

applicability to the current debate on U.S. foreign policy. If we were to follow his suggestion and transform balancing into a routine feature of international politics, it is hard to see why U.S. policymakers should be especially responsive to scholarly assessments that it is occurring. By decoupling the theory from the issue of hegemony, moreover, Art's formulation severs the connection between balancing and any argument about U.S. self-restraint. After all, a U.S. withdrawal from world politics could well create incentives for many states to acquire more capabilities for bargaining, meaning that U.S. restraint might easily generate more rather than less of the "balancing" behavior that Art writes about.

#### CONCLUSION

At issue in this debate is whether it is useful to amend balance of power theory, not whether the United States faces constraints on its power (it does) or whether other states are taking actions that further complicate U.S. foreign policymaking (they are). Our article showed that the soft-balancing amendment is empirically unfounded. Robert Art's analogous effort to stretch the definition of "hard balancing" to encompass recent great-power policies is counterproductive principally because it is inherently unfalsifiable. In the end, there is no escaping that unipolarity is poor terrain for balance of power theory. For any theory to be of any use, it must be capable of being proved wrong at least sometimes. For balance of power theory, now is such a time.

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#### *Lieber and Alexander Reply:*

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Robert Art's letter to the editors in regard to our article "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back."<sup>1</sup> Our article makes three arguments. First, we counter the claim that the United States' grand strategy following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, particularly the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, was so threatening to other major powers that they began to balance against U.S. power.<sup>2</sup> The evidence shows that the United States' nearest rivals

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1. Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 109–139; and Robert J. Art, "Correspondence: Striking the Balance," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Winter 2005/06), pp. 177–185. Additional references to this letter to the editors appear in parentheses in the text.

2. Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 7–45; Robert A. Pape, "The World Pushes Back," *Boston Globe*, March 23, 2003; T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 46–71; Christopher Layne, "America as European Hegemon," *National Interest*, No. 72 (Summer 2003), pp. 17–29; Christopher Layne, "The War on Terrorism and the Balance of Power: The Paradoxes of American Hegemony," in T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the Twenty-first Century* (Stanford, Calif.:

have not responded to its policies by ramping up defense spending, nor have they sought to pool their efforts or resources for counterbalancing. Second, we demonstrate that the new idea of “soft balancing”—that is, behavior that falls short of classic balancing but that somehow seeks to undermine and restrain a dominant power—has little utility for understanding international relations. The concept is difficult to define or operationalize; the behavior typically identified by it seems indistinguishable from normal diplomatic friction; and regardless, the empirical evidence invalidates the specific predictions suggested by those advancing the concept. Third, we propose that the current lack of balancing stems from the fact that the United States is plausibly threatening to only a very limited number of states and terrorist groups. Most other major powers either share the U.S. interest in countering these regimes and groups or do not have a direct stake in the U.S.-led campaign against nuclear proliferators or the war on terrorism. In sum, dire warnings of a global backlash are misplaced because other major powers lack an underlying motivation to compete strategically with the United States under current conditions. The search for balancing will continue.

Robert Art takes issue with several of our arguments, but ultimately his analysis powerfully illustrates the problems that arise when, in the course of that search, traditional definitions of balancing and clear standards for identifying such behavior are relaxed. Since the necessity of using rigorous and consistent criteria for judging balancing was a central theme of our article, it is fitting that our response to Art centers on these problems in his analysis of balancing.

Art asserts that major power balancing against the United States is under way. Although we found little credible evidence of such balancing based on traditional measures, Art contends that “a somewhat broader understanding of balancing behavior is required to appreciate the actions taken by some states against the United States today” (p. 178). Like proponents of soft balancing (with whom Art states he is in general accord), Art relies on vague criteria for detecting balancing in international relations. He so broadens the concept of balancing that it potentially can include state concerns about relative power (pp. 183–184); state behavior not intended to balance another power (p. 180); state behavior aimed at gaining influence, regardless of what a state wishes to influence (p. 181); state pursuit of economic power and leverage (p. 184); and state voting and veto power in international organizations (*ibid.*).

We believe that the label “great power balancing” should be reserved to describe situations where states commit themselves to containing a perceived threat from a dominant state (or coalition). Balancing does not require the fear of an imminent attack, of course, but it must be motivated by some perception of threat and should represent something more concrete than the general desire for influence or the pursuit of power. Stretching the concept of balancing to cover the kinds of behaviors discussed by Art leads to several problems.

First, consider Art’s suggestion that intentions are irrelevant for classifying balancing

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Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 103–126; Stephen M. Walt, “Taming American Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5 (September/October 2005), pp. 105–120; and Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005).

behavior. Art writes, “If China is engaged merely in a general increase in its military capabilities, with no specific adversary in mind, and if these changes result in enhanced Chinese military power in East Asia at the expense of the United States, then China is offsetting and thereby balancing U.S. power, even if it did not explicitly design its efforts to do so” (p. 180).<sup>3</sup> The most basic problem with this intentions-free theory of balancing is that it ignores the debate that we addressed in our article—that is, whether U.S. actions in recent years have made other major powers feel threatened enough to respond with new counterbalancing efforts. It is also unclear whether Art truly believes that intentions do not matter for balancing because, soon after, he explicitly incorporates intentionality: “‘Balancing’ refers to behavior designed to create a better range of outcomes for a state vis-à-vis another state or coalition of states by *adding* to the power assets at its disposal, in an attempt to offset or diminish the advantages enjoyed by that other state or coalition” (pp. 183–184 [emphasis in original]).

This last definition still encompasses too broad a range of behavior to be helpful in explaining the dynamics and incentives for balancing. Such conceptual stretching invites observers to code as “balancing behavior” actions that hardly signify a desire to counter perceived threats and can easily generate analytic inconsistencies.

For example, shifting standards permit observers to identify as balancing an internal defense buildup aimed not at deterring a threat but at mounting one. Art provides an example of this. He believes that China’s current military modernization program constitutes a clear case of internal balancing against the United States. To be sure, we write in our article that “China . . . is engaged in a strategic military buildup” and that it “may well have a long-term strategy to balance U.S. power in the future.”<sup>4</sup> Our argument, however, is that the current growth in Chinese capabilities is primarily driven not by Chinese fears of some new threat, specifically by a fear of attack by an increasingly assertive United States. Instead, China’s buildup is motivated principally by the short-term aim of deterring Taiwan from declaring independence and the medium-term goal of compelling Taiwan’s unification with the mainland. The main concern of China vis-à-vis the United States is with deterring, delaying, or disrupting U.S. intervention in a crisis over the Taiwan Strait.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Art appears to agree: “China’s military modernization is specifically designed both to deter Taiwan from declaring independence and to improve China’s performance should it find itself in a shooting war with the United States over Taiwan” (p. 189). But two sentences later, he asserts that China is upgrading its military capabilities “to defend itself against a U.S. attack” (p. 179). These are two very different possible reasons for China’s buildup, and there are no good analytical reasons for conflating state actions intended to facilitate regional revisionist goals with serious steps to contain or defend against another threatening state. Moreover, in this case empirical evidence can help to decipher Chinese intentions.

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3. In fact, Art believes that China’s actions are directed against the United States, but we use the quotation to illustrate his idea that intentions are not a necessary component of balancing.

4. Lieber and Alexander, “Waiting for Balancing,” pp. 119, 122.

5. See Office of the Secretary of Defense, Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People’s Republic of China, 2005*, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2005/d20050719china.pdf>.

If China had embarked on a serious effort to defend itself against a feared U.S. attack, it would be investing its resources in military capabilities such as a survivable nuclear capability. That Beijing is not doing this and, indeed, is pursuing stable and nonconfrontational relations with Washington suggests that real balancing is not under way. In sum, although we expect that China will eventually balance against the United States if the Chinese economy continues to expand, its behavior has not discernibly shifted in that direction in response to the United States' post-September 11 grand strategy or the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

Shifting standards also permit observers to identify as balancing behavior actions aimed not at deterring intervention but at inviting it. Art contends that an important motive behind the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) is to enhance European military capabilities to better influence the United States. He does not specify what Europeans want to do with this influence, other than to have more agenda-setting power and "more say in the outcomes of deliberations" (pp. 180–183, at p. 181). But his own description of the origins of ESDP, which lie in the wake of Europe's tepid response to the 1999 Kosovo war, indicates that the Europeans worry that the United States "might not be willing to intervene in the next European security crisis" (p. 181).<sup>6</sup> We believe there is something wrong with coding as balancing against the United States actions driven both by the fear of U.S. intervention (as in the case of China over Taiwan) and by fear of U.S. nonintervention (as in this case of Europe and the ESDP).

Indeed, loose standards permit an observer to code as balancing against a certain power action that is clearly not directed at that power. On the one hand, Art apparently agrees with our analysis that the Europeans have not increased their defense spending appreciably since September 11 and the Iraq war. In fact, most West European states have trimmed military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product since 2001. Art believes, however, that we should perceive balancing here in a different form, through external alignment rather than internal military buildups: the Europeans "are working steadily and deliberately to pool and integrate their resources and to fashion a more effective Europe-wide military force" (p. 182). In one sense, this is pooling and integrating of declining relative capabilities. But Art sees plans to deploy a non-NATO European rapid reaction force (ERRF) of 60,000 troops as a nontrivial development, comparing the eventual force size favorably with the roughly 140,000 U.S. troops deployed in Iraq and emphasizing that the force is "not intended merely for humanitarian and rescue missions and peacekeeping, but also for peacemaking (waging war)" (ibid.). If by this we are to imagine the ERRF as the vanguard of a counterweight to U.S. military power, then the United States can rest easy. Although European Union members made an initial commitment in November 2004 to form thirteen small battle groups (each with about 1,500 troops), only one such group was operational in 2005. More important, the ERRF is envisioned as a lightly armed force designed specifically

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6. As Art writes elsewhere, "ESDP was meant to enhance Europe's influence within the NATO alliance; to enable Europe to act in those instances when the United States chose to sit out a European crisis that required military action, instances that the Europeans hoped would be rare; and to appear to do more burden sharing so as to keep U.S. forces in Europe." Robert J. Art, "Europe Hedges Its Security Bets," in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 179–213, at p. 199.

for quick deployment to local-conflict zones (such as the Balkans and Africa) in response to a request from the United Nations.<sup>7</sup> It is in no way designed or directed against U.S. power. Moreover, as Art acknowledges, the force has fallen far short of deployment-time goals and war-waging capabilities. We interpret this as a lack of will and motivation. Although Art offers his own judgment that the broader ESDP “will materialize” and claims (without further discussion or evidence) that tensions in the lead-up to the Iraq war reinforced European motivations to balance the United States (p. 183), we stand by our argument that the French and Dutch decisive rejections of the proposed EU constitution in the spring of 2005 were a major setback for the European common defense vision. The addition of Germany’s indecisive election results in the fall of 2005, following on the heels of its prior cutbacks in participation in several joint European weapons programs, and France’s domestic politics make us even less confident that an effective autonomous European military force will emerge anytime soon.<sup>8</sup>

A distinct problem is posed by Art’s identification of balancing with states’ general concern for relative power (pp. 183–184) and his explicit definition of balancing as “behavior designed to create a better range of outcomes for a state vis-à-vis another state or coalition of states by *adding* to the power assets at its disposal, in an attempt to offset or diminish the advantages enjoyed by that other state or coalition” (ibid. [emphasis in original]). It is a central tenet of realism—and Kenneth Waltz’s essential prediction—that balances of power will tend to form. But equating relative gains concerns with the notion of balancing empties the latter concept of any utility and hinders serious scholarship on this topic. Specifically, Art’s approach leaves us unable to make distinctions in behavior that the term “balancing” was created to make. It would, for example, force us to categorize as balancing virtually any state’s deliberate increase in power, done for any reason whatsoever. Balancing against the United States would now have to include, say, coordination among developing countries to increase their leverage in trade negotiations with developed countries, and not only France’s but also Britain’s acquisition of an independent nuclear deterrent. Indeed, by this standard the United States has been balanced against by most countries in the world virtually since its inception. And it has been balanced against by all of them since its emergence as a superpower in the 1940s, since which time all countries have had one reason or another to “create a better range of outcomes” in their multifaceted dealings with the United States.

When balancing becomes coterminous with a concern for relative power, then it becomes a constant feature of—and not a variable in—international politics, at least from a realist perspective. Not only do we question the analytic utility of this use of the term “balancing,” but we also note that it further muddies the debate over soft balancing. The debate about balancing in the post-Cold War world has turned in large part on

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7. “The EU Battlegroups and the EU Civilian and Military Cell,” European Union fact sheet, February 2005, <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/Battlegroups.pdf>; and *EU Security and Defence: Core Documents, 2004*, Vol. 5, Chaillot paper no. 75 (European Union Institute for Security Studies, February 2005), <http://www.iss-eu.org/chaillot/chai75e.pdf>, pp. 10–11.

8. Craig S. Smith, “Europe’s Direction Is Unclear, Much as Germany’s Is after Vote,” *New York Times*, September 20, 2005.

whether changes in relative power have proved worrisome enough to non-U.S. great powers that these states would be willing to mobilize precious resources or coordinate their efforts to constrain U.S. power. The main position of soft-balancing proponents is that U.S. behavior after the September 11 terrorist attacks induced a change of substantial historical magnitude. Consistent with this, they assert that little balancing against the United States occurred before these attacks, but that since then there has been an important shift to balancing, especially since the lead-up to the Iraq war.

Art says that he is in general accord with proponents of soft-balancing claims. But to be consistent, he cannot agree with either of their core claims. His definition necessarily implies that there has always been balancing against the United States—at least since it has possessed substantial “advantages” in power terms—and that therefore there cannot have been a major shift since the Iraq war. Consistent with this, he asserts that China has been building up its military capabilities since at least the 1980s; he does not even claim that China’s policy has been different since 2003. From this perspective, there can be nothing special about balancing behavior against the United States since 2001 (or 2003) because there was no “before” when the United States was not being balanced against. In sum, if one uses Art’s most explicit definition of balancing, one finds little evidence of resurgent balancing in the wake of September 11 and the Iraq war.

We reiterate our article’s argument that U.S. grand strategy since September 11 has not, so far, inspired other major powers to commit themselves to containing U.S. power, precisely because they do not perceive the United States as a threat. Finding balancing behavior by relaxing definitions harms the debate over this crucial subject instead of advancing it.

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