, Togo and the Cameroons}

Amongst European statesmen, there had been no more ardent anti-imperialist than Bismarck. In 1868, he defended Prussian abstention from colonial expansion, saying:

\begin{flushright}
102 This quest for renewed prestige in the Congo continued under Ferry when he returned to office in February the following year. In search of Parliamentary support, he pressed the fact that enlarged French holdings in equatorial Africa would contribute significantly to the stature, the glory and the prestige of France. See Power, \textit{Jules Ferry and the Renaissance of French Imperialism}, 88-91.

103 Quoted in \textit{Ibid.}, 475. See also Baumgart and Mast, \textit{Imperialism}, 62.
\end{flushright}
The advantages which people expect from colonies for the commerce and industry of the mother country are mainly founded on illusions, for the expenditure very often exceeds the gain…, as is proved by the experience of England and France in their colonial policy.\(^{104}\)

Bismarck had yet to change his tune by 1881, a year before France annexed Tunisia, stating “I don’t like colonies at all. They are only good as supply posts.”\(^{105}\) He worried not only about a colonial drain on resources and the costs associated with administering them, but was also about the drain on German military capabilities as colonies would require protection from powerful naval fleets which Germany did not at the time possess. Furthermore, Bismarck had serious misgivings about becoming more reliant on parliament or individual states and about increasing the tax burden or federal deficit in order to amass funds to support colonial initiatives.\(^{106}\) He maintained his anti-colonial policy up until only a few months prior to Germany’s first act of annexation in April 1884, turning down parochial requests for colonial establishment in South West Africa and East Africa as late as December 1883.\(^{107}\) Between April and October of 1884, however, Bismarck claimed territory first at the South West African port of Angra Pequena, current day Namibia, and then in Togo and the Cameroons.

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What explains this dramatic change of heart? Given his persistent doubts about the utility of colonization, why ultimately did Bismarck decide to follow Britain, France, and Belgium into the colonizing fray? Historians have long debated the impetus for this shift in policy. They have largely rooted their explanations in general economic, financial and social trends of the time, citing the desire for economic growth, the desire for a solution to overpopulation and domestic discontent, and finally the desire for electoral support from imperialist domestic interest groups. As will be shown, however, each of these general explanations confronts serious challenges. Analysis of the statements surrounding Bismarck’s shift in attitude indicate instead that his decision to annex was in direct reaction to the high-handed and overly assertive colonial policy of the British. In particular, Bismarck felt it necessary to signal to Britain Germany’s intentions to exercise its right to annex territory abroad, a right it believed it was afforded by its status as a relatively new great power. He believed that a failure to assert rights associated with great power status risked demotion of Germany’s newfound status.

*British Indifference, German Status and African Colonies*

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109 Many have refuted A.J.P. Taylor’s controversial argument that Bismarck’s expansion into Africa was aimed at angering the British in order to draw closer to the French. Sanderson in “The European partition of Africa: Coincidence or conjuncture?” notes that it is not clear why the Germans needed a quarrel with England to arrive at this outcome nor why he would have aimed to anger Britain through colonial expansion rather than exploiting British strategic vulnerability in Egypt. See also Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883-1885*.

110 These explanations focus on placing German expansion into a larger trend rather than on the exact events and statements made by German statesmen in the months preceding the first case of German annexation in Africa.
Bismarck first received a request for the official “protection of the flag of the German Empire” from Herr Lüderitz, a factory owner in Angra Pequeña, in November of 1882.\textsuperscript{111} Bismarck felt it necessary, as he had in the past, to first inquire with the British who held territory in the vicinity before extending consular protections to German citizens in Africa, a testament to the extent that Bismarck above all had prioritized maintaining good relations with the British and respecting their interests abroad.\textsuperscript{112} In February 1883, Bismarck wrote to notify London of Lüderitz’s request, stating that Germany “would be happy to see England extend her efficacious protection to the German settlers in those regions” and adding that Germany “naturally reserved the right to grant protection herself if the settlements in question lay outside England’s influence…”\textsuperscript{113} Bismarck’s intention was to provide basic consular protections, but only in the case that the British were not willing to extend their own.\textsuperscript{114} The British understood this inquiry to be very much in keeping with Bismarck’s ardent anti-colonial stance.

Six months later, Bismarck, however, had yet to receive any indication from the British as to their interests in the area. In September, he requested for the German embassy in London to make a “cautious inquiry” to the British with the intention of establishing British intentions towards the territory as well as the basis of any claim to title of the

\textsuperscript{111} Recognizing that the improbability that his request would be denied, Lüderitz downgraded his request to that of the basic consular protections afforded all German citizens abroad in January 1883.

\textsuperscript{112} The British held only the guano-rich Walfisch islands off the coast.

\textsuperscript{113} Translated from the German in Turner, Bismarck’s Imperialist Venture, 57 - 58. Many related German communiques are in Aydelotte, Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883 -1885, 32 - 39.

\textsuperscript{114} He continued throughout the months that followed to deny requests for anything more than consular protection even in African locales where German trading interests were directly and immediately threatened by the British.
land that the British might have had. He requested the ambassador inquire about provisions the British might make for the protection of German traders in the case that title was claimed.\textsuperscript{115} Response was again, however, slow in coming. On November 12th, ten months after his initial inquiry, an increasingly impatient Bismarck again asked the British directly if they claimed sovereignty over the territory.\textsuperscript{116} Only on November 17th did Bismarck receive an official British response. It stated that although the British had no interest in, title to, or intention to occupy Angra Peque\~{n}a, they would perceive “any claim to sovereignty or jurisdiction by a foreign power...[to] infringe their legitimate rights.”\textsuperscript{117} This response left Bismarck surprised and incensed. The British were effectively declaring a ‘Munro[sic] doctrine for Africa,’\textsuperscript{118} attempting to unfairly exclude the influence of all other powers from the continent regardless of whether Britain had interest in or intention to occupy the territory or not.\textsuperscript{119} Setting aside his concerns about raising the ire of the British as well as his doubts about the advantages of imperialism, he responded in December with a strongly worded letter requesting that Britain provide a legitimate basis for its claim and citing an extensive list of the

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\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., pp. 35.
\textsuperscript{116} Townsend, \textit{Origins of Modern German Colonialism, 1871-1885}, 167.
\textsuperscript{117} Quoted in Pflanze, \textit{Bismarck and the Development of Germany}, 124.
\textsuperscript{119} This perception was augmented by the signing of the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of February 1884 which designated the mouth of the Congo River as Portuguese territory. Given Portugal’s role as a British puppet, the treaty was perceived to be a veiled attempt by the British to expand their influence. See Hal Ashby Turner, “Bismarck's Imperialist Venture: Anti-British in Origin?,” in Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule, ed. Gifford and Louis, 65. This high-handed behavior by the British was not limited to Africa. In January of 1884, London rejected Bismarck's claims for a joint commission to address German claims to Fiji.
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numerous British disavowals of their title to and interest in the area over the years.\textsuperscript{120} 
Upon delivering Bismarck’s response to the British, Count Münster, Germany’s 
amassador in London, felt the need to soften Bismarck’s language, suffused as it was 
with impatience and annoyance. This inquiry too went unanswered for six months, 
however, leaving Bismarck to fume in March that the British had handled the Angra 
Pequeña affair, “not only with indifference but with severity and deliberate injustice.” On 
April 24, 1884, without receiving any response to his strongly worded note, Bismarck 
ordered the German flag to be planted at the port and Germany took responsibility for 
protection of the Angra Pequeña settlement.

Within a few months, Bismarck’s hope that the British would extend sovereignty 
over the Angra Pequeña territory in order to protect German traders had morphed 
into anger at Britain’s unfair treatment and a desire to teach Britain a lesson that it 
could not ride roughshod over the interest of other European powers.\textsuperscript{121} As a result, he 
proceeded to acquire not only Angra Pequeña but also territory within Togo and the 
Cameroons, failing to notify the British of the latter until after the fact.\textsuperscript{122} Following 
these initial annexations, Bismarck felt it necessary to convey his annoyance at British 
high-handed behavior. Stating that Germany would not abide by the “arrogance and

\textsuperscript{120} He had sent a similar inquiry to London in 1880, for instance, upon the request of protection of 
missionaries in South West Africa, to be told that London had no interest in the area and would not 
be able to extend such protections. 
\textsuperscript{121} Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Ronald E. Robinson, Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The 
Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition (Oxford University Press, 1988), 153; 
Turner, “Bismarck’s Imperialist Venture.” 
\textsuperscript{122} There is evidence that Bismarck intentionally deceived the British as to his true intentions in April 
and May, allowing them to believe he was only extending consular protections most likely so that the 
annexations would be a fait accompli. Ibid., p. 71. Dugdale, German Diplomatic Documents 1871-1914, 
vol. 1.
selfishness of the English for ever,” he wrote to Münster that “…the Munro[sic] Doctrine, that monstrosity in International Law, was being applied in favor of England to the coast of Africa…This naïve egoism is in itself an insult to our national feeling … The ‘quod licet Jovi, etc.’ cannot be applied to Germany.”123 Why was it that England forbade others from the right to colonize, a right which England practiced so actively, Bismarck wondered?124 It was exactly this sense of a British double standard – the British belief that its elevated status somehow privileged it in ways that it was unwilling to grant to others – that prompted Bismarck’s colonial turn. A failure to assert Germany’s right to acquire colonies, a right Germany should be afforded because of its high status, in the face of such disrespect would threaten Germany’s status over the long term. Bismarck declared as such to Münster:

London is not showing the consideration to our overseas trade to which it is entitled. If we fail to push our rights with energy, we shall risk, by letting them sink into oblivion, falling into a position inferior to England, and strengthening the unbounded arrogance shown by England and her Colonies in opposition to us…Seeing the want of consideration shown in British colonial policy, modesty on our part is out of place.125

It was not simply the extension of British influence around the globe, but the fact that the British extended their influence without due consideration for those of near-

124 Aydelotte, Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883 - 1885, 72.
equivalent status that motivated Bismarck to annex territory abroad, an act reserved for those with great power status.\textsuperscript{126}

For its part, London was shocked upon hearing of the German claims. The British had long taken Bismarck at his anti-colonial word and had not expected his change of heart regarding German colonies. They felt it necessary to apologize for the slight, with Granville claiming to have been guided by the belief in Bismarck’s anti-colonialism when he deemed German colonial inquiries to be of secondary importance. Beyond a mere apology, the British focused on righting the wrong with a spirit of generosity. The British cabinet decided in mid-June that Bismarck, who they recognized was greatly irritated with the British Government because of Angra Pequeña, “was to have all he wanted.”\textsuperscript{127} In September of 1884, Gladstone made clear his low regard for the quality of Germany’s new colonies, stating: “The world contains other waste places in want of occupants which would reward plantation better than these. Great Britain is very far from grudging their annexation to Germany. Colonization is costly and troublesome work.”\textsuperscript{128}

Bismarck’s lesson for the British was not finished however.\textsuperscript{129} Following months of conspiring with the French about how to confront unchecked British arrogance in

\textsuperscript{126} See Förster et al., \textit{Bismarck, Europe and Africa}. This explanation was supported by Bismarck’s son, the only person who according to Bismarck, possessed knowledge of all of his secrets. He claimed that Bismarck had been motivated first and foremost by the need to check British arrogance. Robert O Collins, \textit{The Partition of Africa: Illusion or Necessity?}, vol. 67, (John Wiley & Sons, 1969), 91.

\textsuperscript{127} Quoted in Aydelotte, \textit{Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883 -1885}, 97. Sir William Harcourt apologized profusely to Prince Herbert Bismarck on June 22, ad indicated that Germany could have all of Fiji and any land she might be interested in in Africa. See \textit{Ibid.}, 99.


\textsuperscript{129} Murray in “Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics” has shown that this was just the beginning of a long period of German status assertions continuing into the next century. German status concerns motivated its policy of \textit{Weltpolitik} and its pursuit of an imperial navy and dreadnought battleships.
Africa, Bismarck convened the Berlin Conference in November 1884, a gathering intended to address the ‘miniature scrambles’ starting to multiply along the African coasts, but intended to have a far greater symbolic significance. For Bismarck, who had only entered the colonial game in the few months prior, there was no greater recognition of Germany’s status as an imperial great power than British willingness to convene in Berlin in order to discuss African affairs.

*Alternative Explanations for the First Stage of German Imperialism*

As with discussions leading up to France’s early acts of annexation in Africa, Bismarck’s correspondence and recorded conversations regarding Germany’s first acts of imperial expansion contained little reference to material, economic or strategic calculations. Moreover, expansion into Angra Pequen lacked a logical economic or strategic rationale. Bismarck had little reason to expect great material reward in the region. Numerous reports had circulated prior to annexation about the barren deserts of South West Africa, a place devoid of water but replete with restless natives. Prior to official annexation, one German explorer reported back that the port was ‘inhospitable

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130 That the conference was intended as a further lesson to the British was made clear in part by Bismarck's intention to declare it an international rule that colonial land be occupied in order for a claim to be legitimate. See Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann, “Consequences of the Foundation of the German Empire: Colonial Expansion and the Process of Political-Economic Rationalization,” in *Bismarck, Europe and Africa. The Berlin Africa Conference and the Onset of Partition*, eds. Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Ronald E. Robinson, (Oxford University Press, 1988), 105–20.

131 Robinson has described the conference as a ‘ritual drama signifying a change in seniority between sibling nations.’ To dramatic effect during the conference, Bismarck declared to the Reichstag ‘the astonishment’ of the British at ‘their cousins, the land rats [taking] suddenly to seafaring’ and warned Britannia that its hegemony overseas was over. Ronald Robinson, “The Conference in Berlin and the Future in Africa, 1884–1885,” in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa*, ed. Forster, et al., 8 - 9. This was despite having fully supported British colonial expansion not a year earlier.


133 von Strandmann, *Consequences of the Foundation of the German Empire*, 107.
even for a penal colony."\textsuperscript{134} Another stated, “It is one of the least economic coasts on earth…no tree, no bush, no leaf is to be seen, nothing but sand.”\textsuperscript{135} Furthermore, the British had held islands directly off the coast since 1867 but had never expressed the slightest interest in the region, attesting to the area’s lack of obvious natural appeal. Even if there had been abundant material resources within the region, extracting them would have required a significant amount of infrastructural development, investments Bismarck was absolutely not willing to make. Even after official annexation, Bismarck’s attitude toward the colonies remained one of ‘indifference,’ much to the dismay of the explorers and few settlers there, and official colonial policy was that the state would play as small a role as possible in colonial administration or protection.\textsuperscript{136} Furthermore, he had little reason to believe that private investors would fill the need for capital given their reluctance to fund colonial exploits in the years before and long after annexation.\textsuperscript{137}

It is also very unlikely that Bismarck was substantially swayed by the possibility of generating economic growth through the acquisition of new markets or by an increase in German exports to South West Africa. The German economy had been hit hard by the economic crisis of 1873, a crisis caused by industrial over expansion funded by war reparations paid by France following its loss in the Franco-Prussian War.

\textsuperscript{134} Quoted in Turner, \textit{Bismarck’s Imperialist Venture}, 60.
\textsuperscript{135} Another German explorer, upon visiting the new protectorate, exclaimed “What a terrible desert we have acquired.” Both quoted in Pflanze, \textit{Bismarck and the Development of Germany}, vol. 3, 134.
\textsuperscript{136} His colonial model differed dramatically from the hands-on French approach in that he desired for the state to play as small a role as possible in the administration and protection of the colonies von Strandmann, \textit{Consequences of the Foundation of the German Empire}, 106 - 107.
\textsuperscript{137} African investments were deemed to be highly risky, and with safer more profitable investments closer to home and abroad on other continents, not worth the risk. \textit{Ibid.}
Attention after the crisis shifted towards a need for larger markets to absorb German industrial goods. The completely undeveloped, largely unpopulated area around Angra Pequeña however offered no possibility of boosting the demand for such goods. Substantial infrastructural investment would be required to create an industrial marketplace but, as mentioned, neither the government nor German capitalists were willing to front such investments. In keeping with more particularist explanations of expansion, such as that of Snyder (1991), domestic financial and trading groups did propagate for German expansion overseas. The vast majority of these groups, however, was small in size and influence and generated little direct financial or commercial involvement in Africa prior to or after the formation of the colony. Additionally, Bismarck historically had had no problem keeping interest groups at bay. By assuming direct control over Angra Pequeña, Bismarck met the demands for protection by the traders at the Angra Pequeña post. As the case evidence suggests above, however, the protection of German trading interests there was more a side effect of Bismarck’s primary aim of signaling German status to the British than it was a motivating aim in itself.

Another oft-cited explanation for German expansion into Africa was growing social

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138 Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire 1875-1914*.
139 von Strandmann, *Consequences of the Foundation of the German Empire*, 106 - 107.
140 Famous German explorer Friedrich Fabri complained in 1885 of the inertia of ‘our financiers and capitalists’ in colonial matters. See *Ibid.*, 110.
141 Snyder argues that German expansion was far more likely to occur when German domestic politics was cartelized and run by groups of elites, from 1890 to 1918, or was dominated by a single dictator as it was in the 1930s and 40s than it was under the unitary oligopoly of Bismarck. *Snyder, Myths of Empire*, 68 - 69, 99.
142 As Smith notes in *The German Colonial Empire*, the largest trading group advocating overseas expansion was facing bankruptcy at the time. See pp. 7 - 10.
unrest due to the economic crisis and booming population and the resulting need to acquire territory for German settlement abroad.\textsuperscript{143} Germany held too many people, the argument went, and expansion abroad could act as a ‘safety valve’ to prevent disorder if domestic conditions became too difficult.\textsuperscript{144} For many of aforementioned reasons, however, emigration to the African colonies was not perceived as an attractive opportunity for settlement. Beleaguered by a lack of investment, the regions suffered from poor communication, insufficient resources, and the hostility of native populations. Very few Germans ever emigrated to German colonies in Africa. By 1913, only 23,500 Germans lived within all of Germany’s African holdings.\textsuperscript{145}

Finally, Bismarck was not motivated by strategic motivations in his choice to annex African colonies. The locations of the colonies were determined far more by what territories were available at the time and by the position of German explorers on the ground than they were by any foresighted strategic calculations. Prior to annexation, Bismarck believed colonial adventures generated strategic weakness. The German empire, scattered in far-flung regions across the continent, lacked geographical unity and presented exactly the challenge to effective defense that Bismarck had feared.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textsuperscript{143} Wolfgang Mommsen, \textit{Imperial Germany 1867-1918}, chap. 5. The British also had the impression that Bismarck’s colonial shift was prompted by the jingoistic demands of the German public. Bismarck’s letters do convey a desire to take electoral advantage of growing nationalist sentiment. See Louis and Gifford, \textit{Britain and Germany in Africa}, 24. It appears however that Bismarck strategically released information about the arrogant British treatment of German interests to the German press in order to arouse such popular anti-British, pro-colonial sentiments. See Aydelotte, \textit{Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883 -1885} and Chamberlain, \textit{The Scramble for Africa}, 56 - 59.

\textsuperscript{144} The population increased by 25% to 50 million between 1871 and 1890. See Pflanze, \textit{Bismarck and the Development of Germany}, vol. 3, 116.

\textsuperscript{145} Förster et al., \textit{Bismarck, Europe and Africa}, 125.
This article has demonstrated that humiliated and disrespected states are likely to engage in competitive status-seeking behavior and that they are often willing to do so in spite of their material and strategic interests. The cases above demonstrate that responses to humiliation and disrespect need not involve demonstrations of one’s military effectiveness relative to that of potential rivals. France, in a move that undoubtedly changed few minds about its military capability relative to that of potential European rivals, handily acquired control of the bankrupt Tunisian government within less than two weeks. Similarly, Germany’s initial act of imperialism involved little more than planting a flag at a remote, barren port. Rather, both states sought to signal their expectation of holding higher status by exercising the prerogatives associated with their desired status.

Because it often threatens the status, security and interests of other states, status seeking engendered by humiliation and disrespect often has a significant impact on international behavior. Germany’s decision to become an empire, for instance, generated status concerns for Italy, leading it to embark upon a colonial policy of its own. 146 While in 1882 President Mancini privately decried the system of territorial colonies as ‘sterile and harmful … a source of weakness rather than of strength,’ in May 1884, he ordered the occupation of Massawa in current-day Eritrea in January of 1885. 147 The timing of this shift in attitude can be pinpointed almost exactly to


147 May 20, 1884. Lowe et al., Italian Foreign Policy, 1870 - 1940, 37.
Bismarck’s imperial debut. Italian statesman came to see German actions as setting a new precedent that threatened the relegation of Italy to a lower status. As one diplomat stated at the time, “Germany had acted; Italy must act.” If Italy were to ever acquire its ‘place in the sun’, it would have to ‘abandon prudence’ and engage in costly African expansion like the other European powers.

The French and German adoption of forward policies in Africa also presented direct threats to Britain’s unchallenged status as the preeminent seafaring power. With the French ratification of the Congo treaty and the possibility of French ownership of much of the west coast of Africa, the British began to detect a consistent French policy of anti-British antagonism. British leaders also increasingly confronted the antagonistic intentions of the ‘young and ambitious’ Germany, which was continuing its assault on Britain’s ‘Munro [sic] policy’ in the west. Over time, British leaders came to realize that if Britain were to remain a preeminent power, they could not allow themselves to be ‘cheeked by Bismarck or anyone else.” Without a ‘positive and vigorous effort’ to assert British rights as the preeminent power, Britain would be left behind, suffering the

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151 See Boyce, *Decolonisation and the British Empire, 1775-1997*, 14 - 16. Aside from the Cape Colony Egypt, Britain had opted against major expansion into Africa in the 19th century, despite its unrivaled ability to do so through most of the period.

152 Chamberlain in 1885. Quoted in Taylor et al., *Germany’s First Bid for Colonies, 1884-1885*, 71. As late as December 1884, Prime Minister Gladstone was writing to Granville regarding further British expansion, “I see great objection to it; and generally considering what we have got I am against entering into a scramble for the remainder.” December 7, 1884. Quoted in Aydelotte, *Bismarck and British Colonial Policy, 1883-1885*, 164.
inevitable decline of an empire. As The Times put it, “With the colonies massed around us we can hold our own in the ranks of the world Powers…without them we must sink to the position of a merely European kingdom a position which for England entails slow but sure decay.” British leaders agreed, with Chamberlain stating that a failure to expand further would “strike at the root cause of our great position.”\(^{153}\) By the turn of the century, Britain – the once reluctant imperialist – had acquired possession of over roughly one-quarter of the entire African continent.\(^{154}\) The European powers collectively had assumed control of 95% of the entire African continent.

While concerns about status have not generated similar competition for territory over the last century, recent territorial claims by Russia and China suggest that the potential for status-driven conquest remains.\(^{155}\) The likelihood that states in the contemporary system will seek status through territorial expansion increases in cases in which states’ spheres of interest are disrespected by prominent powers within the international community. Territorial expansion, however, is only one of many ways that states in the contemporary international system may assert their status following instances of humiliation or disrespect. States may choose to lead multilateral interventions, to conduct weapons tests or to form regional economic institutions.\(^{156}\) Regardless of the

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\(^{153}\) By 1890, Britain’s transition to a self-conscious imperialistic power was complete. It became, as Porter has described, like a “cock-bird, blowing up his feathers to assert his dominance to rivals.” B. Porter, The Lion’s Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1970 (New York: Longman, 1975), 119.

\(^{154}\) Sanderson, “The European partition of Africa: Coincidence or conjuncture?,” 28.


\(^{156}\) Following Bill Clinton’s 1995 decision to offer a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Deng-hu, China
exact competitive status-seeking strategy contemporary states engage in, we should expect the general conditions outlined in this article to apply. States that have been humiliated or disrespected will be likely to engage in competitive behaviors in an effort to secure their status. As with French and German conquests in Africa in the 1880s, the actions such states take in the contemporary world are likely to have far-reaching consequence.
