

What does it take to be a great power? The story of France joining the Big Five

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Abstract. The article illuminates the International Relations (IR) enigma of how states with relative low power succeed in gaining privileges reserved for great powers. Many IR studies on status stress the importance of social recognition as a precondition for enjoying the status of a great power. However, very few focus on the factors that affect such recognition. This article tries to fill this gap by looking at systemic wars. Systemic wars are special circumstances wherein a new world order is built and privileges are redistributed among states. In these situations, states may use their symbolic, moral, and circumstantial assets to grant themselves a paramount role in the new order. A state's previous status as a great power, its contribution to victory in a war, and the utilitarian considerations of other countries are all assets that help it to win the privileges reserved for great powers – and that in the long run could gain it recognition as a great power, despite its lack of the requisite capabilities. By using this conceptual framework in the case of France during and after the Second World War, this article tries to explain how a relatively weak power can gain a leading role in a postwar order.

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In January 1945, President Roosevelt's envoy, Harry Hopkins, visited Paris in an attempt to improve the poor state of relations between the US government and the French provisional government. When asked by General de Gaulle to explain America's reservations toward France, Hopkins replied that France's collapse in 1940 had shattered its image as a great power overnight. France, no longer the state it had been, could not be given the central role it had played in the past.¹

This fact was difficult to deny. France's resounding defeat by the German army, its humiliating surrender, and its occupation were clear evidence of the final descent of what once had been Europe's dominant power. Materially, France lay in ruins in the aftermath of liberation, with nearly its entire heavy industry destroyed or looted by the Germans.² Militarily, France was a 'virtual pygmy'. The French army was reduced to eight divisions, equipped entirely with American weapons. Its economy

* The author wishes to acknowledge the wise and useful comments and suggestions of the following individuals: Nadav Kedem, Oded Löwenheim, and Einat Vadai. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Review of International Studies* and the editors.

¹ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de guerre: le salut* (Paris: Plon, 1956), pp. 81–2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

was shattered and its institutions in chaos. Furthermore, until the end of 1944, the major powers refused to recognise the provisional government of de Gaulle as the legitimate government of France. The French nation in 1945 was deemed to be ‘internally divided, economically ruined and institutionally feeble’.³

An analysis based on material factors would surely have predicted France’s relegation to the international system’s periphery with other once-great powers that had lost the material foundation for their greatness – such as Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and the Netherlands. However, in the final year of the war, France managed to win many privileges that largely preserved its status as a great power after the war. This article attempts to shed light on this phenomenon, examining how a state can receive great-power privileges and a leading role in the international arena without actually being a great power. More generally, it asks what compels leading victorious powers to share their privileges with minor powers when designing a new world order.

The first part of the article seeks to develop a conceptual framework of how states acquire status in international relations. In it, I present the current literature on status in International Relations (IR) and propose an alternative approach; then I discuss current literature’s grasp of the conditions for great powerhood; and finally, I present my conceptual framework, which stresses the non-material factors that influence recognition of great powerhood. In the second part of the article, I use post-World War II France to illustrate the conceptual framework. France is not the only case of a second-ranked power taking advantage of systemic war to gain a paramount position exceeding its modest capabilities: others include Prussia in 1815; Italy and Japan in 1919; and China (and to some extent Britain) in 1945. While I make brief reference to post-World War I Italy in order to enlarge the sample, my analysis centres mainly on the single case study of France. Such a focus provides a detailed and convincing description of the process by which a minor power is able to gain great-power privileges, and makes it much easier to understand similar cases. Presenting the story in depth and then analysing its various components is crucial to strengthening causality. France, *a priori*, represents a particularly hard case for this study. Among the cases of second-rank powers seeking great power status, France was the weakest. While Italy and Japan in 1919 were no doubt behind France, Britain, and the US in material capabilities, the differences were not enormous, at least in relation to the first two. China in 1945, although weak, was seen as a probable future great power due to its huge potential. France’s capabilities after World War II, on the other hand, did not compare with the two superpowers, and even in relation to Britain, it was considerably weaker. There were thus no illusions of any factual parity with the ‘Big Three’, or any probability that France would bridge the gap in the future.

What is status?

While historically IR literature has paid little attention to the issue of status and prestige, researchers in recent years have begun to analyse the role of factors such as prestige, status, and honour in the behaviour of states. Studies dealing with the desire

³ William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), p. 1.

of states to improve their status,⁴ acquire prestige,⁵ and maintain their honour and dignity within the community of nations⁶ have enriched our understanding of the role of these non-material considerations in policy formation. Unlike political realism, which tends to see prestige and status as aspects of the quest for power, and neo-realism, which ignored these factors almost completely, these studies illuminate an important question that historians and political philosophers like Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Rousseau were well aware of.⁷

Almost every IR study on status portrays the concept in its broad sense: namely, a state's status is a function of its position on the *general* axis of international hierarchy.⁸ This Weberian approach sees status as a distinctive hierarchy in which individuals are ranked (the two other Weberian hierarchies are power and wealth).⁹ It makes status synonymous with prestige: an actor's status is determined by its amount of prestige. The source of prestige lies in different attributes, such as material capabilities, roles, and moral features. These attributes are a means to acquiring prestige and moving up the status axis. Accordingly, a state has high status because it is, for example, a great power or a developed country. Scholars point to several strategies, driven by Social Identity Theory (SIT), that states can employ to improve their overall status in the international system:¹⁰ they can join a higher status (social mobility); they can mobilise resources to improve the group's relative standing (social competition); or they can re-evaluate the meanings of the group's negative features or find new dimensions of superiority (social creativity).¹¹ It is worth noting that although the oft-stated goal of these strategies is to acquire great-power status, the state's true aim is to gaining high status (and through this, self-esteem). The tendency in IR to unite the concept of great-power status with high status in general explains the common practice of broadening the first to include attributes that are seen as prestigious in themselves but that are not intrinsically connected to great powerhood: for example,

⁴ David C. Kang, 'Status and Leadership on the Korean Peninsula', *Orbis*, 54:4 (2010), pp. 546–64; Deborah W. Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, 'Chinese and Russian Responses to US Primacy', *International Security*, 34:4 (2010), pp. 63–95; Shogo Suzuki, 'Seeking "Legitimate" Great Power Status in Post Cold War International Society: China's and Japan's Participation in UNPKO', *International Relations*, 22:1 (2008), pp. 45–63; William C. Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War', *World Politics*, 61:1 (2009), pp. 28–57.

⁵ Daniel Markey, 'Prestige and the Origins of War: Returning to Realism's Roots', *Security Studies*, 8:4 (1999), pp. 126–72; Barry O'Neill, 'Nuclear Weapons and National Prestige', Cowles Foundation Discussion Paper No. 1560 (Yale University, 2006).

⁶ Shashank Joshi, 'Honor in International Relations', Weatherhead Center for International Affairs: Working Paper Series (2008); Richard Wolf, 'Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition', *International Theory*, 3:1 (2011), pp. 105–42.

⁷ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (3rd edn, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962); On the realist approach to the question of prestige in IR, see: Markey, 'Prestige and the Origins of War'.

⁸ See, for example, Gustavo Largas, *International Stratification and Underdeveloped Countries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963); Evan Luard, *Types of International Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1976); Randall L. Schweller, 'Realism and the Present Great Power System: Growth and Positional Conflict over Scarce Resources', in Eithan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastandunu (eds), *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies After the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 28–68.

⁹ Max Weber, 'Class, Status, Party', in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lipset (eds), *Class, Status and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953), pp. 63–75.

¹⁰ Larson and Shevchenko, 'Chinese and Russian Responses'; Wohlforth, 'Unipolarity'; T. J. Volgy, R. Corbetta, K. A. Grant, and R. G. Baird (eds), *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics: Global and Regional Perspectives* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹¹ Larson & Shevchenko, 'Chinese and Russian Responses'.

adopting liberal democratic institutions, embracing capitalism, being part of the West, or displaying respect for human rights.¹²

Alternatively, status is viewed as a social institution: that is, a hierarchical ranking with a social meaning that differentiates it from other rankings within the hierarchy. In O'Neill's words, '[s]tatus suggests a hierarchy with clearly defined positions and an institution that set it up.'¹³ Status is based to some degree on possessing a certain characteristic and could be described as the outcome of the institutionalisation of that characteristic.¹⁴ Examples in IR include military power, economic development, or effective control over territory and populations. This institutionalisation can take various forms and have varying degrees, spanning a scale that from basic accepted terminology (such as 'developed country') to formal status with a high degree of legalisation (such as sovereign state).¹⁵ A great power is an actor with a characteristic (state power) that has undergone a process of institutionalisation. The term 'great power' is not just a description of how much of a certain asset a state holds; it is a description with social meaning that grants identity, demands certain rules of conduct, and bestows certain rights and obligations on the holder. Other kinds of status in international relations are 'developed/developing country', 'hegemony', and 'sovereign state'.

The institutionalisation of different meaningful characteristics creates different hierarchy axes, and the positioning of actors along these axes grants them particular status. A state can be a 'great power', 'medium-sized power', or 'small state'; it can be a 'developed', 'developing', or 'under-developed' state; it can be a 'sovereign state', a 'protectorate', or a 'colony'. These different types of 'hierarchies' coexist in parallel and produce separate status groups (although the hierarchies are also linked). States may have a top position in some hierarchies but a lower one in others. It is the sum of its various statuses that will determine an actor's general standing in the community. These status hierarchies also vary in how status is acquired. Each possesses an independent system of conditions governing upward/downward mobility along the axis. They also each have different degrees of formalisation and different sets of behavioural expectations, rights, and obligations stemming from the actor's position on the axis – in other words, its status. Actors in the top positions in these hierarchies are envied by other actors, not only because their positions are prestigious, but also because they are useful in gaining other goals, such as influence and economic advantages.

Viewing status as a social institution has two main advantages over the general high-status approach. First, it separates status from prestige, so that acquiring the second is not the sole motivation in pursuing the first. Actors may seek great power status not only because it fosters self-esteem, but also because gaining it gives them various other advantages – influence, economic advantage, and even security. Second,

¹² Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, 'Shortcut to Greatness: The New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy', *International Organization*, 57 (Winter 2003), pp. 77–109; Larson and Shevchenko, 'Chinese and Russian Responses'; Erik Ringmar, 'The Recognition Game: Soviet Russia against the West', *Cooperation & Conflict*, 37:2 (2002), pp. 115–36; Suzuki, 'Seeking'.

¹³ Barry O'Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 194.

¹⁴ On the process of institutionalisation see James G. March and John P. Olsen, 'The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Order', *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 943–69.

¹⁵ Many statuses, like 'class status', are 'not specifically laid down in law or contract and are not invariably recognized in practice'. Erving Goffman, 'Symbols of Class Status', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2:4 (1951), pp. 294–304.

it clarifies the question of how status is acquired. SIT theory rightly argues that high status (prestige) can be acquired through various means; nonetheless, being recognised as having a specific institutionalised status (such as great power or sovereign state) is dependent on a number of conditions. As we will see below, these conditions are related both to the intrinsic characteristic of the status and to the social and political constellation surrounding it. Emphasising these conditions enriches our understanding of the paths open to states wishing to acquire great-power status.

Great-power status

Although the notion of great powers is a key concept of international politics, relatively few studies tackle the question of what constitutes a great power.¹⁶ Scholars of the issue are unanimous in assuming that being a great power requires a considerable amount of material power. However, it is difficult to define *a priori* the necessary material attributes for great powerhood. Leopold von Ranke's classic definition of a power that can stand alone against all others has been dismissed as too demanding.¹⁷ Although some, such as Kenneth Walz, have set a list of relevant power components that determine the state's standing,¹⁸ there is no clear answer on to how to measure power or what the threshold is for becoming a great power. The implication is that the question of which states belong to the rank of great power is empirically obvious, and thus does not require a systematic form of evaluation.¹⁹

Yet, it is apparent that discrepancies between a state's material capabilities and its status are frequent.²⁰ A more holistic approach takes into consideration not only capabilities but also the state's interests, goals, and behaviour. It claims that great powerhood is not just a function of a state having certain quantitative and qualitative assets; rather, the state will also play a part in world affairs, exhibit global interests, and behave as a great power (for example, adopting a politic of *grandeur*). However, the state's interests or mode of behaviour are not in themselves good indicators of great powerhood, because these are often adopted by states that do not have such status.

Thus, material capabilities and state behaviour are not empirically or theoretically satisfying in determining which states deserve to be included in the list of great powers. This is why almost all research on this subject acknowledges the subjective dimension behind great powerhood. Hans Morgenthau admits power is to some extent evaluated subjectively and that this is why states may display a façade of power to foster their global status.²¹ Robert Gilpin emphasises the subjective dimension of great-power status further: 'Whereas power refers to the economic, military, and related capabilities of a state, prestige refers primarily to the perceptions of other states with respect to a state's capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise

¹⁶ Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers: World Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), p. 59.

¹⁷ Leopold von Ranke, 'The Great Powers', in Theodore H. von Laue (ed.), *Leopold von Ranke: The Formative Years* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950).

¹⁸ See the discussion in Nick Bisley, *Great Powers in the Changing International Order* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2012), pp. 8–10.

¹⁹ Buzan, *United States*, p. 59.

²⁰ Suzuki, 'Seeking'.

²¹ Morgenthau, *Politics*.

its power.²² Prestige becomes the true coin of power, and it is through other actors' recognition that the state is able to enjoy the benefits of its material superiority. The English School goes even further, giving recognition a paramount place in determining great powerhood.²³ These scholars claim that great-power status is primarily acknowledged through the duties and special rights or privileges bestowed upon the state. With regard to the duties of such states, Bull contends that the function of great powers is to keep international order, and he lists various duties relating to this role: keeping the balance of power, reducing the number of wars, and avoiding and controlling crises.²⁴ According to Löwenheim, great powers are responsible for other members of the community (small countries). Because of their special role, they have a duty to intervene in certain situations, such as international conflicts. They also carry the burden of ridding the community of troublesome subpolitical factors, such as pirates or terrorists.²⁵ Suzuki broadens the definition of the great powers' responsibility even further, suggesting that 'legitimate great powers are expected to uphold the core norms of international society and play an active part in reinforcing them'.²⁶ With regard to special rights or privileges bestowed upon the state, these normally take three different forms: (1) the privileges awarded to them in *collective security institutions* (for example, a permanent seat in the Security Council with veto power); (2) the entitlement to possess a *sphere of influence*;²⁷ and (3) a place and a voice in non-formal exclusive forums within the framework of a *concert*.²⁸

The centrality of community recognition as a condition for being a great power is widely accepted in current IR literature. Recognition, however, does not help us to identify the conditions for being recognised as a great power. A breach still exists between material capabilities and non-material attributes, such as state behaviour on one hand and the willingness of the international community or other great powers to grant recognition on the other. The English School literature does not deal at length with the conditions for according great powers rights. SIT theorists in IR suggest that recognition may be influenced by the openness of the status hierarchy and the values of the community, but this is too general to be a fruitful analytical tool.²⁹

The present article contributes to our understanding of the conditions under which states are recognised as great powers. Its goal is not to provide a theory that takes into account *all* the variables influencing such recognition. Rather, it aims to

²² Gilpin, *War and Change*, p. 31.

²³ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Buzan, *United States*; Jack Donnelly, 'Sovereign Inequalities in Hierarchy in Anarchy: American Power and International Society', *European Journal of International Relations*, 12:2 (2004), pp. 139–70; Kang, 'Status'; Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Suzuki, 'Seeking'; Martin White, *Power Politics* (2nd edn, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

²⁴ Bull, *Anarchical Society*, pp. 205–27.

²⁵ Oded Löwenheim, *Predators and Parasites: Persistent Agents of Transnational Harm and Great Power Authority* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Janice E. Thompson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁶ Suzuki, 'Seeking'.

²⁷ Donnelly, 'Sovereign Inequalities'.

²⁸ Ian Clark, *Reform and Resistance in the International Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 86–9; Robert Jervis, 'From Balance to Concert: A Study of International Security Cooperation', *World Politics*, 38:1 (1985), pp. 58–79; Gerry Simpson, *Great Powers and Outlaw States: Unequal Sovereigns in the International Legal Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁹ Volgy *et al.*, *Major Powers*.

explain a specific and particularly interesting case of recognition: a state that is granted great powers duties and privileges even though it clearly lacks the material capabilities. Such cases are important in developing a comprehensive model on the conditions for gaining status in IR precisely because of their deep breach between social recognition and material bases.

Conceptual framework: Four bases for recognition as great power

Since great power status is not a legal status granted to a nation, recognition of having such status is only evident through the privileges granted, both actively and passively, by the international community. Even if these privileges do not immediately grant full great-power recognition, they tend over time to enhance a nation's standing, and the circumstances under which they were granted fade from memory. In considering the conditions necessary for a country to receive great-power privileges, we must consider first which characteristics of a state will affect the willingness of the international community to accord it such privileges. I identify four characteristics: basic, symbolic, moral, and circumstantial.

I. Basic characteristics

Basic characteristics are directly linked to status. They are in fact the feature around which a status is created – the nucleus of its institutionalisation. In the case of great power, this refers to the bases of the state's power.³⁰ Generally speaking, and despite historical shifts, power has been based on military and economic capabilities, which jointly determine a state's ability to effectively wield large-scale, long-term – and in modern times, long-distance – violence. It is important, however, not to confuse basic characteristics with material assets. In fact, many basic characteristics are intangible, and great-power status is no exception. The key aspect of basic characteristics is that they are directly linked to status in such a way that the state's possession of them is perceived as the *natural* and *legitimate* course of acquiring great-power status. Normally, when a state possesses assets recognised as being directly linked to great-power status, the state will be recognised as a great power. It will be regarded as entitled to one or more of the privileges reserved to that status: a seat in collective security organisation, a sphere of influence, or participation in a concert of powers.

II. Symbolic characteristics

Symbolic characteristics are traits of the actor that are connected or have a direct – sometimes subconscious – affinity with a certain status or its associated privileges. In the case of great-power status, this form of associative affinity can arise, for example, if a non-great power has some of the characteristic resources of a great power (for

³⁰ I do not intend to present a detailed survey of these historical shifts, since they do not affect our present conceptual framework. For a survey on the bases of power across history, see John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1993); Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

example, large territory and population, colonies, nuclear weapons, aircraft carriers, submarines).³¹ Another type of affinity is that created by the state's historical legacy (that is, was the state a major actor in the international system in the not-too-distant past? Is the state holding one or more privileges identified with great powers owing to tradition or historical circumstances?) Such states tend to continue to receive special privileges, regardless of the extent to which circumstances have changed. This underscores the importance of precedence in IR: privileges are seldom taken away once they are granted. The tradition of being a great power is thus an asset in seeking renovation of great power privileges. Finally, certain behaviour patterns exhibited by the nation also create an associative affinity between the nation and great-power status.³² If you want to be recognised as a great power, you should behave like one (that is, showing interest in world affairs, demanding to take part in crises management, displaying independence). It is important to note that in all the above mechanisms, it is clear that the state lacks the material base (military capabilities) that great powerhood demands. But the very fact that an affinity exists may be an asset in certain circumstances, since it marks the state as a 'natural' candidate for sharing the privileges reserved for this status.

III. Moral characteristics

Moral rights may in some cases be an asset in gaining status. For example, rights granted in repayment for supplying certain services, or rights established by tradition or moral prestige, may be relevant in granting privileges connected with a status to an actor that does not have the necessary basic characteristics of that status. In the case of great-power status, the most common example of moral rights are the privileges accorded to state for their participation in war (contribution rights). It is commonly believed that a state that puts great effort and endures great sacrifice in fighting for the common cause is entitled to some recompense in the *post bellum* order. This may take the form of territorial gains, economic advantages, and – commonly – an influential role in the new order.

IV. Circumstantial characteristics

Circumstantial characteristics are traits that an actor, under certain circumstances, can use to acquire the status, or its privileges – through trading with them or using them to provide essential services to other actors. This includes both material and non-material characteristics: for example, natural resources, geographical location, demographic qualities, political affiliation, and membership in an organisation. Being a neighbour of a state perceived as a potential threat to the international order

³¹ States sometimes intentionally look after the weapons of great powers, believing that they will enhance their global or regional standing. Such behaviour is known as *conspicuous consumption*. For an excellent analysis of this phenomenon, see Lilach Gilady, *Conspicuous Waste in International Relations* (Phd thesis, Yale University, 2006). For a survey on the associative characteristics of great powerhood see Barry O'Neill, 'Nuclear Weapons'.

³² Buzan emphasises that a state's behaviour is one of the contributors to recognition as a great power. See Buzan, *United States*.

is an example of a circumstantial characteristic. This characteristic gives the state leverage *vis-à-vis* the leading powers, which see an interest in making that state a pillar of the existing order. During systemic wars, even a small state may 'sell' its participation at a high price, especially if it enjoys characteristics that make its contribution important. After victory is achieved, it is the right of participant states to demand fulfillment of the terms agreed upon. Thus, circumstantial characteristics during the war become moral rights after victory.

Symbolic, moral, and circumstantial characteristics enable small or medium-sized countries to acquire privileges reserved for great power mainly through systemic wars. Historically, systemic wars have decided on the leaders of the new world order – namely, the states that played a key role in the victory. These are generally recognised as having great-power status by virtue of their material capabilities. But such 'coronations' also allow opportunities for hitchhiker states, lacking the material capabilities to justify great-power status, to gain a 'promotion'. The strongest states on each side of the war often required cooperation of weaker states with qualities that give them special value. As architects of the new international order, powerful states can trade privileges in exchange for cooperation in the war or in the postwar era. In the following subsections I outline three 'services' powerful states seek.

I. Rapid, low-cost victory in war

Ensuring victory over the enemy is the most important goal for the warring camps. Creating new alliances can further this goal. In this context, the most attractive states are those with attractive assets: for example, a geographical location that would make it more difficult for the enemy; large numbers of soldiers; and even strong political status with another group of states. Usually, the compliance of the state whose cooperation is sought is not considered essential to the victory, but simply seen as a way of gaining a faster victory at a lower cost to the major allies. On the other hand, the 'service' must be sufficiently important to justify granting privileges to the minor ally in the postwar era.

II. Assistance in safeguarding the postwar order

The strongest allies require extra support to enforce and defend the new order. They realise that the defeated enemy will not like the new order and that the victors will need to establish an effective deterrence, which may require employing coercive measures in the form of occupying forces. Cooperation from other states makes it easier to achieve these goals and eases some of the burden. States with special assets, such as geographical proximity to the defeated enemy or reasonable military potential, will seem particularly appealing candidates for cooperation.

III. Gaining legitimacy for the postwar order

After the war, the leading great powers design an international order convenient to them in which they enjoy a special status. To extend the life of this order, they wish it

to receive as much legitimacy as possible from the international community so that its preservation is not based on strong-arm enforcement. One way to ‘sell’ this order to other states is by having fair rules and principles.³³ However, the postwar order’s legitimacy in the international community is also based on the question of who (or which states) will be responsible for guaranteeing and protecting the order – and as a result will receive special privileges within the order. Agreement on the moral validity of the criterion defining who should have this role is crucial to the legitimacy of the entire order. A state’s central role in the victory is one such moral criterion, but it is not the only one. A second question is whether its partnership in the pyramid apex is perceived as ‘natural’. Tradition, historical precedent, and the representative character of the state are very important here: Did the state have a leadership position in the past? Does it represent a particular region / broad group of countries?

Leading states are thus willing (for instrumental reasons) to involve states that lack great material power in the design and administration of the postwar order, which creates opportunity for those states without material power but with other valuable assets. To hasten victory, consolidate the new order, and give it legitimacy, the major states are willing to bestow a number of privileges on states with the capacity to contribute to those aims. Granting a few privileges for instrumental reasons leads to bestowing additional privileges later, and eventually to the weaker state achieving almost equivalent status to the major states. This creates an illogical discrepancy between states of ostensibly equal power and is the reason for the bitterness felt by the medium powers, such as Poland and Spain after World War I, and Brazil, Australia, and Sweden after World War II. These states could not understand why France and China were in fact entitled to privileges that placed them in a leadership position.

France’s path to becoming a great power

France’s first major, and probably most important, achievement on the way to reviving its status as a great power was the Big Three decision to include it as a fifth permanent member of the future UN Council (At Dumbarton Oaks Conference in August 1944). The decision was not made because France had the characteristics of a great power, either at the time or in the foreseeable future. Rather, France was given this key role due to political interests and technical considerations.

The initial plans on the UN Executive Committee (later the Security Council) did not include France.³⁴ The Americans, who first envisaged the new organisation, intended it to be dominated by four major powers (‘The Four Policemen’): the US, the Soviet Union, Britain, and China. The Soviets and British argued that China was not really a power in terms of capabilities, and therefore was not entitled to the privilege of a permanent seat on the UN Council. They rightly suspected that the US wished to include China because they sought greater power on the Council via their

³³ John G. Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restrain and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³⁴ See, for example, FRUS, Conferences at Washington and Quebec (11 August 1943), p. 694; (14 August 1944), p. 708; FRUS, General (29 December 1943), p. 617.

influence over the Chinese leadership.³⁵ Stalin and Churchill nonetheless agreed to accept China as the fourth power because they realised that increasing the number of permanent Council members would add legitimacy to the great powers' rule as far as the small countries were concerned.³⁶

But there was another more important reason for Britain's willingness to turn a blind eye to China. Britain also sought to promote its own candidate for a permanent council seat, a candidate, like China, whose power did not warrant this position: France. Winston Churchill and British Foreign Minister Eden regarded France's elevation to a great power as a vital British interest, seeing France's incorporation in Europe's new postwar order as a counterweight to Germany and the Soviet Union.³⁷ A further advantage for Britain was that France was a colonial power, guaranteeing Britain an ally in helping to repel any decolonisation initiatives introduced by the other powers.³⁸ Thus, postwar circumstances made promoting France's status an asset in British eyes.

However, Stalin, and especially Roosevelt, vigorously opposed France having a permanent seat on the Council.³⁹ Moreover, in April 1944, France's name was missing from US Secretary of State Cordell Hull's announcement of the powers that would have a permanent seat on the Council.⁴⁰ When de Gaulle visited Washington in July 1944, Roosevelt indicated that he envisaged a world leadership composed of just four powers.⁴¹ But on 18 July 1944, only one month before the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, the Secretary of State decided in his final revisions to the draft proposal to increase the total Council membership from eight to eleven and to include France among the permanent members – as soon as it had an elected government.⁴²

Besides wanting to placate the British, there was an arithmetic logic behind this surprise decision. To legitimise the elite status of the powers sitting on the Council, it made sense for the majority to consist of the non-permanent members. At the

³⁵ Bosco, *Five to Rule Them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 25; Robert C. Hilderband, *Dumbarton Oaks* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 59; Chandra S. Tiwari, *Genesis of the United Nations* (Varanasi: Naivedya Niketan, 1968), p. 259.

³⁶ Stalin and Molotov expressed fears that rule by the Big Three would be opposed by smaller states. See Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 85. The British too were concerned over the legitimacy of great-power privileges, trying on several occasions to reduce them in order to win the minor powers' approval. See Yehuda Z. Blum, 'Proposals for UN Security Reform', *American Journal of International Law*, 99:3 (2005), pp. 632–49.

³⁷ David Reynolds, 'Great Britain: Imperial Diplomacy', in David Reynolds, Warren F. Kimball, and A. O. Chubarian (eds), *Allies at War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 343–5; Jukka Sihvo, 'Pandora's Box: Reviewing the Composition of the UN Security Council in the Light of British and French Experience, 1945–1963', *Nordic Journal of International Law*, 66 (1997), pp. 273–300. Yet, the British had no illusions that France could play even a modest role in keeping Europe's balance of power: 'France had slipped to the status of second-class citizens in the new international polity, as far as London was concerned.' See Reynolds, 'Great Britain', p. 343.

³⁸ Bosco, *Five*, p. 26; Hilderband, *Dumbarton*, p. 40.

³⁹ Zi Zhongyun, 'Big Power Assurance of Peace versus the Principle of Equality among All Nations', in Ernest R. May and Angeliki E. Laiou (eds), *The Dumbarton Oaks Conversations and the United Nations 1944–1994* (Washington: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 49.

⁴⁰ Cordell Hull, *The Memoires of Cordell Hull*, vol. 2. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), p. 1651.

⁴¹ Walter La Feber, 'Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina', *The American Historical Review*, 80:5 (1975), pp. 1277–95.

⁴² FRUS, General (18 July 1944), p. 657; see also Hull, *Memoires*, p. 1674.

same time, it was preferable to limit this majority as much as possible to avoid excessively weakening the influence of the permanent members. The right number seemed to be five permanent members and six non-permanent members. France was seen as an ideal candidate to fill the new position, as it enjoyed a great deal of prestige among the small states, especially in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Thus, moral prestige influenced the choosing of France. Also, being a traditional great power made France a suitable candidate for filling the vacant position, since other states would more easily 'swallow' the choice of France, whereas a newcomer could have led to jealousy. This is an example of the role symbolic characteristics plays in gaining great power's privileges.

Although the reluctant Soviets, in a letter to the US Secretary of State, emphasised 'the necessity for a predominant position in the proposed organization of those great powers who have proved themselves in the present war to have real [military] power',⁴³ they finally gave way against the united Anglo-American front. On 12 August, two weeks before the conference, they too included France on the list of countries eligible for a permanent Council seat,⁴⁴ and on 23 August, this course was approved by Roosevelt. At that meeting, Brazil's candidacy for a permanent seat was also put forward by the Americans.⁴⁵ Brazil, in terms of natural resources, population, and role in the last war, seemed an equal candidate to France; moreover, Brazil represented a geographical region that was not yet represented on the Council. However, the Soviets and British strongly opposed this, having no desire for the number of permanent members to exceed five and fearing that Brazil, like China, would be under American influence.⁴⁶

Thus France won its permanent seat on the Council for political and technical considerations. However, this does not detract from the greatness of its achievement: permanent Security Council membership was the strongest expression *de jure* of a nation's recognition as a great power. It provided France with long-term institutional power, as well as – and of no less importance – an effective means of achieving additional privileges in the short term.

France's second achievement on the way to reviving its status as a great power was its inclusion as a full permanent member of the European Advisory Commission. This forum was set up by the three major Allies at the Moscow Conference of October 1943 to examine problems related to Europe in general, including the terms of surrender, the policy of occupation, and the apparatus for governing. In September 1944, immediately following the establishment of the provisional French government, France demanded a seat on the Council since vital French interests were being debated.⁴⁷ France maintained that it was entitled to this, 'not only on moral grounds but because of France's material contribution to the Allied victory in the past five years'.⁴⁸

The British government agreed, maintaining that France was needed to provide a counterweight in postwar Europe. However, the Americans and Russians were far less enthusiastic about the idea of including another – they believed unnecessary –

⁴³ FRUS, General (24 July 1944), p. 694.

⁴⁴ FRUS, General (12 August 1944), p. 709.

⁴⁵ FRUS, General (24 August 1944), p. 731; see also Hull, *Memoires*, p. 1678.

⁴⁶ FRUS, General (28 August 1944), p. 737.

⁴⁷ Documents diplomatiques français (DDF), Vol. II (14 September 1944), doc. 10.

⁴⁸ DDF, Vol. II (28 September 1944), doc. 29.

member, which would cause additional complications in negotiations. The Soviet representative repeatedly rejected the proposal to put the question on the Commission agenda; the Americans, under great pressure from the British, were only willing to involve France in matters relating to Germany.⁴⁹

In a surprising reversal, however, the Soviet's changed their position in early November, probably due to an understanding between Moscow and Paris reached at this time and to Moscow's hope of gaining a political ally.⁵⁰ The Soviets were now prepared to support France's admission as a full and permanent member of the Commission. Britain feared that if the Americans failed to adopt a similar line immediately, France might break away from the Western democracies and drift toward the east. Since France had already been awarded a permanent seat at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, '[i]t seems to follow therefore that admission of France as an equal and permanent member of European Advisory Commission is a *logical next step along* the road towards her restoration as a great power.'⁵¹ On 8 November, the Americans finally agreed that France should have full and permanent membership on the Commission. Political interests, inter-power rivalry, and some degree of inertia were thus responsible for setting the stage for France's integration on an equal footing in an important forum.

In February 1945, the Big Three gathered for their most exclusive forum – the Yalta Summit Conference – in order to decide on critical questions. France was not invited to Yalta, although it explicitly asked to attend.⁵² There was in fact a consensus between the three main Allies that France need not be present, revealing the lack of any illusion as to France's current or foreseeable power. Nevertheless, although absent, France was treated with surprising generosity: Britain, the US, and the Soviet Union agreed that France was entitled to an independent occupation zone in Germany, which would be taken from the area allotted to America and Britain.⁵³ At Britain's request, Roosevelt introduced the idea to Stalin at the preconference meeting on 4 February. 'For what reason?' wondered Stalin. To which Roosevelt replied, 'Out of kindness.'⁵⁴

Although Churchill managed to convince the Soviets to agree to this plan, Stalin and Roosevelt continued to reject France as a member of the Control Commission for Germany, whose purpose was to administer the occupation zone. Having a seat on it would have enabled France to influence policy on the German occupation, and Churchill and Foreign Minister Eden argued that that France was essential for blocking future German revisionism.⁵⁵ But according to Stalin, France's weakness

⁴⁹ DDF, Vol. II (14 October 1944), doc. 63. The American representative at the EAC was against any kind of French inclusion, but the State Department was concerned about alienating the French government. See FRUS, General (3 October 1944), pp. 14–16, 92–4.

⁵⁰ We can note here France's willingness to accept Soviet requests on the issue of prisoners. But even more significant were the Soviets' hopes of trading this gesture of goodwill for French recognition of the Lublin Committee. In his conversation with French Foreign Minister Bidault, Molotov hinted that the Polish issue was the price the Soviet desired for their support of France in the Commission. See DDF, Vol. II (5 December), doc. 206.

⁵¹ FRUS, General (6 November 1944), pp. 97–8.

⁵² Archives du ministère des affaires étrangères (MAE), file: Y 120 (13 January 1945).

⁵³ France demanded such an occupation zone for itself at the EAC. See DDF, Vol II, (23 November 1944), doc. 182. Although Britain was eager to satisfy this demand and the US accepted it, the Soviets displayed much less enthusiasm.

⁵⁴ Serhii Plokhy, *Yalta: The Price of Peace* (New York: Viking, 2010), p. 107.

⁵⁵ FRUS, Malta and Yalta (5 February 1945), pp. 616–17.

and its minor role in the war deprived it of this right, and further, France's admission could open the door to similar claims from other small countries. Roosevelt agreed. The British switched strategy, arguing that, as they had agreed that France should receive an occupied zone, not involving France in the Control Commission might provoke France's refusal to cooperate with Commission decisions, causing chaos. Moreover, why refuse to include France in the Control Commission when its seat on the EAC had been approved?⁵⁶ In the face of these arguments, Roosevelt retracted his opposition to France's inclusion in the Control Commission.⁵⁷ Stalin had no choice but to agree.⁵⁸ Again, logical consistency and technical considerations dictated that awarding one privilege implied that other privileges would follow.

Although the overall balance was very positive,⁵⁹ as de Gaulle and the French foreign ministry admitted,⁶⁰ the Yalta Conference was considered a challenge to France's status as a great power despite the privileges it received. Its non-participation in the conference and the fact that the privileges were granted as a favour not as right undermined – and in the short term failed to magnify – France's prestige.⁶¹ Some days after the conference, de Gaulle – in a demonstration of France's independence and the fact that its status was no less important than its membership – publicly rejected Roosevelt's invitation to meet in Algeria for a report on the conference. Furthermore, France made its joining the powers invited to the San Francisco Conference contingent on amending the Dumbarton Oaks proposal, which France had not co-authored⁶² – sending another message that it rejected any arrangements reached without it. The remaining four powers rejected this demand, fearing this would open the door to new demands, and France was thus not invited.⁶³ These gestures of independence, while provoking the 'Big Three',⁶⁴ seemed to have done France no harm, and indeed rather helped it. In San Francisco, France was accepted as a full partner in the concert of great powers leading the conference. France's hypersensitivity over its status thus forced the great powers to make repeated goodwill gestures for what the Americans called 'psychological reasons'.⁶⁵ This was another effective instrument for upgrading France's status.

⁵⁶ FRUS, Malta and Yalta (7 February 1945), p. 701.

⁵⁷ FRUS, Malta and Yalta (10 February 1945), pp. 899–900. It is probable that he was also influenced by his state department, which strongly supported France's inclusion. See FRUS, Malta and Yalta (5 January 1945), pp. 293–4; and also John L. Snell, *The Meaning of Yalta: The Big Three Diplomacy and the New Balance of Power* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1956), p. 69.

⁵⁸ According to Harbutt, Stalin's objection was more tactical than real: he wanted to trade France's membership in the commission over Soviet domination of Poland. Fraser J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 292.

⁵⁹ France was also invited to be part of the Declaration of Free Europe and to become one of the sponsors of the San Francisco Conference.

⁶⁰ De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, p. 90; DDF, Vol. II (13 February 1945), doc. 99.

⁶¹ Anton W. Deporte, *De Gaulle's Foreign Policy, 1944–46* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 94.

⁶² On the amendments see MAE, Nations Unies Organisations Internationales (NUOI), file: S1 (13 March 1945). The French refusal did not affect its standing in the conference. France was invited to join the other four powers in their deliberations. France also succeeded in introducing French as one of the official UN languages. For France's accomplishments in the conference see Archive de ministère des affaires étrangères (AMAE), Y 125 (28 Juin 1945); NOUI (27 April 1945).

⁶³ Evan Luard, *A History of the United Nations* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1982), pp. 38–9.

⁶⁴ Roosevelt reacted to De Gaulle's rejection by calling him a 'prima donna'.

⁶⁵ We can identify this tendency in the Allies' discourse. See, for example, FRUS, Malta and Yalta (10 February 1945), p. 908.

The Potsdam Conference, the Big Threes' final conference of the war, convened on July 1945 without France. However, at Potsdam the Soviets were forced to yield on France and China's exclusion from the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) – the last bastion of the Triple Entente. In operational terms, CFM was planned as the most important forum of the postwar order (its first main task was to conclude peace agreements with all the vanquished nations). The foreign ministers would convene every three months to manage the world's affairs. The US and Britain succeeded in overturning the Soviet proposal, now voiced weakly, to preserve the small forum of the Big Three.⁶⁶ France's inclusion in the CFM was the final stamp of its recognition as a great power in the new world order. France gained a seat in all leading forums (UNSC, EAC, CFM), was accorded an occupation zone in Germany, and was allowed to regain control of French Indochina. It was an impressive achievement.

Explaining France's achievement

Despite France's clear lack of entitlement to great-power status in the last stages of World War II, its role in the postwar era was enhanced by the privileges it gained that were closely connected to that status. France's symbolic, moral, and circumstantial characteristics compensated the absence of great power's basic characteristics. As de Gaulle was well aware, the fact of possessing great power privileges was what mattered. He sought to acquire *de facto* recognition as a great power by acquiring great-power privileges for France – that is, membership in elite forums; an equal position in these forums relative to other members; and allocation of occupied zones. Achieving these privileges meant that France would be recognised as a great power regardless of the material capabilities actually at its disposal. De Gaulle thus compensated for France's lack of material capabilities by using the other assets – symbolic, moral, and circumstantial – at his disposal.

France's great-power legacy and moral prestige

De Gaulle kept repeating his mantra to the Big Three that great power was based not only on material strength, but also on moral power. Already in 1941 he spoke about the 'two-thousand years pact between the grandeur of France and the liberty of the world'.⁶⁷ France's glorious past, its place as the cradle of Western civilisation, the democratic heritage it bequeathed to Europe, and its glorious diplomatic tradition all allowed France to transcend its material weaknesses.⁶⁸ De Gaulle and his foreign minister attempted to 'sell' the idea that France's unique vocation and role in the world rested on its glorious past,⁶⁹ and that the world needed the leadership of France no less than France wished to continue leading it. In his visit to Washington in July 1944, he said, 'France not being great was too ridiculous to consider ... It is

⁶⁶ See, for example, FRUS, The Conference of Berlin (17 July 1945), p. 58; (18 July), p. 69.

⁶⁷ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940–44* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 397.

⁶⁸ Jackson, *France*, p. 6; De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, p. 180.

⁶⁹ Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self Esteem: The United States and the Choices of the Cold War in France and Italy, 1941–1958* (West Point: Praeger, 2002), p. 15; De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, pp. 84, 232.

so obvious that there could be no real world organization without France on the first plane.⁷⁰

As we saw, Roosevelt and Stalin were in no hurry to 'buy' this argument. Stalin, who measured everything by weapons, people, and resources, dismissed de Gaulle's emphasis on historical heritage and moral rights. He stated to Roosevelt and Churchill, 'France could be a charming and pleasant country but could not be allowed to play any important role.'⁷¹ And Roosevelt viewed de Gaulle's resort to symbolism and the non-material aspects of power as a direct outcome of his realisation that his country was in decline.⁷² However, despite US and Soviet reluctance to accept the principle that prestige not founded on material assets is part of being a great power, this view did in fact have a positive impact on France's position. Roosevelt and Stalin recognised the great prestige France had among the smaller nations, and thus France's influence over them. This assumption assisted France to gain a permanent seat on the Security Council. When the Big Three made the move to enlarge the Council membership and its representative ability, France, as one of the great historical pillars of international order, seemed an obvious candidate.

France as a victorious power

De Gaulle saw France's active and independent participation in the war as carrying supreme importance. There were two reasons for this. First, he hoped to convince the world that France had never ceased regarding itself as a great power, and therefore had never relinquished its rights as one.⁷³ Second, he assumed, and events proved him right, that mere participation in the war awarded the combatant a right to post-war privileges. Therefore, at an early juncture in the fighting, de Gaulle lobbied for the French to be given an independent role in fighting the Germans and later the Japanese. As he explained: '[w]e had to make our allies see our successes, intervene almost everywhere at once, make ourselves felt, kick up a lot of dust.'⁷⁴

De Gaulle regarded French Resistance support for the Allied invasion of France as important political currency.⁷⁵ He insisted on the participation of independent French troops in the liberation of France and the occupation of Germany.⁷⁶ He fought with the Americans to allow French forces to participate in the conquest of Indochina, as he believed this would ensure France's return to the colony. France's practical contribution to the war effort was not always considerable, and rarely was it necessary.⁷⁷ Even when useful, this was because of special circumstances that developed in a particular arena and not due to French power: the French government deployed only a small force compared to the massive armies of the Big Three,⁷⁸ and

⁷⁰ Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and de Gaulle: Allies in Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), p. 182.

⁷¹ FRUS, Conferences at Cairo and Teheran (28 November 1943), p. 514.

⁷² Brogi, *Question*, p. 30; Deporte, *De Gaulle*, p. 71.

⁷³ Deporte, *De Gaulle*, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Jackson, *France*, p. 386.

⁷⁶ On de Gaulle's efforts to maximise French involvement in military operations, see Andrew Shennan, *De Gaulle* (New York: Longman, 1993), pp. 32–4.

⁷⁷ This is why historians termed France only a 'half-victor'. See Daniel Vernet, 'The Dilemma of French Policy', *International Affairs*, 68:4 (1992), pp. 655–64.

⁷⁸ In the Yalta Conference Stalin said that 'he respected France but that he could not ignore the truth and that at the present moment France only had eight divisions in the war, Yugoslavia twelve and [the Poles] thirteen'. FRUS, Malta and Yalta Conferences (5 February 1945), p. 623.

French troops were equipped entirely with American arms. It was de Gaulle, not the Allies, who kept pushing for arms for the French troops in an effort to increase France's contribution to victory. Despite the increased casualties involved, de Gaulle welcomed the delay in the plans to invade Germany since it gave France a more prominent role in the victory.⁷⁹ Ultimately, France's role during the last months of fighting did provide it with moral grounds for demanding various privileges, as noted above.

A display of independence

De Gaulle believed that a show of independence in dealings with the Big Three would be an effective tool for restoring France's status – pushing them into giving France a place not only next to them, but of complete equality. He therefore acknowledged the importance of symbolic behaviour as an asset for gaining recognition. He transformed this instrument into real policy with two parallel lines of action.

First, he insisted that France could not be bound by any of the Big Three's agreements or understandings that had been reached without involving, or at least consulting, France.⁸⁰ De Gaulle hoped that this threat would deter the other great powers from excluding France from the decision-making, and, as we have seen, was one of the main factors involved in securing the French a seat on the European Advisory Commission and the Control Commission created at Yalta. De Gaulle was even prepared to concede various 'honours' in order to gain agreement on this principle, assuming (which proved justified) that a demonstration of independence would ultimately be more effective for upgrading the status of France.

Second, de Gaulle vigorously stood up for French dignity, even if it annoyed his allies. He considered this a means of ensuring that France would not be an inferior partner in the inter-power concert.⁸¹ He believed that being a great power required acting like a great power, which meant abstaining from anything that might be regarded as an attempt to appease the other side. France's weakness made this course of action all the more vital.⁸² When Anthony Eden told de Gaulle, '[w]e have ten times more trouble with the committee of the free French than with all the other allies put together', de Gaulle replied: 'I have always maintained that France was a very great power.'⁸³ This attitude proved quite effective. More than once the Big Three showed themselves receptive to French 'sensitivities' – as we have seen, for example, in de Gaulle's refusal to attend the San Francisco Conference.

Geo-demographic conditions

One of France's most important circumstantial assets was the belief that even if it did not have strength equal to the other powers, it had several advantages that

⁷⁹ De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, p. 28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 85.

⁸¹ De Gaulle did not want to receive the same treatment as China, which, although present at Dumbarton Oaks, played a marginal role in the talks. See Luard, *History of the United Nations*, p. 32; Tiwari, *Genesis*, p. 237.

⁸² One of de Gaulle's maxims was that the weaker you are the more uncompromising you must be (Vernet, 'Dilemma'), or as Jackson nicely put it, 'De Gaulle bit the hand that fed him [the British] because it was his only way of showing that France still had teeth.' (Jackson, *France*, p. 393).

⁸³ Edgar S. Ferniss, *France: Troubled Ally* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 4–5.

made it vital for ensuring stability and peace on the continent. The Big Three still saw Germany as the main threat to peace in Europe. To neutralise this threat, they needed to hold it in place. Though the Soviet power lay to the east, there would be nothing to contain Germany in the west once the US withdrew from the continent in two years. Britain was unable to shoulder the burden alone. France thus became vital – a country with a relatively large population and a common border with Germany. De Gaulle’s signaling of France’s determination to play a prominent role in preventing a future German ‘revanchism’ made France a valuable ally since the burden of keeping Germany non-belligerent could rest partially on its shoulders. It was not France’s material power that counted here, but rather its geographic proximity to Germany and, more importantly, its willingness to play that role. Because of its importance on the continent, France, in exchange for its cooperation, could insist on a key role in shaping the new order both in Europe and in the world arena. Stalin and Roosevelt were not always willing to pay this price, but Winston Churchill, who had already begun to realise the need to counterbalance not only Germany but the Soviet Union, became the most ardent supporter of rehabilitating France’s status.

The dynamics of precedents

The remarkable improvement in France’s status throughout the period may also be explained by the process. Every privilege that de Gaulle obtained for France by using symbolic and circumstantial assets, became itself an asset and facilitated the acquisition of further privileges. The reason for this was twofold. In terms of the circumstantial element, every privilege that France received – whether a permanent seat on the Security Council, membership on the coordinating committee, or a zone of occupation in Germany – awarded it power relative to other powers. Failure to share more privileges with France might have provoked France to ‘make trouble’ by using the privileges it had already, which happened more than once. The price of not involving France became too costly. In terms of the symbolic element, as France won increasing privileges, it made less sense to withhold the next privilege from it. Here, the tendency to insist on a logical consistency worked to France’s benefit.

The case of Italy: A brief comparative review

The story of France is not a unique case of gaining great power’s status through non-material characteristics. Systemic wars are usually an excellent opportunity for middle powers to upgrade their status. Their success in gaining great-power privileges is determined by the symbolic, moral, and circumstantial characteristics they hold mediated by the diplomatic skills they display. The case of Italy at the end of the World War I is an example of a quest for great-power status that turned out to be less successful than that of France, mainly due to Italy’s lack of symbolic and circumstantial assets and its poor diplomatic performance.

Since its unification, Italy had been considered only a second rank power. The First World War gave the Italians an excellent opportunity to enhance their status and gain long-desired new territories, as the Entente powers were desperate for any

new factor to break the deadlock on the western front. Italy's entrance to the war would open a new front with Austria-Hungary and introduce dozens of fresh army divisions into the battlefield. Great Britain and France were prepared to pay for Italy's cooperation: in the Treaty of London of May 1915 they promised Italy south Tyrol, Trieste, Istria and a good part of the Dalmatian coast. They also agreed to compensate Italy for additional colonial territories they gained after the dissolution of the German and Ottoman empires. Although both states had serious doubts about Italian fighting capacity,⁸⁴ they gave Italy an equal status among them.

As they had feared, Italy's war performance was disastrous. At the battle of Caporetto in October 1917, the Italians suffered a devastating defeat, but one that ironically turned out to be very fortunate for Italy's postwar status, since it led to the creation of a Supreme War Council to better coordinate the joint war strategy. Because the Italian defeat had created a real fear of the total collapse of Italy, it was only natural to include Italy as one of the powers sending a representative to the Council. This relatively unimportant forum was transformed soon after the armistice into the Council of Ten, which had the task of designing the new global order.⁸⁵ Italy's inclusion had nothing to do with its war performances or its actual power, but rather with the fact it was in the right place at the right time.

The five members of the Council of Ten accorded themselves permanent seats in the League of Nation's Council and five representatives in the Plenary Session of the Peace Conference, establishing their new status as the leading powers.⁸⁶ When this group of the Council of Ten had operative difficulties, a smaller unofficial forum was created: the Council of Four – composed of the main allies' heads of state. Italy's Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando, was given a place beside the three leading figures of the war: Wilson, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George. This tiny forum made all the important decisions at the Paris Peace Conference, designing the postwar world map. The Italians used the leverage of their position to promote their territorial wishes. In April 1919, Orlando conditioned the invitation of a German delegation to Paris on the settlement of Italy's own territorial concerns. The Big Three had no choice but to accept putting the Adriatic problem at the top of the council's agenda.

However, Orlando was much less successful in bringing the Big Three to grant Italy its demands. The main obstacle was the lack of consistency between the territories promised to Italy in the Treaty of London and the principle of self-determination. If the treaty were to be carried out, many hundreds of thousands of German and Slavic people would find themselves under Italian rule. Wilson thus vehemently opposed putting the Treaty of London into practice. Great Britain and France chose however to stand by Italy, bound by their word and by the sacrifices Italy had made for the

⁸⁴ Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (London: Constable & Co., 1933), p. 158.

⁸⁵ Each of the five leading powers had two representatives in the Council of Ten. Many, who took an active role in the Paris Peace Conference, acknowledge the fact that the Council of Ten was born spontaneously from the Supreme War Council. See Edward House, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (Boston: H. Mifflin, 1926); Robert Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations: A Personal Narrative* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), pp. 213–22; Nicolson, *Peacemaking*.

⁸⁶ It is of interest to note that the criteria for ranking was not only actual capabilities, but also war contribution and sacrifices. Brazil was accorded three representatives due to its power, while Belgium and Serbia got the same privilege as a compensation for their heroic role in the war. See Lord Hankey, *The Supreme control at the Paris Peace Conference 1919: A Commentary* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), p. 35.

allies' cause.⁸⁷ This is just another example of the impact moral assets may have. But the Italians' stubborn unwillingness to relinquish Fiume, which was not included in Italy under the treaty, provided Great Britain and France with an excuse to withdraw their support. The Italians then made another error in leaving the Council of Four to protest Wilson's appeal to the Italian people over their leaders' heads. In the two weeks the Italians were absent, Great Britain and France distributed the German colonies among themselves leaving very little territory for Italy.⁸⁸

Thus, although Italy was able to gain a formal leading role in the new League of Nations, it was less successful in securing its territorial wishes. Three factors explain its failure. First, Italy unlike France was not seen as an important factor in defending the new order and thus its *circumstantial assets* were fewer. If Austria-Hungary had been kept alive, Italy's control of the Adriatic might have seemed more attractive for the Big Three. Second, as we have seen, Italy destroyed the *moral asset* it had gained when its cooperation was highly evaluated and much desired. Third, Italy was also less equipped than France with regard to its *symbolic assets*. It had never been a true great power and was treated by France and Great Britain as an inferior.⁸⁹ More importantly, Orlando made the mistake of taking almost no part in the discussions not directly concerned with Italian interest.⁹⁰ In this way, he lost for Italy the image of a power with global interests willing to shoulder responsibilities to protect the new world order.

Conclusion

In 1944 everyone expected France to go the way of Holland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and many of the other nations in the historical pantheon of great powers long vanished from the world stage. In terms of capabilities, France was just a small country. In terms of future potential, no one believed it could be more than a mediocre middling power. But like a phoenix, France was able to rise from the ashes and wrestle a place for itself among the great powers by masterfully using its symbolic, moral, and circumstantial assets to gain exclusive privileges.

We can draw three main conclusions from the conceptual framework and the cases presented in this research. First, the article offers new thinking on the conditions for great powerhood, challenging the implicit assumption in the existing literature that material capabilities are a *necessary* condition to being recognised as a great power. Although the realist and the English School approaches concur that capabilities are not a *sufficient* condition for acquiring great power's privileges, these two schools of thought assume that capabilities are at least a necessary condition for gaining them.⁹¹ This study suggests otherwise: If recognition is a function of being granted certain privileges – and if these privileges can be obtained by using symbolic

⁸⁷ Great Britain's and France's consistent loyalty to their promise to Italy is well-reflected in the Council of Four minutes. See *The Deliberation of the Council of Four: Notes of the Official Interpreter, 19th April & 20th April sessions* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁸⁸ Roger W. M. Louise, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies, 1914–1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

⁸⁹ James Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy* (West Point: Praeger, 1997), p. 13; Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, p. 166.

⁹⁰ The minutes of the Council of Four clearly reveals Orlando's minimal participation.

⁹¹ See also Volgy *et al.*, *Major Powers*.

affinities, moral rights, or circumstantial opportunities – then material capabilities cease to be a precondition for great powerhood. Admittedly, such cases are rare, developing mainly in the special circumstances of systemic wars. Yet, the fact remains that states seeking great-power status can sometimes compensate for lack of material capabilities with non-material assets. The study also suggests that *creativity*, as defined by SIT theory, is not the only strategic outlet for states that lack the capabilities to ‘keep up with the Joneses’.⁹² Such a state may watch for opportunities to become useful to states that are privileged to design a new world order, and in this way gain a role far beyond what its actual capabilities deserve.

Second, the study may help to explain why no other power has obtained a permanent seat on the Security Council since World War II. Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil have made great efforts to gain this distinguished privilege.⁹³ All four have impressive economic capabilities, putting them among the leading forces of the world. Although their military capabilities are inferior in comparison to the P5 and only India had developed a military nuclear capacity, they are among the world’s top 11 states with the largest military budget. Indeed, their repeated failure to gain a seat seems to have little to do with their strategic means – in fact, their candidature was supported by the majority of P5, which never questioned their ability to fulfill that role. They failed, rather, because of opposition from one or two P5 members who considered their inclusion a deterrent to their own interests, as well as from small and medium powers, usually neighbours of the candidate, concerned about the regional implications of such a development.⁹⁴ The barrier to gaining great power status, then, lay in particular political considerations. These postwar circumstances highlight the reasons why systemic wars are such a fertile ground for status seekers. First, in wartime, leading powers more prone to leave aside particular interests in order to win the war and build a secure and legitimate order in which they will play a paramount role. Because they all agree that giving the status seeker great-power privileges will help to achieve these goals, they are willing to put aside other considerations. Second, at the end of systemic wars, small and medium powers seem relatively more well-disposed to accept the new world order designed by the victorious powers – or at least they are less equipped to oppose it. They are more prone to overcome regional jealousies and rivalries for the sake of a stable world order. This special constellation, however, is short-lived. As the new world order crystallises, newcomers find it much more difficult to push into the top positions, not only because symbolic, moral, and circumstantial assets have become less relevant, but also because institutional procedures makes it easy for political opponents to block their inclusion.⁹⁵ Ironically, even states that have gained the basic assets (material capabilities) of great-power status are unable to convert them to formal privileges. They must content themselves with membership in new and less formal forums, such as the G8 or G20.

⁹² Larson and Shevchenko, ‘Shortcut to Greatness’.

⁹³ See, for example, Reinhard Drifte, *Japan’s Quest for a Permanent Security Council Seat: A Matter of Pride or Justice?* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 2000); Baldev Rai Nayar and T. V. Paul, *India in the World Order: Searching for Major-Power Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁹⁴ Andrew Hurrell, ‘Hegemony, Liberalism and Global Order: What Space for Would-Be Great Powers?’, *International Affairs*, 82:1 (2006), pp. 1–19.

⁹⁵ Blum, ‘Proposals for UN Security Reform’.

Finally, the study challenges a number of key assumptions of the realist approach in IR, two of which I will address. First, it defies the conception that institutional power in international politics is a mere reflection of the distribution of capabilities. According to this view, great powers hold key positions in international organisations and forums such as the UN, the World Bank, or the G8, and enjoy the privileges derived from these, because of their exceptional capabilities. The study shows that shortcuts to key positions do exist in IR, and therefore institutional power may be gained independently from the distribution of capabilities. Second, from a constructivist point of view, the study emphasises the social dimension of the concept of great power. It stresses the fact that great power status is a social institution that constitutes different identities and bestows rights and duties upon those that hold it. This follows the English School understanding of the concept. But the study goes even further. It emphasises the social dimension behind the attribution of great-power identity to states. If symbolic characteristics and moral rights play a part in gaining recognition as a great power – for example, if having a long legacy as great power or behaving like one are assets in maintaining that status – then we can speak of a state as having an *ascribed* identity of a great power that is detached from the real power it holds at a certain moment in history. This was precisely what de Gaulle meant when he stated that France's special vocation in the world rested on its past greatness. This study suggests that he was not entirely wrong.