

Waiting for Balancing

Why the World Is Not Pushing Back

Keir A. Lieber and
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Many scholars and policy analysts predicted the emergence of balancing against the United States following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Since then, however, great power balancing—when states seriously commit themselves to containing a threatening state—has failed to emerge, despite a huge increase in the preponderant power of the United States. More recently, the prospect and then onset of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 generated renewed warnings of an incipient global backlash. Some observers claim that signs of traditional balancing by states—that is, internal defense buildups or external alliance formation—can already be detected. Others suggest that such “hard balancing” may not be occurring. Instead, they argue that the world is witnessing a new phenomenon of “soft balancing,” in which states seek to undermine and restrain U.S. power in ways that fall short of classic measures. But in both versions, many believe that the wait is over and that the world is beginning to push back.

This article argues, in contrast, that both lines of argument are unpersuasive. The past few years have certainly witnessed a surge in resentment and criticism of specific U.S. policies. But great power balancing against the United States has yet to occur, a finding that we maintain offers important insights into states’ perceptions and intentions. The United States’ nearest rivals are not ramping up defense spending to counter U.S. power, nor have these states sought to pool their efforts or resources for counterbalancing. We argue, further, that discussion of soft balancing is much ado about nothing. Defining or operationalizing the concept is difficult; the behavior typically identified by it seems identical to normal diplomatic friction; and, regardless, the evidence does not support specific predictions suggested by those advancing the concept.

Global interactions during and after the Iraq war have been filled with both a great deal of stasis—as many states leave their policies toward the United States fundamentally unchanged—and ironies, such as repeated requests by

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the United States for its allies to substantially boost their military spending and capabilities, requests that so far have gone unfilled. Moreover, U.S. relations with regional powers such as China, Russia, India, and other key states (e.g., Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia) have improved in recent years. These revealing events and trends are underappreciated by many, perhaps most, analyses in search of balancing.

The lack of balancing behavior against the United States constitutes a genuine puzzle for many observers, with serious implications both for theorizing and for U.S. foreign policy making, and so is a puzzle worth explaining. The next section of this article reviews approaches that predict balancing under current conditions. The second section presents evidence that classic forms of balancing are not occurring. The third section argues that claims of soft balancing are unpersuasive because evidence for them is poor, especially because they rely on criteria that cannot effectively distinguish between soft balancing and routine diplomatic friction. These claims are, in that sense, nonfalsifiable. The fourth section proposes that balancing against the United States is not occurring because the post-September 11 grand strategy designed by the George W. Bush administration, despite widespread criticism, poses a threat only to a very limited number of regimes and terrorist groups. As a result, most countries either do not have a direct stake in the “war on terror” or, often, share the U.S. interest in the reduction of threats from rogue states and terrorist groups. This line of argument refocuses analytic attention away from U.S. relations with the entire world as a disaggregated whole and toward a sharp distinction between, on the one hand, U.S. policy toward rogue states and transnational terrorist organizations and, on the other, U.S. relations with other states.

Predictions of Balancing: International Relations Theory and U.S. Foreign Policy

The study of balancing behavior in international relations has deep roots, but it remains fraught with conceptual ambiguities and competing theoretical and empirical claims.¹ Rather than offer a review of the relevant debates, we focus here on a specific set of realist and liberal predictions that states will balance

1. Recent surveys of balance of power theory that also include discussions of contemporary international politics include G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002); John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman, eds., *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2002); and T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

against U.S. power under current conditions. Although realists tend to see great power balancing as an inevitable phenomenon of international politics and liberals generally see it as an avoidable feature of international life, the arguments discussed below share the view that balancing is being provoked by aggressive and imprudent U.S. policies.

Traditional structural realism holds that states motivated by the search for security in an anarchical world will balance against concentrations of power: "States, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them."² According to Kenneth Waltz and other structural realists, the most powerful state will always appear threatening because weaker states can never be certain that it will not use its power to violate their sovereignty or threaten their survival. With the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States was left with a preeminence of power unparalleled in modern history. The criteria for expecting balancing in structural realist terms do not require that U.S. power meet a specific threshold; all that matters is that the United States is the preeminent power in the system, which it was in 1990 and clearly remains today. Consistent with earlier theorizing, prominent realists predicted at the end of the Cold War that other major powers would balance against it.³ A decade later, Waltz identified "balancing tendencies already taking place" and argued that it was only a matter of time before other great powers formed a serious balancing coalition, although that timing is theoretically underdetermined: "Theory enables one to say that a new balance of power will form but not to say how long it will take. . . . In our perspective, the new balance is emerging slowly; in historical perspectives, it will come in the blink of an eye."⁴

John Mearsheimer's work is an important exception to the structural realist prediction of balancing against the United States. He argues that geography—specifically, the two oceans that separate the United States from the world's other great powers—prevents the United States from projecting enough military power to pursue global hegemony. Given this lack of capability, the

2. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 127.

3. Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 44–79; and Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5–51. John J. Mearsheimer's widely cited article about a return to multipolarity (and the dangers that would follow) was predicated on the assumption that the United States would join the Soviet Union in withdrawing its forces from Europe. See Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 5–56.

4. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 27, 30.

United States must be content with regional hegemony. This means that the United States is essentially a status quo power that poses little danger to the survival or sovereignty of other great powers. Thus, according to Mearsheimer, no balancing coalition against the United States is likely to form. (For similar reasons, history's previous "offshore balancer"—Great Britain—did not provoke a balancing coalition even at the height of its power in the nineteenth century.)⁵

A distinctive strand of realist theory holds that states balance against perceived threats, not just against raw power. Stephen Walt argues that perceived threat depends on a combination of aggregate power, geography, technology, intentions, and foreign policy behavior.⁶ With this theoretical modification, Walt and others seek to explain why the United States provoked less balancing in the last half century than its sheer power would suggest.⁷ Although geography is important, as in Mearsheimer's explanation above, balance of threat theorists find the key to the absence of real balancing in the United States' distinct history of comparatively benign intentions and behavior, especially the absence of attempts to conquer or dominate foreign lands. As Robert Pape argues, "The long ascendancy of the United States has been a remarkable exception" to the balance of power prediction, and the main reason for this is its "high reputation for non-aggressive intentions."⁸ Given the United States' long-standing power advantages, this has been partly the result of self-restraint, which Walt believes can continue to "keep the rest of the world 'off-balance' and minimize the opposition that the United States will face in the future."⁹

Now, however, many balance of threat realists predict balancing based on what amounts to an empirical claim: that U.S. behavior since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks is sufficiently threatening to others that it is accelerating the process of balancing. For these balance of threat theorists, U.S. policies are

5. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001). See also Jack S. Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance Against and When?" in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 29–51.

6. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

7. The United States was overwhelmingly the world's most dominant country immediately after World War II, surpassed the Soviet Union by a considerable margin in the primary indicators of national power throughout the Cold War, and was left as the sole superpower after the Cold War.

8. Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World," paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, September 2–5, 2004, pp. 11, 13.

9. Stephen M. Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off-Balance': Self-Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy," in Ikenberry, *America Unrivaled*, p. 153.

undermining the reputation of the United States for benevolence. Walt compares the position of the United States today with that of imperial Germany in the decades leading up to 1914, when that country's expansionism eventually caused its own encirclement. According to Walt, "What we are witnessing is the progressive self-isolation of the United States."¹⁰ Pape argues that President George W. "Bush[s] strategy of aggressive unilateralism is changing America's long-enjoyed reputation for benign intent and giving other major powers reason to fear America's power." In particular, adopting and implementing a preventive war strategy is "encouraging other countries to form counterweights to U.S. power."¹¹ Pape essentially suggests that the Bush administration's adoption of the preventive war doctrine in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks converted the United States from a status quo power into a revisionist one. He also suggests that by invading Iraq, the United States has become an "'on-shore' hegemon in a major region of the world, abandoning the strategy of off-shore balancing," and that it is perceived accordingly by others.¹²

Traditional structural realists agree that U.S. actions are hastening the balancing process. They argue that the United States is succumbing to the "hegemon's temptation" to take on extremely ambitious goals, use military force unselectively and excessively, overextend its power abroad, and generally reject self-restraint in its foreign policy—all of which invariably generate counterbalancing. Christopher Layne's stark portrayal is worth citing at length: "Many throughout the world now have the impression that the United States is acting as an aggressive hegemon engaged in the naked aggrandizement of its own power. The notion that the United States is a 'benevolent' hegemon has been shredded. America is inviting the same fate as that which has overtaken previous contenders for hegemony."¹³ The Bush administration's decision to go to war against Iraq is singled out as a catalytic event: "In coming years, the Iraq War may come to be seen as a pivotal geopolitical event that

10. "Opposing War Is Not 'Appeasement': An Interview with Stephen Walt," March 18, 2003, <http://www.tompaine.com/feature.cfm/ID/7431>.

11. Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World," pp. 3, 14, 22; and Robert A. Pape, "The World Pushes Back," *Boston Globe*, March 23, 2003.

12. Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing: How the World Will Respond to U.S. Preventive War on Iraq," article posted on the Oak Park Coalition for Truth & Justice website, January 20, 2003, <http://www.opctj.org/articles/robert-a-pape-university-of-chicago-02-21-2003-004443.html>; and Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World," p. 24.

13. Christopher Layne, "America as European Hegemon," *National Interest*, No. 72 (Summer 2003), p. 28. See also Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," p. 29.

heralded the beginning of serious counter-hegemonic balancing against the United States.”¹⁴

Liberal theorists typically argue that democracy, economic interdependence, and international institutions largely obviate the need for states to engage in balancing behavior.¹⁵ Under current conditions, however, many liberals have joined these realists in predicting balancing against the United States. These liberal theorists share the view that U.S. policymakers have violated a grand bargain of sorts—one that reduced incentives to balance against preponderant U.S. power. In the most detailed account of this view, John Ikenberry argues that hegemonic power does not automatically trigger balancing because it can take a more benevolent form. Specifically, the United States has restrained its own power through a web of binding alliances and multilateral commitments infused with trust, mutual consent, and reciprocity. This U.S. willingness to place restraints on its hegemonic power, combined with the open nature of its liberal democracy, reassured weaker states that their interests could be protected and served within a U.S.-led international order, which in turn kept their expected value of balancing against the United States low. This arrangement allowed the United States to project its influence and pursue its interests with only modest restraints on its freedom of action.¹⁶ Invoking a similar empirical claim, Ikenberry argues that U.S. policies after September 11 shattered this order: “In the past two years, a set of hard-line, fundamentalist ideas have taken Washington by storm” and have produced a grand strategy equivalent to “a geostrategic wrecking ball that will destroy America’s own half-century-old international architecture.”¹⁷ This has greatly increased the incentives for weaker states to balance.¹⁸

These claims and predictions rest on diverse theoretical models with different underlying assumptions, and one should not conclude that all realist or liberal theories now expect balancing. But there is unusual convergence among these approaches on the belief that other countries have begun to en-

14. Christopher Layne, “The War on Terrorism and the Balance of Power: The Paradoxes of American Hegemony,” in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 103–126 at p. 119.

15. See, for example, John M. Owen IV, “Transnational Liberalism and American Primacy,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2001/2002), pp. 117–152; G. John Ikenberry, “Democracy, Institutions, and American Restraint,” in Ikenberry, *America Unrivaled*, pp. 213–238; and T.V. Paul, “Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance,” in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 1–25 at pp. 9–11.

16. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

17. G. John Ikenberry, “The End of the Neo-Conservative Moment,” *Survival*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring 2004), p. 7.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 20; and G. John Ikenberry, “Introduction,” in Ikenberry, *America Unrivaled*, p. 10.

gage in balancing behavior against the United States, whether because of the U.S. relative power advantage, the nature of its foreign policies (at least as those policies are characterized), or both.

Evidence of a Lack of Hard Balancing

The empirical evidence consistently disappoints expectations of traditional forms of balancing against the United States. This section first justifies a focus on this evidence and then examines it.

JUSTIFYING A FOCUS ON HARD BALANCING

Some international relations theorists appear to have concluded that measurements of traditional balancing behavior since September 11 are irrelevant to assessing the strength of impulses to balance the United States. They have done so because they assume that other states cannot compete militarily with the United States. Therefore, they conclude, any absence of hard balancing that may (well) be detected would simply reflect structural limits on these states' capabilities, and does not constitute meaningful evidence about their intentions. Evidence of such an absence can thus be dismissed as analytically meaningless to this topic. We dispute this and argue instead that evidence concerning traditional balancing behavior is analytically significant.

William Wohlforth argues that the United States enjoys such a large margin of superiority over every other state in all the important dimensions of power (military, economic, technological, geopolitical, etc.) that an extensive counterbalancing coalition is infeasible, both because of the sheer size of the U.S. military effort and the huge coordination issues involved in putting together such a counterbalancing coalition.¹⁹ This widely cited argument is invoked by theorists of soft balancing to explain, and explain away, the absence of traditional balancing, at least for now.²⁰

Wohlforth's main conclusion on this matter is unconvincing empirically. As a result, the claim that the absence of hard balancing does not reveal intentions is unconvincing analytically. There is certainly a steep disparity in worldwide

19. Additionally, "Efforts to produce a counterbalance globally will generate powerful countervailing action locally," thus undermining the effort. William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), p. 28.

20. See, for example, Stephen M. Walt, "Can the United States Be Balanced? If So, How?" paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, September 2-5, 2004, p. 14; and Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World," pp. 2-3. Both Walt and Pape stress the coordination aspects in particular.

levels of defense spending. Those levels fell almost everywhere after the end of the Cold War, but they fell more steeply and more durably in other parts of the world, which resulted in a widening U.S. lead in military capabilities. Even Europe's sophisticated militaries lack truly independent command, intelligence, surveillance, and logistical capabilities. China, Russia, and others are even less able to match the United States militarily. In 2005, for example, the United States may well represent 50 percent of defense spending in the entire world.

Although this configuration of spending might appear to be a structural fact in its own right, it is less the result of rigid constraints than of much more malleable budgetary choices. Of course, it would be neither cheap nor easy to balance against a country as powerful as the United States. Observers might point out that the United States was able to project enough power to help defeat Wilhelmine Germany, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan; it managed to contain the Soviet Union in Europe for half a century; and most recently it toppled two governments on the other side of the world in a matter of weeks (the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Baathist regime in Iraq). But it is easy to exaggerate the extent and effectiveness of American power, as the ongoing effort to pacify Iraq suggests. The limits of U.S. military power might be showcased if one imagines the tremendous difficulties the United States would face in trying to conquer and control, say, China. Whether considered by population, economic power, or military strength, various combinations of Britain, China, France, Germany, Japan, and Russia—to name only a relatively small number of major powers—would have more than enough actual and latent power to check the United States. These powers have substantial latent capabilities for balancing that they are unambiguously failing to mobilize.

Consider, for example, Europe alone. Although the military resources of the twenty-five members of the European Union are often depicted as being vastly overshadowed by those of the United States, these states have more troops under arms than the United States: 1.86 million compared with 1.43 million.²¹ The EU countries also have the organizational and technical skills to excel at command, control, and surveillance. They have the know-how to develop a wide range of high-technology weapons. And they have the money to pay for them,

21. Of this, the fifteen countries that were EU members before May 2004 have an estimated 1.55 million active military personnel. See International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance, 2003–2004* (London: IISS, 2003), pp. 18, 35–79.

with a total gross domestic product (GDP) greater than that of the United States: more than \$12.5 trillion to the United States' \$11.7 trillion in 2004.²²

It is true that the Europeans would have to pool resources and overcome all the traditional problems of coordination and collective action common to counterbalancing coalitions to compete with the United States strategically. Even more problematic are tendencies to free ride or pass the buck inside balancing coalitions.²³ But numerous alliances have nonetheless formed, and the EU members would be a logical starting point because they have the lowest barriers to collective action of perhaps any set of states in history. Just as important, as discussed below, the argument about coordination barriers seems ill suited to the contemporary context because the other major powers are apparently not even engaged in negotiations concerning the formation of a balancing coalition. Alternatively, dynamics of intraregional competition might forestall global balancing. But this, too, is hardly a rigid obstacle in the face of a commonly perceived threat. Certainly Napoleon, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin after World War II all induced strange bedfellows to form alliances and permitted several regional powers to mobilize without alarming their neighbors.

That said, even if resources can be linked, there are typically limits to how much internal balancing can be undertaken by any set of powers, even wealthy ones, given that they usually already devote a significant proportion of their resources to national security. But historical trends only highlight the degree to which current spending levels are the result of choices rather than structural constraints. The level of defense spending that contemporary economies are broadly capable of sustaining can be assessed by comparing current spending to the military expenditures that West European NATO members—a category of countries that substantively overlaps with the EU—maintained less than twenty years ago, during the Cold War. In a number of cases, these states are spending on defense at rates half (or less than half) those of the mid-1980s (see Table 1).

Consider how a resumption of earlier spending levels would affect global military expenditures today. In 2003 the United States spent approximately \$383 billion on defense. This was nearly twice the \$190 billion spent by West

22. These figures are the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's estimates for 2004. See <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/48/4/33727936.pdf>. Of this, the pre-May 2004 EU members had a combined 2004 GDP of approximately \$12 trillion. EU per capita income, of course, is somewhat lower than in the United States, and dollar-denominated comparisons shift with currency fluctuations.

23. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 155–162.

Table 1. Military Spending as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, European NATO Members, 1985 and 2002

Country	1985	2002
Belgium	2.9	1.3
Denmark	2.1	1.6
France	3.9	2.5
Germany	3.2	1.5
Greece	7.0	4.4
Italy	2.2	1.9
Luxembourg	1.0	0.9
Netherlands	2.9	1.6
Norway	2.8	1.9
Portugal	3.2	2.3
Spain	2.4	1.2
United Kingdom	5.2	2.4

SOURCE: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2003–2004* (London: IISS, 2003), p. 335.

European NATO members. But if these same European countries had resumed spending at the rates they successfully sustained in 1985, they would have spent an additional \$150 billion on defense in 2003. In that event, U.S. spending would have exceeded theirs by little more than 10 percent, well within historic ranges of international military competition.²⁴ Moreover, this underlying capacity to fully, if not immediately, match the United States is further enhanced if one considers the latent capabilities of two or three other states, especially China's manpower, Japan's wealth and technology, and Russia's extensive arms production capabilities.

In sum, it appears that if there were a will to balance the United States, there would be a way. And if traditional balancing is in fact an option available to contemporary great powers, then whether or not they are even beginning to exercise that option is of great analytic interest when one attempts to measure the current strength of impulses to balance the United States.

International relations theorists have developed commonly accepted standards for measuring traditional balancing behavior. Fairly strictly defined and relatively verifiable criteria such as these have great value because they reveal

24. This estimate is calculated from individual country data on military expenditure in local currency available from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, http://www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_database1.html; GDP for eurozone countries from Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.eu>; and GDP for non-eurozone countries from UN Statistics Division, "National Accounts Main Aggregates Database," <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/Introduction.asp>.

behavior—costly behavior signifying actual intent—that can be distinguished from the diplomatic friction that routinely occurs between almost all countries, even allies.

We use conventional measurements for traditional balancing. The most important and widely used criteria concern internal and external balancing and the establishment of diplomatic “red lines.” Internal balancing occurs when states invest heavily in defense by transforming their latent power (i.e., economic, technological, social, and natural resources) into military capabilities. External balancing occurs when states seek to form military alliances against the predominant power.²⁵ Diplomatic red lines send clear signals to the aggressor that states are willing to take costly actions to check the dominant power if it does not respect certain boundaries of behavior.²⁶ Only the last of these measurements involves the emergence of open confrontation, much less the outbreak of hostilities. The other two concern instead states’ investments in coercive resources and the pooling of such resources.

EXAMINING EVIDENCE OF INTERNAL BALANCING

Since the end of the Cold War, no major power in the international system appears to be engaged in internal balancing against the United States, with the possible exception of China. Such balancing would be marked by meaningfully increased defense spending, the implementation of conscription or other means of enlarging the ranks of people under arms, or substantially expanded investment in military research and technology.

To start, consider the region best positioned economically for balancing: Europe. Estimates of military spending as a share of the overall economy vary because they rely on legitimately disputable methods of calculation. But recent estimates show that spending by most EU members fell after the Cold War to rates one-half (or less) the U.S. rate. And unlike in the United States, spending has not risen appreciably since September 11 and the lead-up to the Iraq war, and in many cases it has continued to fall (see Table 2).

In the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Greece, and Sweden, military spending has been substantially reduced even since September 11 and the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. Several recent spending upticks are modest and predomi-

25. Waltz sums up the basic choice: “As nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power. Faced with unbalanced power, some states try to increase their own strength or they ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance.” Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” p. 28. On internal and external balancing more generally, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 118.

26. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 156–157.

Table 2. Military Spending as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, 2000–03

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003
United States	3.10	3.12	3.44	4.11
Austria	0.84	0.78	0.76	0.78
Belgium	1.40	1.34	1.29	1.29
Denmark	1.51	1.59	1.56	1.57
France	2.58	2.52	2.53	2.58
Germany	1.51	1.48	1.48	1.45
Greece	4.87	4.57	4.31	4.14
Italy	2.09	2.02	2.06	1.88
Netherlands	1.61	1.62	1.61	1.60
Portugal	2.07	2.11	2.14	2.14
Spain	1.25	1.22	1.21	1.18
Sweden	2.03	1.91	1.84	1.75
United Kingdom	2.47	2.46	2.40	2.37

NOTE: Percentages were calculated with individual country data on military expenditure in local currency at current prices taken from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, http://www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_database1.html; and on gross domestic product at current prices from UN Statistics Division, "National Accounts Main Aggregates Database," <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/Introduction.asp>.

nantly designed to address in-country terrorism. Long-standing EU plans to deploy a non-NATO rapid reaction force of 60,000 troops do not undermine this analysis. This light force is designed for quick deployment to local-conflict zones such as the Balkans and Africa; it is neither designed nor suited for continental defense against a strategic competitor.

In April 2003 Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and Germany (the key player in any potential European counterweight) announced an increase in cooperation in both military spending and coordination. But since then, Germany's government has instead trimmed its already modest spending, and in 2003–04 cut its military acquisitions and participation in several joint European weapons programs. Germany is now spending GDP on the military at a rate of under 1.5 percent (a rate that is declining), compared with around 4 percent by the United States in 2003, a rate that is growing.

Alternative explanations for this spending pattern only undercut the logical basis of balancing predictions. For example, might European defense spending be constrained by sizable welfare-state commitments and by budget deficit limits related to the common European currency? Both of these constraints are self-imposed and can easily be construed to reveal stronger commitments to entitlement programs and to technical aspects of a common currency than to the priority of generating defenses against a supposed potential strategic

threat.²⁷ This contrasts sharply with the United States, which, having unambiguously perceived a serious threat, has carried out a formidable military buildup since September 11, even at the expense of growing budget deficits.

Some analysts also argue that any European buildup is hampered deliberately by the United States, which encourages divisions among even traditional allies and seeks to keep their militaries “deformed” as a means of thwarting efforts to form a balancing coalition. For example, Layne asserts that the United States is “actively discouraging Europe from either collective, or national, efforts to acquire the full-spectrum of advanced military capabilities . . . [and] is engaged in a game of divide and rule in a bid to thwart the E.U.’s political unification process.”²⁸ But the fact remains that the United States could not prohibit Europeans or others from developing those capabilities if those countries faced strong enough incentives to balance.

Regions other than Europe do not clearly diverge from this pattern. Defense spending as a share of GDP has on the whole fallen since the end of the Cold War in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Central and South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa, and it has remained broadly steady in most cases in the past several years.²⁹ Russia has slightly increased its share of defense spending since 2001 (see Table 3), but this has nothing to do with an attempt to counterbalance the United States.³⁰ Instead, the salient factors are the continuing campaign to subdue the insurgency in Chechnya and a dire need to forestall further military decline (made possible by a slightly improved overall budgetary situation). That Russians are unwilling to incur significant costs to counter U.S. power is all the more telling given the expansion of NATO to Russia’s frontiers and the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty and deploy missile defenses.

China, on the other hand, is engaged in a strategic military buildup. Although military expenditures are notoriously difficult to calculate for that country, the best estimates suggest that China has slightly increased its share of defense spending in recent years (see Table 3). This buildup, however, has been going on for decades, that is, long before September 11 and the Bush administration’s subsequent strategic response.³¹ Moreover, the growth in Chi-

27. Moreover, neither constraint applies to Japan, which enjoys the second-largest economy in the world, has been a relatively modest welfare state, and since the mid-1990s has had extensive experience with budget deficits—and yet has not raised its military expenditures in recent years.

28. Layne, “America as European Hegemon,” p. 25.

29. IISS, *The Military Balance, 2004–2005* (London: IISS, 2004).

30. See William C. Wohlforth, “Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia,” in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 214–238.

31. Measuring rates of military spending as a percentage of GDP as an indication of military

Table 3. Military Spending as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, Selected Regional Powers, 2000–03

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003
Brazil	1.27	1.45	1.56	1.52
China	2.04	2.24	2.40	2.35
India	2.33	2.31	2.25	2.29
Japan	0.96	0.98	0.99	0.99
Russia	3.73	4.09	4.06	4.30

NOTE: Percentages were calculated with individual country data on military expenditure in local currency at current prices taken from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, http://www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_database1.html; and on gross domestic product at current prices from UN Statistics Division, "National Accounts Main Aggregates Database," <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/Introduction.asp>.

nese conventional capabilities is primarily driven by the Taiwan problem: in the short term, China needs to maintain the status quo and prevent Taiwan from acquiring the relative power necessary to achieve full independence; in the long term, China seeks unification of Taiwan with the mainland. China clearly would like to enhance its relative power vis-à-vis the United States and may well have a long-term strategy to balance U.S. power in the future.³² But China's defense buildup is not new, nor is it as ambitious and assertive as it should be if the United States posed a direct threat that required internal balancing. (For example, the Chinese strategic nuclear modernization program is often mentioned in the course of discussions of Chinese balancing behavior, but the Chinese arsenal is about the same size as it was a decade ago.³³ Moreover, even if China is able to deploy new missiles in the next few years, it is not clear whether it will possess a survivable nuclear retaliatory capability vis-à-

buildups—which is the conventional practice and a good one in the case of stable economies—can be deceptive for countries with fast-growing economies, such as China. Maintaining a steady share of GDP on military spending during a period in which GDP is rapidly growing essentially means that a state is engaging in a military buildup. Indeed, China has not greatly increased its military spending as a share of GDP, but it is conventional wisdom that the Chinese are modernizing and expanding their military forces. The point does not, however, undermine the fact that the Chinese buildup predates the Bush administration's post-September 11 grand strategy.

32. See Robert S. Ross, "Bipolarity and Balancing in East Asia," in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 267–304. Although Ross believes the balance of power in East Asia will remain stable for a long time, largely because the United States is expanding its degree of military superiority, he characterizes Chinese behavior as internal (and external) balancing against the United States.

33. Jeffrey Lewis, "The Ambiguous Arsenal," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (May/June 2005), pp. 52–59.

vis the United States.) Thus, China's defense buildup is not a persuasive indicator of internal balancing against the post-September 11 United States specifically.

In sum, rather than the United States' post-September 11 policies inducing a noticeable shift in the military expenditures of other countries, the latter's spending patterns are instead characterized by a striking degree of continuity before and after this supposed pivot point in U.S. grand strategy.

ASSESSING EVIDENCE OF EXTERNAL BALANCING

A similar pattern of continuity can be seen in the absence of new alliances. Using widely accepted criteria, experts agree that external balancing against the United States would be marked by the formation of alliances (including lesser defense agreements), discussions concerning the formation of such alliances or, at the least, discussions about shared interests in defense cooperation against the United States.

Instead of September 11 serving as a pivot point, there is little visible change in the alliance patterns of the late 1990s—even with the presence of what might be called an “alliance facilitator” in President Jacques Chirac's France. At least for now, diplomatic resistance to U.S. actions is strictly at the level of maneuvering and talk, indistinguishable from the friction routine to virtually all periods and countries, even allies. Resources have not been transferred from some great powers to others. And the United States' core alliances, NATO and the U.S.-Japan alliance, have both been reaffirmed.

Walt recognized in 2002 that Russian-Chinese relations fell “well short of formal defense arrangements” and hence did not constitute external balancing; this continues to be the case.³⁴ Russian President Vladimir Putin's expressed hope that India becomes a great power to help re-create a multipolar world hardly rises to the standard of external balancing. Certainly few would suggest that the Indo-Russian “strategic pact” of 2000, the Sino-Russian “friendship treaty” of 2001, or media speculation of a Moscow-Beijing-Delhi “strategic triangle” in 2002 and 2003 are as consequential as, say, the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894 or even the less-formal U.S.-Chinese balancing against the Soviet Union in the 1970s.³⁵ In 2002–03 Russia, China, and several EU members broadly coordinated diplomatically against granting

34. Walt, “Keeping the World ‘Off-Balance,’” p. 126.

35. Arguing that a “strategic triangle” between Russia, China, and India is unlikely, in large part because U.S. ties with each of these countries are stronger than any two of them have between themselves, is Harsh V. Pant, “The Moscow-Beijing-Delhi ‘Strategic Triangle’: An Idea Whose Time May Never Come,” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (September 2004), pp. 311–328.

international-institutional approval to the 2003 Iraq invasion, but there is no evidence that this extended at the time, or has extended since, to anything beyond that single goal. The EU's common defense policy is barely more developed than it was before 2001. And although survey data suggest that many Europeans would like to see the EU become a superpower comparable to the United States, most are unwilling to boost military spending to accomplish that goal.³⁶ Even the institutional path toward Europe becoming a plausible counterweight to the United States appears to have suffered a major setback by the decisive rejection of the proposed EU constitution in referenda in France and the Netherlands in the spring of 2005.

Even states with predominantly Muslim populations do not reveal incipient enhanced coordination against the United States. Regional states such as Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia cooperated with the Iraq invasion; more have sought to help stabilize postwar Iraq; and key Muslim countries are cooperating with the United States in the war against Islamist terrorists.

Even the loosest criteria for external balancing are not being met. For the moment at least, no countries are known even to be discussing and debating how burdens could or should be distributed in any arrangement for coordinating defenses against or confronting the United States. For this reason, the argument (discussed further below) that external balancing may be absent because it is by nature slow and inefficient and fraught with buck-passing behavior is not persuasive. No friction exists in negotiations over who should lead or bear the costs in a coalition because no such discussions appear to exist.

EVALUATING EVIDENCE OF DIPLOMATIC RED LINES

A final possible indicator of traditional balancing behavior would be states sending "clear signals to the aggressor . . . that they are firmly committed to maintaining the balance of power, even if it means going to war."³⁷ This form of balancing has clearly been absent. There has been extensive criticism of specific post-September 11 U.S. policies, especially criticism of the invasion of Iraq as unnecessary and unwise. No states or collections of states, however, issued an ultimatum in the matter—drawing a line in the Persian Gulf sand and warning the United States not to cross it—at the risk that confrontational steps would be taken in response.

Perhaps a more generous version of the red-lines criterion would see evi-

36. German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo, *Transatlantic Trends, 2004*, <http://www.transatlantictrends.org>.

37. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 156.

dence of balancing in a consistent pattern of diplomatic resistance, not conciliation. A recent spate of commentary about soft balancing does just this.

Evidence of a Lack of Soft Balancing

In the absence of evidence of traditional balancing, some scholars have advanced the concept of soft balancing. Instead of overtly challenging U.S. power, which might be too costly or unappealing, states are said to be able to undertake a host of lesser actions as a way of constraining and undermining it. The central claim is that the unilateralist and provocative behavior of the United States is generating unprecedented resentment that will make life difficult for Washington and may eventually evolve into traditional hard balancing.³⁸ As Walt writes, "States may not want to attract the 'focused enmity' of the United States, but they may be eager to limit its freedom of action, complicate its diplomacy, sap its strength and resolve, maximize their own autonomy and reaffirm their own rights, and generally make the United States work harder to achieve its objectives."³⁹ For Josef Joffe, "'Soft balancing' against Mr. Big has already set in."⁴⁰ Pape proclaims that "the early stages of soft balancing against American power have already started," and argues that "unless the United States radically changes course, the use of international institutions, economic leverage, and diplomatic maneuvering to frustrate American intentions will only grow."⁴¹

We offer two critiques of these claims. First, if we consider the specific predictions suggested by these theorists on their own terms, we do not find persuasive evidence of soft balancing. Second, these criteria for detecting soft balancing are, on reflection, inherently flawed because they do not (and possibly cannot) offer effective means for distinguishing soft balancing from routine diplomatic friction between countries. These are, in that sense, nonfalsifiable claims.

38. Layne writes, "By facilitating 'soft balancing' against the United States, the Iraq crisis may have paved the way for 'hard' balancing as well." Layne, "America as European Hegemon," p. 27. See also Walt, "Can the United States Be Balanced?" p. 18; and Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World," p. 27. See also Paul, "Introduction," in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 2–4, 11–17.

39. Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off-Balance,'" p. 136; and Walt, "Can the United States Be Balanced?"

40. Josef Joffe, "Gulliver Unbound: Can America Rule the World?" August 6, 2003, <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/08/05/1060064182993.html>.

41. Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World," p. 29; and Pape, "The World Pushes Back."

EVALUATING SOFT-BALANCING PREDICTIONS

Theorists have offered several criteria for judging the presence of soft balancing. We consider four frequently invoked ones: states' efforts (1) to entangle the dominant state in international institutions, (2) to exclude the dominant state from regional economic cooperation, (3) to undermine the dominant state's ability to project military power by restricting or denying military basing rights, and (4) to provide relevant assistance to U.S. adversaries such as rogue states.⁴²

ENTANGLING INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. Are other states using international institutions to constrain or undermine U.S. power? The notion that they could do so is based on faulty logic. Because the most powerful states exercise the most control in these institutions, it is unreasonable to expect that their rules and procedures can be used to shackle and restrain the world's most powerful state. As Randall Schweller notes, institutions cannot be simultaneously autonomous and capable of binding strong states.⁴³ Certainly what resistance there was to endorsing the U.S.-led action in Iraq did not stop or meaningfully delay that action.

Is there evidence, however, that other states are even trying to use a web of global institutional rules and procedures or ad hoc diplomatic maneuvers to constrain U.S. behavior and delay or disrupt military actions? No attempt was made to block the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan, and both the war and the ensuing stabilization there have been almost entirely conducted through an international institution: NATO. Although a number of countries refused to endorse the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, none sought to use international institutions to block or declare illegal that invasion. Logically, such action should be the benchmark for this aspect of soft balancing, not whether states voted for the invasion. No evidence exists that such an effort was launched or that one would have succeeded had it been. Moreover, since the Iraqi regime was toppled, the UN has endorsed and assisted the transition to Iraqi sovereignty.⁴⁴

If anything, other states' ongoing cooperation with the United States ex-

42. These and other soft-balancing predictions can be found in Walt, "Can the United States Be Balanced?"; Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World," pp. 27–29; and Pape, "Soft Balancing: How the World Will Respond to U.S. Preventive War on Iraq."

43. Randall L. Schweller, "The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), p. 182.

44. Before the invasion, Pape predicted that "after the war, Europe, Russia, and China could press hard for the United Nations rather than the United States to oversee a new Iraqi government. Even if they didn't succeed, this would reduce the freedom of action for the United States in Iraq and elsewhere in the region." See Pape, "Soft Balancing: How the World Will Respond to U.S. Preventive War on Iraq." As we note above, the transitional process was in fact endorsed by the Bush administration, and if anything, it has pressed for greater UN participation, which China, France,

plains why international institutions continue to amplify American power and facilitate the pursuit of its strategic objectives. As we discuss below, the war on terror is being pursued primarily through regional institutions, bilateral arrangements, and new multilateral institutions, most obviously the Proliferation Security and Container Security Initiatives, both of which have attracted new adherents since they were launched.⁴⁵

ECONOMIC STATECRAFT. Is post-September 11 regional economic cooperation increasingly seeking to exclude the United States so as to make the balance of power less favorable to it? The answer appears to be no. The United States has been one of the primary drivers of trade regionalization, not the excluded party. This is not surprising given that most states, including those with the most power, have good reason to want lower, not higher, trade barriers around the large and attractive U.S. market.

This rationale applies, for instance, to suits brought in the World Trade Organization against certain U.S. trade policies. These suits are generally aimed at gaining access to U.S. markets, not sidelining them. For example, the suits challenging agricultural subsidies are part of a general challenge by developing countries to Western (including European) trade practices.⁴⁶ Moreover, many of these disputes predate September 11; therefore, relabeling them a form of soft balancing in reaction to post-September 11 U.S. strategy is not credible. For the moment, there also does not appear to be any serious discussion of a coordinated decision to price oil in euros, which might undercut the United States' ability to run large trade and budget deficits without proportional increases in inflation and interest rates.⁴⁷

RESTRICTIONS ON BASING RIGHTS/TERRITORIAL DENIAL. The geographical isolation of the United States could effectively diminish its relative power advantage. This prediction appears to be supported by Turkey's denial of the Bush administration's request to provide coalition ground forces with transit

and Russia, among others, have resisted. This constitutes resistance to U.S. requests, but it hardly constitutes use of institutions to constrain U.S. action.

45. The Proliferation Security Initiative's initial members were Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, and the United States.

46. The resistance of France and others to agricultural trade liberalization could be interpreted as an attempt to limit U.S. economic power by restricting access to their markets by highly competitive U.S. agribusiness. But then, presumably, contrasting support for liberalization by most developing countries would have to be interpreted as expressing support for expanded U.S. power.

47. For an insightful discussion of why this may well remain the case, see Herman Schwartz, "Ties That Bind: Global Macroeconomic Flows and America's Financial Empire," paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, September 2-5, 2004.

rights for the invasion of Iraq, and possibly by diminished Saudi support for bases there. In addition, Pape suggests that countries such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea will likely impose new restrictions or reductions on U.S. forces stationed on their soil.

The overall U.S. overseas basing picture, however, looks brighter today than it did only a few years ago. Since September 11 the United States has established new bases and negotiated landing rights across Africa, Asia, Central Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. All told, it has built, upgraded, or expanded military facilities in Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Diego Garcia, Djibouti, Georgia, Hungary, Iraq, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.⁴⁸

The diplomatic details of the basing issue also run contrary to soft-balancing predictions. Despite occasionally hostile domestic opinion surveys, most host countries do not want to see the withdrawal of U.S. forces. The economic and strategic benefits of hosting bases outweigh purported desires to make it more difficult for the United States to exercise power. For example, the Philippines asked the United States to leave Subic Bay in the 1990s (well before the emergence of the Bush Doctrine), but it has been angling ever since for a return. U.S. plans to withdraw troops from South Korea are facing local resistance and have triggered widespread anxiety about the future of the United States' security commitment to the peninsula.⁴⁹ German defense officials and businesses are displeased with the U.S. plan to replace two army divisions in Germany with a single light armored brigade and transfer a wing of F-16 fighter jets to Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.⁵⁰ (Indeed, Turkey recently agreed to allow the

48. See James Sterngold, "After 9/11, U.S. Policy Built on World Bases," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 21, 2004, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2004/040321-world-bases.htm>; David Rennie, "America's Growing Network of Bases," *Daily Telegraph*, September 11, 2003, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2003/030911-deployments01.htm>; and "Worldwide Reorientation of U.S. Military Basing in Prospect," Center for Defense Information, September 19, 2003, and "Worldwide Reorientation of U.S. Military Basing, Part 2: Central Asia, Southwest Asia, and the Pacific," Center for Defense Information, October 7, 2003, <http://www.cdi.org/program/documents.cfm?ProgramID-37>.

49. Strategic and economic worries are easily intertwined. In response to prospective changes in U.S. policy, the South Korean defense ministry is seeking a 13 percent increase in its 2005 budget request. See "U.S. Troop Withdrawals from South Korea," *IISS Strategic Comments*, Vol. 10, No. 5 (June 2004). Pape suggests both that Japan and South Korea could ask all U.S. forces to leave their territory and that they do not want the United States to leave because it is a potentially indispensable support for the status quo in the region. See Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World."

50. "Proposed U.S. Base Closures Send a Shiver through a German Town," *New York Times*, August 22, 2004.

United States expanded use of the base as a major hub for deliveries to Iraq and Afghanistan.)⁵¹

The recently announced plan to redeploy or withdraw up to 70,000 U.S. troops from Cold War bases in Asia and Europe is not being driven by host-country rejection, but by a reassessment of global threats to U.S. interests and the need to bolster American power-projection capabilities.⁵² If anything, the United States has the freedom to move forces out of certain countries because it has so many options about where else to send them, in this case closer to the Middle East and other regions crucial to the war on terror. For example, the United States is discussing plans to concentrate all special operations and anti-terrorist units in Europe in a single base in Spain—a country presumably primed for soft balancing against the United States given its newly elected prime minister's opposition to the war in Iraq—so as to facilitate an increasing number of military operations in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵³

THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY IS MY FRIEND. Finally, as Pape asserts, if "Europe, Russia, China, and other important regional states were to offer economic and technological assistance to North Korea, Iran, and other 'rogue states,' this would strengthen these states, run counter to key Bush administration policies, and demonstrate the resolve to oppose the United States by assisting its enemies."⁵⁴ Pape presumably has in mind Russian aid to Iran in building nuclear power plants (with the passive acquiescence of Europeans), South Korean economic assistance to North Korea, previous French and Russian resistance to sanctions against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and perhaps Pakistan's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) assistance to North Korea, Iraq, and Libya.

There are at least two reasons to question whether any of these actions is evidence of soft balancing. First, none of this so-called cooperation with U.S. adversaries is unambiguously driven by a strategic logic of undermining U.S. power. Instead, other explanations are readily at hand. South Korean economic aid to North Korea is better explained by purely local motivations: common ethnic bonds in the face of famine and deprivation, and Seoul's fears of the consequences of any abrupt collapse of the North Korean regime. The other

51. "Turkey OKs Expanded U.S. Use of Key Air Base," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 2005.

52. Kurt Campbell and Celeste Johnson Ward, "New Battle Stations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 5 (September/October 2003), pp. 95–103.

53. "Spain, U.S. to Mull Single Europe Special Ops Base—Report," *Wall Street Journal*, May 2, 2005.

54. Pape, "Soft Balancing: How the World Will Respond to U.S. Preventive War on Iraq"; and Pape, "Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World," pp. 31–32.

cases of “cooperation” appear to be driven by a common nonstrategic motivation: pecuniary gain. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan’s nuclear program, was apparently motivated by profits when he sold nuclear technology and methods to several states. And given its domestic economic problems and severe troubles in Chechnya, Russia appears far more interested in making money from Iran than in helping to bring about an “Islamic bomb.”⁵⁵ The quest for lucrative contracts provides at least as plausible, if banal, an explanation for French cooperation with Saddam Hussein.

Moreover, this soft-balancing claim runs counter to diverse multilateral nonproliferation efforts aimed at Iran, North Korea, and Libya (before its decision to abandon its nuclear program). The Europeans have been quite vocal in their criticism of Iranian noncompliance with the Nonproliferation Treaty and International Atomic Energy Agency guidelines, and the Chinese and Russians are actively cooperating with the United States and others over North Korea. The EU’s 2003 European security strategy document declares that rogue states “should understand that there is a price to be paid” for their behavior, “including in their relationship” with the EU.⁵⁶ These major powers have a declared disinterest in aiding rogue states above and beyond what they might have to lose by attracting the focused enmity of the United States.

In sum, the evidence for claims and predictions of soft balancing is poor.

DISTINGUISHING SOFT BALANCING FROM TRADITIONAL DIPLOMATIC FRICTION

There is a second, more important, reason to be skeptical of soft-balancing claims. The criteria they offer for detecting the presence of soft balancing are conceptually flawed. Walt defines soft balancing as “conscious coordination of diplomatic action in order to obtain outcomes contrary to U.S. preferences, outcomes that could not be gained if the balancers did not give each other some degree of mutual support.”⁵⁷ This and other accounts are problematic in a crucial way. Conceptually, seeking outcomes that a state (such as the United States) does not prefer does not necessarily or convincingly reveal a desire to balance that state geostrategically. For example, one trading partner often seeks outcomes that the other does not prefer, without balancing being relevant to the discussion. Thus, empirically, the types of events used to

55. The importance of the sums Russia is earning, compared to its military spending and arms exports, is suggested in IISS, *Military Balance, 2003–2004*, pp. 270–271, 273.

56. European Union, “A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy,” Brussels, December 12, 2003, <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

57. Walt, “Can the United States Be Balanced?” p. 14.

operationalize definitions such as Walt's do not clearly establish the crucial claim of soft-balancing theorists: states' desires to balance the United States. Widespread anti-Americanism can be present (and currently seems to be) without that fact persuasively revealing impulses to balance the United States.

The events used to detect the presence of soft balancing are so typical in history that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, distinguished from routine diplomatic friction between countries, even between allies. Traditional balancing criteria are useful because they can reasonably, though surely not perfectly, help distinguish between real balancing behavior and policies or diplomatic actions that may look and sound like an effort to check the power of the dominant state but that in actuality reflect only cheap talk, domestic politics, other international goals not related to balances of power, or the resentment of particular leaders. The current formulation of the concept of soft balancing is not distinguished from such behavior. Even if the predictions were correct, they would not unambiguously or even persuasively reveal balancing behavior, soft or otherwise.

Our criticism is validated by the long list of events from 1945 to 2001 that are directly comparable to those that are today coded as soft balancing. These events include diplomatic maneuvering by U.S. allies and nonaligned countries against the United States in international institutions (particularly the UN), economic statecraft aimed against the United States, resistance to U.S. military basing, criticism of U.S. military interventions, and waves of anti-Americanism.

In the 1950s a West Europe-only bloc was formed, designed partly as a political and economic counterweight to the United States within the so-called free world, and France created an independent nuclear capability. In the 1960s a cluster of mostly developing countries organized the Nonaligned Movement, defining itself against both superpowers. France pulled out of NATO's military structure. Huge demonstrations worldwide protested the U.S. war in Vietnam and other U.S. Cold War policies. In the 1970s the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries wielded its oil weapon to punish U.S. policies in the Middle East and transfer substantial wealth from the West. Waves of extensive anti-Americanism were pervasive in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s, and Europe and elsewhere in the late 1960s and early 1970s and again in the early-to-mid 1980s. Especially prominent protests and harsh criticism from intellectuals and local media were mounted against U.S. policies toward Central America under President Ronald Reagan, the deployment of theater nuclear weapons in Europe, and the very idea of missile defense. In the Reagan

era, many states coordinated to protect existing UN practices, promote the 1982 Law of the Sea treaty, and oppose aid to the Nicaraguan Contras. In the 1990s the Philippines asked the United States to leave its Subic Bay military base; China continued a long-standing military buildup; and China, France, and Russia coordinated to resist UN-sanctioned uses of force against Iraq. China and Russia declared a strategic partnership in 1996. In 1998 the “European troika” meetings and agreements began between France, Germany, and Russia, and the EU announced the creation of an independent, unified European military force. In many of these years, the United States was engaged in numerous trade clashes, including with close EU allies. Given all this, it is not surprising that contemporary scholars and commentators periodically identified “crises” in U.S. relations with the world, including within the Atlantic Alliance.⁵⁸

These events all rival in seriousness the categories of events that some scholars today identify as soft balancing. Indeed, they are not merely difficult to distinguish conceptually from those later events; in many cases they are impossible to distinguish empirically, being literally the same events or trends that are currently labeled soft balancing. Yet they all occurred in years in which even soft-balancing theorists agree that the United States was not being balanced against.⁵⁹ It is thus unclear whether accounts of soft balancing have provided criteria for crisply and rigorously distinguishing that concept from these and similar manifestations of diplomatic friction routine to many periods of history, even in relations between countries that remain allies rather than strategic competitors. For example, these accounts provide no method for judging whether post-September 11 international events constitute soft balancing, whereas similar phenomena during Reagan’s presidency—the spread of anti-Americanism, coordination against the United States in international institutions, criticism of interventions in the developing countries, and so on—do not. Without effective criteria for making such distinctions, current claims of soft balancing risk blunting rather than advancing knowledge about international political dynamics.

In sum, we detect no persuasive evidence that U.S. policy is provoking the

58. See, for example, Eliot A. Cohen, “The Long-Term Crisis of the Alliance,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Winter 1982/83), pp. 325–343; Sanford J. Ungar, ed., *Estrangement: America and the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Stephen M. Walt, “The Ties That Fray: Why Europe and America Are Drifting Apart,” *National Interest*, No. 54 (Winter 1998–99), pp. 3–11.

59. Walt, “Keeping the World ‘Off-Balance’”; and Pape, “Soft Balancing: How States Pursue Security in a Unipolar World,” p. 13.

seismic shift in other states' strategies toward the United States that theorists of balancing identify.

Why Countries Are Not Balancing against the United States

The major powers are not balancing against the United States because of the nature of U.S. grand strategy in the post–September 11 world. There is no doubt that this strategy is ambitious, assertive, and backed by tremendous offensive military capability. But it is also highly selective and not broadly threatening. Specifically, the United States is focusing these means on the greatest threats to its interests—that is, the threats emanating from nuclear proliferator states and global terrorist organizations. Other major powers are not balancing U.S. power because they want the United States to succeed in defeating these shared threats or are ambivalent yet understand they are not in its crosshairs. In many cases, the diplomatic friction identified by proponents of the concept of soft balancing instead reflects disagreement about tactics, not goals, which is nothing new in history.

To be sure, our analysis cannot claim to rule out other theories of great power behavior that also do not expect balancing against the United States. Whether the United States is not seen as a threat worth balancing because of shared interests in nonproliferation and the war on terror (as we argue), because of geography and capability limitations that render U.S. global hegemony impossible (as some offensive realists argue), or because transnational democratic values, binding international institutions, and economic interdependence obviate the need to balance (as many liberals argue) is a task for further theorizing and empirical analysis. Nor are we claiming that balancing against the United States will never happen. Rather, there is no persuasive evidence that U.S. policy is provoking the kind of balancing behavior that the Bush administration's critics suggest. In the meantime, analysts should continue to use credible indicators of balancing behavior in their search for signs that U.S. strategy is having a counterproductive effect on U.S. security.

Below we discuss why the United States is not seen by other major powers as a threat worth balancing. Next we argue that the impact of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq on international relations has been exaggerated and needs to be seen in a broader context that reveals far more cooperation with the United States than many analysts acknowledge. Finally, we note that something akin to balancing is taking place among would-be nuclear proliferators and Islamist extremists, which makes sense given that these are the threats targeted by the United States.

THE UNITED STATES' FOCUSED ENMITY

Great powers seek to organize the world according to their own preferences, looking for opportunities to expand and consolidate their economic and military power positions. Our analysis does not assume that the United States is an exception. It can fairly be seen to be pursuing a hegemonic grand strategy and has repeatedly acted in ways that undermine notions of deeply rooted shared values and interests. U.S. objectives and the current world order, however, are unusual in several respects. First, unlike previous states with preponderant power, the United States has little incentive to seek to physically control foreign territory. It is secure from foreign invasion and apparently sees little benefit in launching costly wars to obtain additional material resources. Moreover, the bulk of the current international order suits the United States well. Democracy is ascendant, foreign markets continue to liberalize, and no major revisionist powers seem poised to challenge U.S. primacy.

This does not mean that the United States is a status quo power, as typically defined. The United States seeks to further expand and consolidate its power position even if not through territorial conquest. Rather, U.S. leaders aim to bolster their power by promoting economic growth, spending lavishly on military forces and research and development, and dissuading the rise of any peer competitor on the international stage. Just as important, the confluence of the proliferation of WMD and the rise of Islamist radicalism poses an acute danger to U.S. interests. This means that U.S. grand strategy targets its assertive enmity only at circumscribed quarters, ones that do not include other great powers.

The great powers, as well as most other states, either share the U.S. interest in eliminating the threats from terrorism and WMD or do not feel that they have a significant direct stake in the matter. Regardless, they understand that the United States does not have offensive designs on them. Consistent with this proposition, the United States has improved its relations with almost all of the major powers in the post-September 11 world. This is in no small part because these governments—not to mention those in key countries in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, such as Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia—are willing partners in the war on terror because they see Islamist radicalism as a genuine threat to them as well. U.S. relations with China, India, and Russia, in particular, are better than ever in large part because these countries similarly have acute reasons to fear transnational Islamist terrorist groups. The EU's official grand strategy echoes that of the United States. The 2003 European security strategy document, which appeared months after the U.S.-led invasion

of Iraq, identifies terrorism by religious extremists and the proliferation of WMD as the two greatest threats to European security. In language familiar to students of the Bush administration, it declares that Europe's "most frightening scenario is one in which terrorist groups acquire weapons of mass destruction."⁶⁰ It is thus not surprising that the major European states, including France and Germany, are partners of the United States in the Proliferation Security Initiative.

Certain EU members are not engaged in as wide an array of policies toward these threats as the United States and other of its allies. European criticism of the Iraq war is the preeminent example. But sharp differences over tactics should not be confused with disagreement over broad goals. After all, comparable disagreements, as well as incentives to free ride on U.S. efforts, were common among several West European states during the Cold War when they nonetheless shared with their allies the goal of containing the Soviet Union.⁶¹

In neither word nor deed, then, do these states manifest the degree or nature of disagreement contained in the images of strategic rivalry on which balancing claims are based. Some other countries are bystanders. As discussed above, free-riding and differences over tactics form part of the explanation for this behavior. And some of these states simply feel less threatened by terrorist organizations and WMD proliferators than the United States and others do. The decision of these states to remain on the sidelines, however, and not seek opportunities to balance, is crucial. There is no good evidence that these states feel threatened by U.S. grand strategy.

In brief, other great powers appear to lack the motivation to compete strategically with the United States under current conditions. Other major powers might prefer a more generally constrained America or, to be sure, a world where the United States was not as dominant, but this yearning is a long way from active cooperation to undermine U.S. power or goals.

REDUCTIO AD IRAQ

Many accounts portray the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq as virtually of world-historical importance, as an event that will mark "a fundamental transformation in how major states react to American power."⁶² If the Iraq war is placed

60. European Union, "A Secure Europe in a Better World," p. 4.

61. This was exemplified in highly uneven defense spending across NATO members and in European criticism of the Vietnam War and U.S. nuclear policy toward the Soviet Union.

62. Pape, "Soft Balancing: How the World Will Respond to U.S. Preventive War on Iraq," p. 1. See

in its broader context, however, the picture looks very different. That context is provided when one considers the Iraq war within the scope of U.S. strategy in the Middle East, the use of force within the context of the war on terror more broadly, and the war on terror within U.S. foreign policy in general.

September 11, 2001, was the culmination of a series of terrorist attacks against U.S. sites, soldiers, and assets in the Middle East, Africa, and North America by al-Qaida, an organization that drew on resources of recruits, financing, and substantial (though apparently not majoritarian) mass-level support from more than a dozen countries across North and East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Central and Southwest Asia. The political leadership of the United States (as well as many others) perceived this as an accelerating threat emerging from extremist subcultures and organizations in those countries. These groupings triggered fears of potentially catastrophic possession and use of weapons of mass destruction, which have been gradually spreading to more countries, including several with substantial historic ties to terrorist groups. Just as important, U.S. leaders also traced these groupings backward along the causal chain to diverse possible underlying economic, cultural, and political conditions.⁶³ The result is perception of a threat of an unusually wide geographical area.

Yet the U.S. response thus far has involved the use of military force against only two regimes: the Taliban, which allowed al-Qaida to establish its main headquarters in Afghanistan, and the Baathists in Iraq, who were in long-standing defiance of UN demands concerning WMD programs and had a history of both connections to diverse terrorist groups and a distinctive hostility to the United States. U.S. policy toward other states, even in the Middle East, has not been especially threatening. The United States has increased military aid and other security assistance to several states, including Jordan, Morocco, and Pakistan, bolstering their military capabilities rather than eroding them. And the United States has not systematically intervened in the domestic politics of states in the region. The “greater Middle East initiative,” which was floated by the White House early in 2004, originally aimed at profound economic and political reforms, but it has since been trimmed in accordance with

also Layne, “The War on Terrorism and the Balance of Power”; and Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, p. 119.

63. See, for example, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), pp. 52–55.

the wishes of diverse states, including many in the Middle East. Bigger budgets for the National Endowment for Democracy, the main U.S. entity charged with democratization abroad, are being spent in largely nonprovocative ways, and heavily disproportionately inside Iraq. In addition, Washington has proved more than willing to work closely with authoritarian regimes in Kuwait, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere.

Further, U.S. policy toward the Middle East and North Africa since September 11 must be placed in the larger context of the war on terror more broadly construed. The United States is conducting that war virtually globally, but it has not used force outside the Middle East/Southwest Asia region. The primary U.S. responses to September 11 in the Mideast and especially elsewhere have been stepped-up diplomacy and stricter law enforcement, pursued primarily bilaterally and through regional organizations. The main emphasis has been on law enforcement: the tracing of terrorist financing; intelligence gathering; criminal-law surveillance of suspects; and arrests and trials in a number of countries. The United States has also pursued a variety of multilateralist efforts. Dealings with North Korea have been consistently multilateralist for some time; the United States has primarily relied on the International Atomic Energy Agency and the British-French-German troika for confronting Iran over its nuclear program; and the Proliferation and Container Security Initiatives are new international organizations obviously born of U.S. convictions that unilateral action in these matters was inadequate.

Finally, U.S. policy in the war on terror must be placed in the larger context of U.S. foreign policy more generally. In matters of trade, bilateral and multilateral economic development assistance, environmental issues, economically driven immigration, and many other areas, U.S. policy was characterized by broad continuity before September 11, and it remains so today. Government policies on such issues form the core of the United States' workaday interactions with many states. It is difficult to portray U.S. policy toward these states as revisionist in any classical meaning of that term. Some who identify a revolutionary shift in U.S. foreign policy risk badly exaggerating the significance of the Iraq war and are not paying sufficient attention to many other important trends and developments.⁶⁴

64. See, for example, Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2003).

“ASYMMETRIC BALANCING”?

Very different U.S. policies, and very different local behavior, are of course visible for a small minority of states. U.S. policy toward terrorist organizations and rogue states is confrontational and often explicitly contains threats of military force. One might describe the behavior of these states and groups as forms of “asymmetric balancing” against the United States.⁶⁵ They wish to bring about a retraction of U.S. power around the globe; unlike most states, they are spending prodigiously on military capabilities; and they periodically seek allies to frustrate U.S. goals. Given their limited means for engaging in traditional balancing, the options for these actors are to engage in terrorism to bring about a collapse of support among the American citizenry for a U.S. military and political presence abroad or to acquire nuclear weapons to deter the United States. Al-Qaida and affiliated groups are pursuing the former option; Iran and North Korea the latter.

Is this balancing? On the one hand, the attempt to check and roll back U.S. power—be it through formal alliances, terrorist attacks, or the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent—is what balancing is essentially about. If balancing is driven by defensive motives, one might argue that the United States endangers al-Qaida’s efforts to propagate radical Islamism and North Korea’s and Iran’s attempts to acquire nuclear weapons. On the other hand, the notion that these actors are status quo oriented and simply reacting to an increasingly powerful United States is difficult to sustain. Ultimately, the label “asymmetric balancing” does not capture the kind of behavior that international relations scholars have in mind when they predict and describe balancing against the United States in the wake of September 11 and the Iraq war.

Ironically, broadening the concept of balancing to include the behavior of terrorist organizations and nuclear proliferators highlights several additional problems for the larger balancing prediction thesis. First, the decisions by Iran and North Korea to devote major resources to their individual military capabilities despite limited means only strengthens our interpretation that major powers, with much vaster resources, are abstaining from balancing because of a lack of motivation, not a lack of latent power resources. Second, the radical Islamist campaign against the United States and its allies is more than a decade old, and the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs began well before that, reinforcing our argument that the Bush administration’s grand strategy and invasion of Iraq are far from the catalytic event for balancing that some an-

65. See Paul, “Introduction,” in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, p. 3.

alysts have portrayed it to be. Finally, much of the criticism that current U.S. strategy is generating counterbalancing yields few policy options that would actually eliminate or reduce asymmetric balancing.

Conclusion

Major powers have not engaged in traditional balancing against the United States since the September 11 terrorist attacks and the lead-up to the Iraq war, either in the form of domestic military mobilization, antihegemonic alliances, or the laying-down of diplomatic red lines. Indeed, several major powers, including those best positioned to mobilize coercive resources, are continuing to reduce, rather than augment, their levels of resource mobilization. This evidence runs counter to ad hoc predictions and international relations scholarship that would lead one to expect such balancing under current conditions. In that sense, this finding has implications not simply for current policymaking but also for ongoing scholarly consideration of competing international relations theories and the plausibility of their underlying assumptions.

Current trends also do not confirm recent claims of soft balancing against the United States. And when these trends are placed in historical perspective, it is unclear whether the categories of behaviors labeled “soft balancing” can (ever) be rigorously distinguished from the types of diplomatic friction routine to virtually all periods of history, even between allies. Indeed, some of the behavior currently labeled “soft balancing” is the same behavior that occurred in earlier periods when, it is generally agreed, the United States was not being balanced against.

The lack of an underlying motivation to compete strategically with the United States under current conditions, not the lack of latent power potentialities, best explains this lack of balancing behavior, whether hard or soft. This is the case, in turn, because most states are not threatened by a post-September 11 U.S. foreign policy that is, despite commentary to the contrary, highly selective in its use of force and multilateralist in many regards. In sum, the salient dynamic in international politics today does not concern the way that major powers are responding to the United States’ preponderance of power but instead concerns the relationship between the United States (and its allies), on the one hand, and terrorists and nuclear proliferators, on the other. So long as that remains the case, anything akin to balancing behavior is likely only among the narrowly circumscribed list of states and nonstate groups that are directly threatened by the United States.