

Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy

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A growing body of international relations literature contends that balance of power theory has become a relic of the Cold War.¹ According to this literature, second-ranking major powers such as Russia and China are abandoning balance of power strategies despite increased U.S. capabilities in almost all parameters of traditional sources of national power.² In every category of new weapons development and acquisition, the United States is widening its lead vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Not only does it possess global power status, but it has also been pursuing unilateralist strategies to prevent the rise of a peer competitor. Since the terrorist strikes of September 11, 2001, preventive and preemptive military actions against regional challengers seeking weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have become a key part of the United States' global strategy.³ Certain U.S. policies, especially with respect to the Middle East and Central Asia, have made some foreign governments uneasy—among them the United States' traditional allies in Europe. Yet evidence of a balancing coalition forming against

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1. See, for example, Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism," *International Organization*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 249–277; John A. Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research in Waltz's Balancing Proposition," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 899–912; and Edward Rhodes, "A World Not in Balance: War, Politics, and Weapons of Mass Destruction," in 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), pp. 150–176.

2. Second-tier major powers are states that possess the actual or potential capabilities to engage in balance-of-power coalition building against the United States. In addition to China and Russia, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, India, and Japan can be included in this group.

3. "Preventive military action" refers to engagement in a war before an adversary develops operational capabilities, thus forestalling future aggression. "Preemptive action" is meant to stop an attacker that is about to launch a war. Regional challengers include Iran, North Korea, and Iraq under Saddam Hussein's rule.

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the United States to countervail its power or threatening behavior has been conspicuously absent.

In this article I argue that since the end of the Cold War, second-tier major powers such as China, France, Germany, India, and Russia have mostly abandoned traditional “hard balancing”—based on countervailing alliances and arms buildups—at the systemic level. This does not mean, however, that they are helplessly watching the resurgence of U.S. power. These states have forgone military balancing primarily because they do not fear losing their sovereignty and existential security to the reigning hegemon, a necessary condition for such balancing to occur. In the past, weaker states aligned themselves against the increasing power of a hegemonic state out of concern that the rising power would inevitably challenge their sovereign territorial existence. Examples include great power behavior in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe as well as during the Cold War. Absent this fear, the motivations and strategies of second-tier major powers vis-à-vis the dominant state can change. The U.S. imperial strategy by indirect methods sufficiently assures these powers that they are safe from predatory attacks by the United States. Indeed, they view the United States as a constrained hegemon whose power is checked by a multitude of factors, including: internal democratic institutions, domestic politics, and above all, the possession of nuclear weapons by some second-ranking powers.

Nevertheless, second-tier major powers—barring the United Kingdom—are concerned about the increasing unilateralism of the United States and its post-September 11 tendency to intervene militarily in sovereign states and forcibly change regimes that pursue anti-U.S. policies (such as Iraq). In this new environment, the second-ranking states are taking steps—including bandwagoning, buck-passing, and free-riding—both to constrain U.S. power and to maintain their security and influence. They have also begun to engage in “soft balancing,” which involves the formation of limited diplomatic coalitions or ententes, especially at the United Nations, with the implicit threat of upgrading their alliances if the United States goes beyond its stated goals.

This article begins with a discussion of the existing explanations for the absence of traditional balancing against the United States. The second section provides an overview of the key characteristics of balance of power theory and its two variants—hard balancing and soft balancing—and the conditions under which states employ these strategies. The third section analyzes two cases of attempted soft balancing: Kosovo in 1999 and Iraq in 2002–03. It then elaborates on the balancing strategies adopted by second-tier powers and their al-

lies through the UN and other forums such as NATO and examines the outcomes. The article concludes with some thoughts for understanding state behavior in the twenty-first century given this broadened concept of balancing and its implications for U.S. foreign policy.

Explanations for the Absence of Traditional Balancing

Explanations for the lack of balancing against the United States hinge on the liberal characteristics of U.S. hegemony, the liberal-democratic political system of the United States, and the absence of a rival state or coalition of states with the military capabilities to mount a serious challenge. According to William Wohlforth, nonliberal states such as Russia and China are incapable of balancing U.S. power because they cannot find allies to join them in such an endeavor.⁴ From a liberal perspective, other liberal states, such as France and Germany, do not perceive the need to counterbalance the United States because they do not consider its growing power a threat.⁵ To John Ikenberry, other states—both liberal and nonliberal—have eschewed traditional balancing because of their ability to influence American foreign policy through both U.S. and international institutions.⁶ To economic liberals, economic interdependence and, more recently, globalization disincline second-tier states from engaging in balance of power politics. Because these powers—especially China and increasingly Russia—are linked by trade, investment, and commercial flows with the United States, they fear that military competition with it could derail their economies.⁷

The liberal school's argument thus assumes that second-tier major powers

4. William C. Wohlforth, "Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia," in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 214–238.

5. John M. Owen IV, "Transnational Liberalism and U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 117–152. For alternative views, see William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5–41; Charles A. Kupchan, "After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of a Stable Multipolarity," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 40–79; Michael Mastanduno, "A Realist View: Three Images of the Coming International Order," in T.V. Paul and John A. Hall, eds., *International Order and the Future of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 19–40; and Randall L. Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Fall 2004), pp. 159–201.

6. G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal Hegemony and the Future of American Postwar Order," in Paul and Hall, *International Order and the Future of World Politics*, pp. 123–145.

7. On this, see Edward D. Mansfield and Brian M. Pollins, eds., *Economic Interdependence and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); and Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).

are generally more interested in wealth acquisition than security or military status. In the hierarchy of national goals, however, security concerns could override wealth acquisition if the former became the predominant challenge to a major power state. Further, if a hegemonic power is left unbalanced, it may deviate from its liberal ideals, especially if it believes that any of its vital interests are at stake. Indeed, liberal states have engaged in empire building and military interventions for both ideological and economic reasons.⁸ Additionally, liberal states can form balancing coalitions with nonliberal nations against other liberal states.⁹ The absence of capable nonliberal states, however, does not explain the dearth of balancing efforts against the United States. Because a state cannot single-handedly balance, it needs coalition partners. Such a coalition needs only to achieve a rough equilibrium, as absolute parity is often not needed to obtain a balance of power in the nuclear age. (In this regard, it is unclear why the combined power of China and Russia cannot achieve a meaningful balance of power against the United States.)

Realists, in contrast, contend that the United States will eventually be balanced by one or more states with matching capabilities, which in turn will produce a multipolar international system.¹⁰ Power transitions occur over time because of the changes in the military, economic, and technological capabilities of major powers.¹¹ The problem with the realist perspective, however, is the indeterminacy in the timing of the arrival of a countervailing power. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, second-tier major powers have in the past adopted various strategies (including bandwagoning, buck-passing, and free-riding) when faced with an ascendant or threatening power, demonstrating that the formation of balancing military coalitions is not automatic.¹²

8. On liberal imperialism, see Michael Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (December 1986), pp. 1154–1155.

9. An example is the U.S.-China-Pakistan alliance versus the Russia-India quasi alliance of the 1970s.

10. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5–41; and Colin Gray, "Clausewitz Rules, OK? The Future Is the Past—with GPS," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (December 1999), p. 169; and Christopher Layne, "The War on Terrorism and Balance of Power: The Paradoxes of American Hegemony," in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 103–126.

11. For arguments for and against this thinking, see Sean M. Lynn-Jones, ed., *The Cold War and After: Prospects for Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War"; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), chap. 10; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5–51.

12. Paul W. Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-realist Theory," *International Security*, Vol. 19,

A variant of the realist argument is the historical/structural perspective on the rise and fall of great powers. On the basis of its logic, some scholars argue that overspending, overstretching, and internal failures will eventually cause the United States' decline.¹³ Although the historical records of past great powers (e.g., Spain and Portugal) attest to the strength of this argument, one must be cautious of its application to the United States for three reasons. First, no previous empire had the benefit of capitalism in its highly developed form as the United States enjoys today. Second, several past empires and major powers managed to persevere, albeit in a weakened form, contrary to the expectations of perspectives that focus on automatic structural change. For instance, depending on the Western or Eastern manifestation, the Roman Empire lasted from 500 to 1,100 years. The Ottoman Empire survived for more than 400 years; the Mughal Empire in India more than 300; and the British Empire more than 250. Without World War II, the British Empire would probably have lasted even longer. Third, most past great powers (e.g., Spain, Portugal, Austria-Hungary, Japan, and Germany) declined following long periods of war with other imperial powers. In the case of the United States, the low probability of a global war akin to World War II may help to prolong its hegemony. Smaller challengers could wear down the hegemon's power through asymmetric strategies; but given its technological and organizational superiority, the United States can devise countermeasures to increase its power position even if it may not fully contain such challenges. Without war as a system-changing mechanism, and with no prospects of an alternative mechanism emerging for systemic change, even a weakened hegemon could endure for a long period. Further, because economic superiority does not automatically bestow military capability, as most modern weapons systems take considerable time to develop and deploy, U.S. dominance in this area is unlikely to be challenged for some time by a potential peer competitor, such as China, even after it overtakes the United States in gross economic terms.

A closer look at balance of power theory helps to clarify why the United States has not been balanced the way realists would have expected.

No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 108–148; and Mark R. Brawley, "The Political Economy of Balance of Power Theory," in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 76–99.

13. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987). Similarly, power transition theorists of various hues believe in the rise and fall of great powers. See A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke, eds., *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of The War Ledger* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

The Axioms of Balance of Power Theory

Balance of power has been the bedrock of realist international relations theory. To realists, states maintain security and stability at the systemic level largely through balancing. Throughout the history of the modern international system, balancing has been the key strategy employed by major powers to achieve their security goals.¹⁴ Traditional balance of power theory is predicated on the following four premises that are also held in realism. First, the international system is anarchic and has no central governing authority to offer protection to individual states. Second, states seek to survive as independent entities. Third, power competition is a fact of international politics, as differential growth rates and technological innovations endow one or more states with military and economic advantages over time. Hegemony is sought by the power whose expanding capabilities compel it to broaden its national interests and thereby seek more power to protect its increasing assets. Fourth, when one state attempts to become dominant, threatened states will form defensive coalitions or acquire appropriate military wherewithal through internal or external sources or, in some cases, a combination of both. In rare cases, they will resort to preventive war to countervail the power of the rising or hegemonic state.¹⁵ If the rising power is not constrained, it will inevitably engage in aggressive behavior that could result in other states losing their sovereign existence.¹⁶

Thus the fundamental goal of balance of power politics is to maintain the survival and sovereign independence of states in the international system; a related objective is not allowing any one state to preponderate.¹⁷ Great powers may also have other instrumental goals in pursuing a balancing strategy, such as maintaining the independence of other great powers. As Jack Levy puts it, from the balance of power perspective, “maintaining the independence of

14. On the significance of balance of power, see Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), chap. 11; David Hume, “Of the Balance of Power,” in Paul Seabury, ed., *Balance of Power* (San Francisco, Calif.: Chandler, 1965), pp. 32–36; Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); and Inis L. Claude Jr., *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962).

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

16. In the current international system, the United States is not a rising power as described above. It is an established hegemonic power, but its power capabilities have been rapidly improving vis-à-vis other great power states, giving it the wherewithal to become an overwhelmingly preponderant state in the medium term.

17. Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1955), pp. 31–33.

one's own state is an irreducible national value, whereas maintaining the independence of other great powers is a means to that end, not an end in itself."¹⁸ Even during the heyday of the balance of power system in nineteenth-century Europe, although major powers wanted to maintain the independence of most states, they were occasionally willing to sacrifice the independence of smaller ones (e.g., Poland) to advance their interests. Nevertheless, this was a rare occurrence, because when a great power occupies strategically vital smaller powers, other great powers may perceive that its ultimate goal is domination over all states.

Of the two hard-balancing instruments, the alignment of smaller states with opponents of the most powerful state is more common.¹⁹ States, especially affected great powers, form coalitions to build both their defensive and deterrent capabilities, so as to dissuade the hegemonic power from becoming too strong or too threatening. Weaker states join coalitions to gain greater respect and appreciation from members of their peer groups. From the structural realist perspective, balancing recurs in international politics as a lawlike phenomenon.²⁰

BALANCING SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Traditional balance of power theory, especially the variant that postulates balance of power as an outcome, fails to explain state behavior in the post-Cold War era. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been expanding both its economic and political power. More recently, it has begun to engage in increasingly unilateralist military policies. The defense expenditure of the United States for 2004–05 represented more than 47 percent of the world's military spending. In the area of research and development (R&D), the United

18. Jack S. Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance Against and When?" in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, p. 32.

19. George Liska, *International Equilibrium: A Theoretical Essay on the Politics and Organization of Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 34–41; Stanley Hoffmann, "Balance of Power," in David L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 507; Claude, *Power and International Relations*, p. 56; and Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

20. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 126–128. Scholars disagree about whether balance of power occurs as a conscious strategy or as a law of politics. On the distinction between automatic balance of power and manual balancing, see Colin Elman, "Introduction: Appraising Balance of Power Theory," in John A. Vasquez and Elman, eds., *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), pp. 9–10. In addition, there is debate over whether balancing occurs against a rising power or a threatening power. Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring 1985), pp. 3–43. Further, some scholars argue that balancing seems to occur against continental powers, such as Germany and Russia, but not against maritime powers, such as Britain and the United States. Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance Against and When?" pp. 45–46.

States spent \$56.8 billion in 2003–04, which constituted 60 percent of the world total.²¹ The United States' wide network of overseas bases and its possession of advanced weapons systems (e.g., aircraft carriers, cruise missiles, stealth bombers, and precision-guided bombs) have given it an extraordinary advantage over all other powers.²² U.S. military superiority in areas such as technology, modern industries, organization, strategic lift capabilities, and personnel quality and training has been on display most recently in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.²³ Yet despite these growing material capabilities, major powers such as China, France, Germany, India, and Russia have not responded with significant increases in their defense spending. Nor have they formed military coalitions to countervail U.S. power, as traditional balance of power theory would predict. Even the U.S. effort to expand NATO to Eastern Europe did not elicit a strong reaction from Moscow. Similarly, the United States' ongoing plans to build national and theater missile defense systems have not produced major balancing efforts from either China or Russia. Although these systems are not yet fully operational, if they are ever successfully developed and deployed, the nuclear deterrent capabilities of both countries will be compromised.

Second-tier major powers have not balanced against the United States primarily because, unlike previous hegemonic or rising powers, it does not appear to be challenging the sovereign existence of other states, barring a few isolated regional countries (e.g., Iran). Although not stated in so many words, the military doctrines and defense plans of second-ranked powers, including those of China and Russia, rule out a major war with the United States and increasingly focus instead on regional and internal security challenges.²⁴ U.S. power seems to be limited by a multitude of internal and external factors, thus making the United States a "constrained hegemon." Even when pursuing quasi-imperial policies, such as in the Middle East, the United States has gen-

21. On comparative military spending, see Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook, 2005: Armaments, Disarmament, and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), <http://yearbook2005.sipri.org/ch8/ch8>. On R&D spending, see Bonn International Center for Conversion, *Conversion Survey, 2004: Global Disarmament, Demilitarization, and Demobilization* (Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2004).

22. For instance, the United States operates nearly 650 military bases around the world and has basing rights in more than forty countries. Jim Garrison, *America as Empire: Global Leader or Rogue Power?* (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler, 2004), p. 25.

23. William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004).

24. For the Russian military doctrine, see http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_05/dc3ma00.asp; and for the Chinese defense policy statement of 2002, see <http://english.people.com.cn/features/ndpaper2002/nd1.html>.

erally been perceived as a defender of the international status quo and an opponent of forced territorial revisions. The U.S. war against terrorism and regional challengers (i.e., the so-called rogue states) does not affect most states negatively; they too feel threatened by terrorist groups and regional proliferators that are attempting to acquire weapons of mass destruction: efforts they believe upset the regional balance of power and the international nuclear order built around the nonproliferation regime.

Michael Doyle has developed a general definition of empire that helps to illuminate the peculiarities of the United States' post-September 11 imperial strategy. Doyle defines an empire as "a system of interaction between two political entities, one of which, the dominant metropole, exerts political control over the internal and external policy—the effective sovereignty—of the other in the subordinate periphery."²⁵ Although the United States exerts some degree of control over many secondary states, unlike previous empires it often does so through indirect means. The United States does not yet require direct conquest, unlike former European hegemonic states that needed additional land for economic or military purposes. Instead, U.S. global military power is based on nuclear and conventional weapons that can be dispatched from great distances, including from U.S. aircraft carriers and U.S. bases in the territory of allies.

Thus, a fundamental cause of hard balancing in the past—states' fear of losing their sovereign existence to a hegemonic power—has had less salience since the end of the Cold War. Great powers once engaged in intense balancing behavior because they worried that a rapidly rising power would eventually subjugate them, challenge their physical existence, or conquer their imperial domains. From the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, European powers feared such outcomes, as is evident in the wars they fought and the intense balance of power games they played. Erstwhile European hegemonies, such as the Habsburg Empire under Charles V, Spain under Philip II, France under Louis XIV and Napoleon, and Germany under Wilhelm II and Hitler, directly challenged the existence of sovereign states, especially of other great powers. The military doctrines and strategies of rising powers were often territorially revisionist, as is apparent in the policies of France under Napoleon in the nineteenth century and of Germany and Japan in the early twentieth century. Hard balancing was therefore essential if states wanted to survive against the onslaught of land-grabbing, predatory great powers. Until the mid-twentieth

25. Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 12.

century, land was also the source of much great power prosperity. Today, however, direct land possession is not a requirement for great powers seeking to accumulate wealth and achieve their military goals; this includes the United States.²⁶

During the Cold War, however, the United States and the Soviet Union perceived that a balance of power, built around mutual nuclear deterrence, was necessary to prevent the loss of their allies' independence. The United States and its Western allies viewed the Soviet Union as a revisionist power bent on altering the sovereign state system through the spread of its communist ideology. Meanwhile, the Soviets feared that the United States and its allies had predatory intentions, and that without an arms buildup and alliances, they would lose their sovereignty and great power status.²⁷ The radical political and economic changes pushed through by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s began to modify this vision. With the end of the Cold War, perceptions on both sides changed dramatically.

Today, even though the overwhelming power of the United States may make many countries uncomfortable, none of the major powers fears being conquered or having their territories usurped. This does not mean that the United States is a benign hegemonic power, as many liberal theorists argue. Rather, it has pursued quasi-imperial policies through indirect means, largely by helping either to install or to prop up favorable regimes in strategic regions such as the Middle East and East Asia, from where it can control the flow of goods and commodities vital for its economy as well as those of its allies. Because the United States does not engage in the kind of direct imperialism that erstwhile European colonial powers did, authors have taken to describing it as an "informal empire," "incoherent empire," "inadvertent empire," "imperial republic," and "unacknowledged empire," as well as a "reluctant superpower." Others consider the United States' dominant role in globalization, for example, as a model of "soft imperialism."²⁸ Yet this hegemony is not as hier-

26. See Richard N. Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), chap. 2.

27. See John Lewis Gaddis, *We Know Now: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Deborah W. Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations during the Cold War* (Ithaca: N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

28. For these characterizations, see Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (London: Verso, 2003); Odom and Dujarric, *America's Inadvertent Empire*; John Newhouse, *Imperial America: The Bush Assault on the World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Garrison, *America as Empire*; and Clyde Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 30.

archical, deeply institutionalized, or territory bound as previous imperial orders were.

The United States' wealth derives partially from its economic interactions, especially trade, with other states. Besides oil, there are few resources it needs to acquire through overt land possession. The American population is not growing at a pace that would require the seizure of foreign territory, unlike, for example, Nazi Germany and its policy of *Lebensraum*. Although the United States has at times pursued mercantilist and protectionist policies, its economic prosperity depends on a stable international order. In every key region, the United States offers some level of protection to potential key balancers, such as the NATO member states and Japan, or economic goods to major rising powers such as China, India, and Russia. During the first decade of the post-Cold War era, U.S. policy posed only a low level of threat to major powers.

Second-tier major powers do not fear direct conquest by the United States for three reasons. First, their possession of nuclear weapons assures their existential security, which allows them to worry less about fluctuations in relative advantages in military capability and about the submerged imperial tendencies of the hegemon. Nuclear possession—even in small numbers—offers assurance to second-tier major powers that the hegemon will not directly threaten their existence as independent actors. Thus, at a minimum the existential deterrence offered by nuclear weapons provides these states with existential security.²⁹ Second, the United States has been careful not to intervene directly in secessionist movements in China, India, and Russia, which further assures these states that it does not want to challenge their territorial integrity. Although at times Washington may have encouraged them to negotiate with the insurgent groups, there is no evidence that it has offered material support to such groups. Third, all major powers, including the United States, seem to believe that the powerful force of nationalism and the asymmetric strategies of nationalist groups make permanent occupation of another state infeasible.³⁰

29. Existential deterrence is based on the notion that a nuclear state can deter an attacker with a small number of nuclear weapons, but that it does not need military capabilities that would guarantee mutual assured destruction. Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 23. For an alternate view on the absence of major power war since 1945, see John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

30. See T.V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 5–40; and Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001), pp. 93–128. Even during the Cold War, a strong norm against the forcible change of state borders and the creation of new states was able to

U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan made clear that even superpowers cannot invade and control smaller countries for too long in the face of intense local opposition.

BALANCING SINCE THE SEPTEMBER 11 TERRORIST ATTACKS

In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist strikes, the United States began to change its national strategy, which until then had emphasized its role as a defender of state sovereignty. The George W. Bush administration's strategic approach has become more offensive and quasi-imperial with the adoption of the preventive and preemptive doctrines that allow the United States to attack states that are suspected of developing or planning to use weapons of mass destruction. In a document titled *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, the administration asserts that the United States will not hesitate to act alone and, if necessary, "preemptively" to counter such threats.³¹ The doctrines are recycled from the 1992 draft defense planning guidelines prepared by some of the same individuals who held positions in George H.W. Bush's administration, which had proposed elevating the objective of U.S. defense strategy to "prevent the reemergence of a new rival."³² These doctrines, if fully implemented, will significantly challenge both sovereignty and territorial integrity norms.

Second-tier major powers (except the United States' closest ally, Britain) and a large number of smaller powers have become increasingly worried about the Bush administration's unilateralist policies—enshrined in its preemptive and preventive war doctrines—which, though mainly directed against "rogue states," nonetheless challenge the norm of territorial integrity. These powers are willing to accept the U.S. war on terrorism, especially against failed states such as Afghanistan, because they share the same overall objective. They supported U.S. military action in Afghanistan because, like the United States, they

emerge. For the basis of this norm, see Mark W. Zacher, "The Territorial Integrity Norm," *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 215–250.

31. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 2002), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>, p. 15.

32. The draft was prepared under the supervision of then Undersecretary for Defense Policy Paul Wolfowitz for the Department of Defense. The forty-six-page document was leaked by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Times*, forcing President Bush to order rewriting of its key passages. The document stated that the first key objective of U.S. defense policy should be to prevent the rise of hostile powers and ensure that they never "dominat[e] a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power." See Frontline, "The War behind Closed Doors: Excerpts from 1992 Draft 'Defense Planning Guidance,'" <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/iraq/etc/wolf.html>. In response to worldwide opposition, the Bush administration changed the wording of the document.

did not recognize the Taliban regime as a legitimate government.³³ But the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and the subsequent occupation, both of which were undertaken without the consent of the UN and justified on the flimsy pretext of the war on terrorism and faulty intelligence on WMD development, are antithetical to Westphalian notions of sovereignty. Second-tier major powers have begun to detect erosion in the liberal characteristics of U.S. hegemony, which had previously allowed allies some say over American policies, especially through NATO. If the United States succeeds in Iraq, these submerged quasi-imperial forces may gather strength within the U.S. political system. If it fails, the neoconservative actors who are pushing for an imperialist strategy may be discredited. In that sense, the affected second-tier major powers' decision not to support the U.S. war in Iraq is a response to their concerns about U.S. hegemony, as success could lead to more military ventures and the expansion of U.S. power globally.

To date, however, the U.S. occupation of Iraq has not been so threatening as to prompt the second-tier major power states to balance militarily against the United States. Instead, they have opted for low-cost diplomatic strategies that essentially seek to constrain U.S. power and dim the chances of the United States becoming a more threatening hegemon. In so doing, they and their supporters believe they can once again make U.S. power institution bound and sovereignty-norm bound.

Soft Balancing: Constraining U.S. Power by Other Means

Balance of power theory, rooted in hard-balancing strategies such as arms buildups and alliance formation, does not seem to explain current great power behavior. In the post-Cold War era, second-tier great power states have been pursuing limited, tacit, or indirect balancing strategies largely through coalition building and diplomatic bargaining within international institutions, short of formal bilateral and multilateral military alliances. These institutional and diplomatic strategies, which are intended to constrain U.S. power, constitute forms of soft balancing. Second-tier states that engage in soft balancing develop diplomatic coalitions or ententes with one another to balance a powerful state or a rising or potentially threatening power. The veto power that

33. For instance, even China, which is usually touchy on the question of sovereignty, seemed to have viewed the U.S. action as not "constituting a technical violation of national sovereignty." Aaron L. Friedberg, "11 September and the Future of Sino-American Relations," *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 2002), p. 35.

these states hold in the UN Security Council is pivotal to this strategy. By denying the UN stamp of approval on U.S.-led interventions, these states hope to deny legitimacy to policies they perceive as imperial and sovereignty limiting.

Soft-balancing behavior occurs under the following conditions: (1) the hegemon's power position and military behavior are of growing concern but do not yet pose a serious challenge to the sovereignty of second-tier powers; (2) the dominant state is a major source of public goods in both the economic and security areas that cannot simply be replaced; and (3) the dominant state cannot easily retaliate either because the balancing efforts of others are not overt or because they do not directly challenge its power position with military means. While pursuing soft balancing, second-tier states could engage the hegemon and develop institutional links with it to ward off possible retaliatory actions.³⁴

In the post-Cold War era, soft balancing has become an attractive strategy through which second-tier major powers are able to challenge the legitimacy of the interventionist policies of the United States and its allies both internationally and in U.S. domestic public opinion. There is an international consensus that foreign intervention, even for humanitarian purposes, needs the "collective legitimation" of the United Nations or a multilateral regional institution.³⁵ The success of a U.S.-led intervention, especially one for humanitarian purposes, depends on post-intervention peacekeeping and stabilization support offered by the UN and its members. The United States would find it difficult to obtain troops from other countries for postwar reconstruction efforts without the support of the UN Security Council.

When the United States has ignored or sidetracked the UN, as it did in the 1999 Kosovo conflict and the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, the interventions have become more cumbersome and less legitimate. In the Iraqi case, the absence of UN approval for the invasion led many potential allies to withhold troops. UN sanction of an intervention is deemed necessary for states to transcend the sovereignty norm temporarily, with the understanding that sovereignty will be restored once the source of the problem that led to the intervention is removed. The UN is unlikely to approve the permanent occupation of a country by the intervening power or the permanent loss of its sovereign existence.

34. See 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.

35. For this concept, see Inis L. Claude Jr., *The Changing United Nations* (New York: Random House, 1967), chap. 4; and Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

THE KOSOVO CRISIS, 1999

The diplomatic efforts of Russia and China prior to and during the U.S.-led NATO offensive against Yugoslavia in March 1999 offer a case of soft balancing. The NATO intervention took place in support of Kosovar Albanians being targeted by Serbian President Slobodan Milošević for ethnic cleansing. Both Russia and China expressed concern that the intervention could establish a potentially dangerous precedent, particularly within their own countries, where ethnic groups have been attempting to secede; examples include Chechnya, Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang.³⁶ The Kosovo intervention, they feared, would dilute the sovereignty norm and give *carte blanche* authority to the United States and its allies to meddle in the affairs of other countries in the name of humanitarian intervention. Russia was also opposed to the intervention because of its potential impact on Serbia's Orthodox population and President Boris Yeltsin's domestic standing. Russia was especially concerned about the unilateral nature of NATO's intervention against an independent state without UN sanction, as well as what it viewed as NATO's transformation from a Western European military alliance into one willing to deploy forces in places outside the alliance's article 5 collective-defense mandate.³⁷

Although in hindsight these concerns appear exaggerated, at the time of the intervention, Russians had strong reasons to compare their situation in Chechnya with that of Yugoslavia in Kosovo. The Russian leadership feared that Western support for Albanian Muslim separatists in Kosovo would encourage similar movements by Muslim groups inside Russia and other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The widespread Russian view was that NATO instigated the conflict by supporting the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in an effort to expand its military presence in the Balkans. The Russian leadership detected what it believed to be similarities between the KLA and Chechen rebels: both represented local Muslim majorities persecuting a Slav minority; both emerged out of the breakup of multinational federations; and both employed terrorism as their principal means to wage war on legitimate states. To the Russians, both movements carried territorial ambitions beyond their immediate borders. The Russian military feared that Kosovo could emerge as a model for NATO intervention in similar conflicts within former

36. The Russian posture was driven by the assumption that Kosovo was Yugoslavia's internal affair and that centrifugal forces within Russia dictated caution. Oleg Levitin, "Inside Moscow's Kosovo Muddle," *Survival*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring 2000), p. 131; and Simon Saradzhyan, "Russia Won't Back Down on Kosovo," *Moscow Times*, October 8, 1998, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 136.

37. Ekaterina A. Stepanova, "Explaining Russia's Dissention on Kosovo," PONARS Policy Memo 57 (Washington, D.C.: Program on New Approaches to Russian Security, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 1999).

Soviet republics and Russia, especially in the context of the appeals by Georgia and Azerbaijan for NATO intervention to quell their internal conflicts.³⁸

In addition to its efforts to stall the intervention through public statements, Russia engaged in soft-balancing diplomacy at the UN with the aid of China and on its own in European multilateral institutions. Although they succeeded in preventing UN approval for the intervention, they failed to prevent NATO from taking military action, largely because it had the support of almost all of the other European states, including former Warsaw Pact allies of Russia. These actors saw the Milošević regime as a larger threat to peace and stability in Europe than a U.S./NATO-led intervention and military presence in the region. The desire to prevent another Bosnia-type situation, where Serb forces had committed ethnic cleansing of Muslims, was deep in the calculations of the European states, a concern that did not strike a chord with the Russians.

Russia continued its soft-balancing efforts even after NATO's aerial bombing had begun. Moscow suspended its participation in the Russia-NATO Founding Act and the Partnership for Peace Program; it withdrew its military mission from Brussels and suspended talks on setting up a NATO information office in Moscow; it attempted to improve its military ties with CIS allies; and it conducted joint military exercises with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan.³⁹ Further, Russia put diplomatic pressure on the United States and its allies to accept its proposal to designate the Group of Eight (G-8) as the venue for political discussions on the conflict. This led to a G-8 meeting in Bonn on May 21, 1999, that resulted in the adoption of a protocol for negotiating an end to the conflict.⁴⁰

Despite actions that caused temporary fissures in Russian-Western relations, Moscow engaged diplomatically to end the conflict and, in fact, helped to convince Milošević to capitulate. The process began when, on April 14, President Yeltsin dispatched former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin to serve as special envoy to Yugoslavia. Chernomyrdin worked with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland to gain Milošević's acceptance of NATO's cease-fire conditions. Russia also became involved in the postwar settlement when it sent troops to occupy Kosovo's Priština airport, an action that provoked a tense standoff between Russian and NATO troops. Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev was dispatched to Hel-

38. For these considerations, see Oksana Antonenko, "Russia, NATO, and European Security after Kosovo," *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter 1999–2000), pp. 124–144.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

40. Rebecca J. Johnson, "Russian Responses to Crisis Management in the Balkans," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 298–299.

sinki where, on June 19, he reached an agreement with NATO officials according to which nearly 3,600 Russian troops would be deployed in Kosovo as part of NATO's KFOR mission, although they would remain under the jurisdiction of Russian commanders.⁴¹ According to one analyst, Russian persuasion was perhaps more crucial in forcing Milošević to acquiesce than his fear of an impending NATO ground invasion.⁴²

The Kosovo crisis was partially instrumental in Russia's approval of a new national security concept in January 2000. A few months later, in April the Russian government introduced a new military doctrine that places high emphasis on the role of nuclear weapons in protecting Russian sovereignty, territorial integrity, and influence in the region. The new doctrine states that although the threat of direct military aggression against Russia has declined, external and internal threats to its security, as well as to that of its allies, persist. Among these threats are territorial claims by other countries, intervention in Russia's internal affairs, attempts to ignore Russia's interests in resolving international security problems, the buildup of forces in adjacent regions, the expansion of military blocs, and the introduction of foreign troops into other states in violation of the UN charter.⁴³

China also opposed the U.S.-led NATO invasion of Kosovo, arguing that it lacked UN approval.⁴⁴ Throughout the crisis, China sought to uphold the sovereignty norm, which it viewed as essential to "counter U.S. hegemony in the post-Cold War era."⁴⁵ To China, sovereignty should remain an inviolable principle to protect the weak; NATO's new intervention strategy, for reasons unrelated to the defense of its member states, was a violation of this principle.

China initially confined its soft-balancing efforts to a veto threat in the UN Security Council, in conjunction with Russia, if the United States and its Euro-

41. *Ibid.*, p. 300.

42. Steven L. Burg, "Coercive Diplomacy in the Balkans: The Use of Force in Bosnia and Kosovo," in Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2003), p. 100.

43. For these documents, see Alexei G. Arbatov, *The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya*, Marshall Center Papers No. 2 (Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2000), <http://www.eng.yabloko.ru/Brooks/Arbatov/rus-military.html>.

44. Evan A. Feigenbaum, "China's Challenge to Pax Americana," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Summer 2001), pp. 31-43.

45. Russell Ong, *China's Security Interests in the Post-Cold War Era* (London: Curzon, 2002), p. 142. According to one Chinese analyst, the U.S. intervention in Kosovo was part of a "python strategy" of using "its thickest body to coil tightly around the world and prevent any country from possessing the ability to stand up to it." Cheng Guangzhong, "Kosovo War and the U.S. 'Python' Strategy," *Ta Kung Pao* (Hong Kong), June 2, 1999, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/cheng.htm>.

pean allies introduced a resolution authorizing the use of force. On March 26 Beijing and Moscow put forward a resolution in the Security Council calling for an immediate halt to the aerial bombing, but it was rejected by a vote of twelve to three.⁴⁶ After the mistaken U.S. bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade on May 8, Beijing cut off all military exchanges and human rights dialogues with the United States and stepped up its strategic collaboration with Moscow, including the activation of a hotline.⁴⁷ Beijing desisted, however, from taking any concrete hard-balancing actions during the crisis.

Both Russia and China continued their soft-balancing efforts even after the Kosovo crisis was brought to an end. Russia, in particular, attempted to enlist India and Central Asian states in this pursuit. In the spring of 1999, Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov called for the formation of a "strategic triangle" against NATO, consisting of Russia, China, and India.⁴⁸ President Vladimir Putin visited India in October 2000 and signed a declaration of strategic partnership, among other agreements—one of which expresses both countries' opposition "to the unilateral use or threat of use of force in violation of the UN charter, and to intervention in the internal affairs of other states, including under the guise of humanitarian intervention."⁴⁹ The proposed Russia-China-India alliance ultimately failed to materialize, as the principal powers began to perceive the likelihood of "potential American military intervention in their internal wars of secession in Kashmir, Chechnya and Xinjiang" as extremely low.⁵⁰

On July 16, 2001, Russia and China signed the Treaty of Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation, which calls for "joint actions to offset a perceived U.S. hegemonism" and the rise of militant Islam in Asia. The treaty also includes agreements on the demarcation of their disputed 4,300-kilometer

46. "Security Council Rejects Russian Halt to Bombing," *CNN.com*, March 26, 1999. See also Voice of Russia, http://www.vor.ru/Kosovo/news_25_29_03_99.html; and M.A. Smith, "Russian Thinking on European Security after Kosovo" (Surrey, U.K.: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, July 1999), <http://www.da.mod.uk/CSRC/documents/Russian/F65>.

47. Yu Bin, "NATO's Unintended Consequence: A Deeper Strategic Partnership . . . or More," *Comparative Connections* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 1999), p. 69.

48. Tyler Marshall, "Anti-NATO Axis Poses Threat, Experts Say," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 1999.

49. John Cheriyan, "A Strategic Partnership," *Frontline*, October 14–27, 2000, quoted in Julie M. Rahm, "Russia, China, India: A New Strategic Triangle for a New Cold War?" *Parameters*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter 2001–02), pp. 87–97. The Russian efforts continued in 2002 when Putin visited China and India. "Putin Keen on Triangle," *Hindu* (Chennai), December 9, 2002.

50. Raju G.C. Thomas, "South Asian Security Balance in a Western Dominant World," in Paul Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power*, pp. 322, 324.

border; a substantial arms sale; and the supply of technology, energy, and raw materials by Russia to China.⁵¹ In June 2001 Russia, China, and four Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—announced the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a regional association designed to confront Islamic fundamentalism and promote economic development.

The Kosovo case shows that although soft-balancing efforts by second-tier major powers may not prevent an intervention, they can still influence the post-intervention settlement. Strictly speaking, although NATO's military intervention in Kosovo constituted a violation of the Westphalian sovereignty norm, there was no intention to dismember Yugoslavia further. In the cease-fire agreement, Kosovo was retained as part of the Yugoslav state. Moreover, NATO members did not want to permanently occupy Yugoslavia or Kosovo. The peacekeeping mission was expected to be temporary and to bring stability to the region. Thus, the security of the two concerned major powers, Russia and China, was challenged in only a limited and indirect way. In the absence of a direct threat, the formation of a coalition to balance against the United States and NATO was unnecessary. Kosovo was a limited operation meant to confront a threatening regime in Central Europe. The intervention was not intended either to radically alter the state system in Central or Eastern Europe or to threaten the physical security and welfare of the other major powers. Moreover, NATO's actions did not create a precedent for similar interventions in places such as Chechnya or Xinjiang; nor did it create a norm that supports secession.

THE IRAQ WAR, 2002–03

The 2002–03 lead-up to the invasion of Iraq provides another example of soft balancing by second-tier major powers against unilateral U.S. military intervention. The invasion was preceded by six months of intense efforts by the United States and Britain to gain the support of the UN Security Council to launch an attack. During this period, a coalition led by France, Germany, and Russia emerged as a strong opponent of U.S. intentions to invade a sovereign country. The opposing states engaged in intense diplomatic balancing at the UN, threatening to veto any resolution that would have authorized the use of

51. Ariel Cohen, "The Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty: A Strategic Shift in Eurasia," Backgrounder 1459 (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, July 18, 2001). See also Igor S. Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2002); and J.L. Black, *Vladimir Putin and the New World Order: Looking East, Looking West?* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), chap. 11.

force. In the end, the United States launched the attack without the backing of a UN resolution and thus without the international legitimacy it had earlier sought.

In the fall of 2002, when the United States attempted to gain the support of the Security Council for the invasion, the second-tier major power states tried to block UN approval. On September 12 President Bush spoke before the General Assembly, seeking a resolution to take action against Iraq for its failure to disarm. On October 22 France and Russia announced their strong opposition to the proposed resolution, arguing that it would implicitly allow the United States to use force.⁵² After several weeks of deliberations and failed efforts to gain consensus, the United States formally introduced a resolution to the UN on October 25, 2002, that would have implicitly authorized the use of force. In response to U.S. pressure, however, on November 7, 2002, the Security Council unanimously approved resolution 1441, which found Iraq in “material breach” of earlier resolutions; established a new regime for inspections; and warned of “serious consequences” in the event of Baghdad’s noncompliance. The resolution did not, however, explicitly threaten the use of force. Meanwhile, in a concession to France, Germany, and Russia, the United States agreed to return to the Security Council for further discussions before taking military action. At the same time, however, the Bush administration argued that resolution 1441 was an endorsement for such action. Opponents asserted that the resolution diminished the chances of war by giving the Security Council the key role in sanctioning the use of force and allowing UN inspectors more time to determine whether Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, as alleged by the Bush administration.⁵³

France, Germany, and Russia, joined by China, demanded more time for the weapons inspectors to complete their work. Most outspoken were the French. Dominique de Villepin, France’s foreign minister, told reporters on January 20, “If war is the only way to resolve this problem, we are going down a dead end.” At the Security Council, several foreign ministers argued that war “would spawn more acts around the globe”; in the words of Germany’s Joschka Fischer, it would have “disastrous consequences for long-term re-

52. Colum Lynch, “France and Russia Raise New Objections to Iraq Plan,” *Washington Post*, October 23, 2002.

53. Russia’s ambassador to the UN, Sergey Lavrov, stated in the Security Council that “the Resolution deflects the direct threat of war”; and according to France’s UN ambassador, Jean-David Levitte, “as a result of intensive negotiations, the resolution that has just been adopted does not contain any provision about automatic use of force.” Both quoted in Colum Lynch, “Security Council Resolution Tells Iraq It Must Disarm; Baghdad Ordered to Admit Inspectors or Face Consequences,” *Washington Post*, November 10, 2002.

gional stability.”⁵⁴ Despite this intense opposition, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell made the case for invasion before the Security Council on January 21 and February 5, 2003, asserting that Iraq still possessed weapons of mass destruction in breach of resolution 1441 and earlier agreements. On February 10 France, Germany, and Russia issued a joint statement calling for the strengthening of the weapons inspection process, the dispatch of additional inspectors with increased surveillance technology at their disposal, and a concerted effort to disarm Iraq through peaceful means.⁵⁵

On February 14, 2003, the UN’s chief weapons inspector, Hans Blix, reported to the Security Council that no evidence of weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq, although many items of concern were unaccounted for. On February 24 the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain introduced a resolution in the Security Council declaring that, under chapter 7 of the UN charter (which deals with threats to peace), Iraq had failed its final opportunity to comply fully with resolution 1441. Nevertheless, France, Germany, and Russia increased their opposition to a U.S. invasion, especially to the new U.S. aim of achieving regime change in Iraq. Also on February 24, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder met in Paris to declare their opposition to the U.S. resolution and plans to place a deadline on Iraq for compliance. The two leaders proposed giving the inspectors at least four more months to complete their work.⁵⁶ At a meeting of their foreign ministers on March 5, France, Germany, and Russia issued a statement that read in part: “We will not let a proposed resolution pass that would authorize the use of force.” The next day China declared that it was taking the same position.⁵⁷ In spite of these soft-balancing efforts, the United States continued its military buildup in the Persian Gulf.

France and Germany also used NATO to engage in soft balancing against the United States by blocking U.S. attempts to gain the alliance’s involvement in the war. On January 16, 2003, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz approached NATO to request its support in the event the United States went to war. Washington wanted NATO to send AWACS surveillance planes and Patriot antimissile batteries in the defense of Turkey, a NATO member with a 218-mile border with Iraq whose bases U.S. officials were planning

54. Quoted in Glenn Kessler and Colum Lynch, “France Vows to Block Resolution on Iraq War,” *Washington Post*, January 21, 2003.

55. Peter Finn, “U.S.-Europe Rifts Widen over Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 11, 2003.

56. Peter Finn, “Chirac, Schroeder Make Counter Proposal,” *Washington Post*, February 25, 2003.

57. For a chronology of events, see Michael J. Glennon, “Why the Security Council Failed,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (May/June 2003), pp. 16–35.

to use as launching pads for possible air and land attacks on northern Iraqi targets. The United States also wanted to employ NATO naval forces to guard approaches to the Mediterranean, through which U.S. warships and cargo vessels would have to pass en route to the Persian Gulf, and to enlist NATO troops to help guard bases in Europe and other strategic areas.⁵⁸ On January 23 and February 12, 2003, opponents of the U.S. invasion plan vetoed a U.S.-backed proposal for NATO to support Turkey in the event of war, arguing that such support was premature before the UN Security Council reviewed the weapons inspectors' report. In the opponents' view, an endorsement of this proposal would facilitate a "rush toward hostilities" and "invite the conclusion that the alliance has accepted the inevitability of war."⁵⁹ Ultimately, however, they relented, with the knowledge that NATO's unity required support for a key member state such as Turkey in the event of an attack.

President Chirac also used the European Union as a forum for mobilizing the antiwar coalition. He pressured the EU to endorse a statement giving more time and resources to efforts to disarm Iraq peacefully; however, French opposition to allow the thirteen Eastern European states waiting for EU membership to speak on the issue led to denunciations by these states for being treated as "second-class citizens."⁶⁰ France pursued its opposition in other forums as well. On February 21, 2003, at a summit in Paris of fifty-two African countries—including three nonpermanent members of the UN Security Council (Angola, Cameroon, and Guinea)—France's opposition to military intervention in Iraq was endorsed.⁶¹

The French position reflected France's general foreign policy orientation. Since the end of the Cold War, France has championed the creation of a multipolar system in which Europe acts as a pole to balance against the United States. Given the military weaknesses of the EU, France has devoted considerable energy to soft-balancing measures such as using international institutions—especially the UN Security Council, NATO, and the EU—to constrain the U.S. unilateral exercise of power. Although France's primary apprehension in early 2003 hinged on the fear that a U.S. invasion of Iraq would further destabilize the Middle East and increase terrorism in the West, the na-

58. Bradley Graham, "U.S. Official Appeals to NATO for Military Support," *Washington Post*, January 17, 2003.

59. Keith B. Richburg, "NATO Blocked on Iraq Decision," *Washington Post*, January 23, 2003; and Peter Finn, "NATO Still at Imasse on Assisting Turkey," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2003.

60. Keith B. Richburg, "E.U. Unity on Iraq Proves Short-lived; France Again Threatens to Veto U.N. Resolution Mandating Force," *Washington Post*, February 19, 2003.

61. Glen Frankel, "Chirac Fortifies Antiwar Caucus; 52 African Leaders Endorse French Stance toward Iraq," *Washington Post*, February 22, 2003.

tional leadership's overriding concern has been the future international order. In President Chirac's view, "The Security Council and the European Union are becoming counterweights to the United States in the post-Cold War, post-September 11 world—and in each of those bodies, France has a say greater than its size or military capability."⁶²

Two days after the start of the war, President Chirac vowed to block any UN resolution authorizing the United States and the United Kingdom to administer postwar Iraq.⁶³ At a meeting in St. Petersburg on April 11, 2003, Chirac, Schröder, and Putin issued a call for a "broad effort under United Nations control to rebuild the shattered country but warned that the immediate tasks of quelling anarchy and preventing a civil catastrophe fell on the United States and Britain."⁶⁴

As discussed earlier, Germany also voiced opposition to the war, despite its greater dependency than, for example, France on the United States for security and trade. Chancellor Schröder successfully used the Iraq crisis to win reelection. In campaign rallies, he called Bush's policy an "adventure."⁶⁵ Unlike the Bush administration's preference for unilateral intervention, Germany has increasingly opted for a multilateralist approach toward regional challengers. In the Iraqi case, the Germans feared that the U.S. intervention would be a distraction from the fight against global terrorism while radicalizing anti-Western opinion in the Middle East.⁶⁶ The Germans also view the UN Security Council as the legitimate authority to sanction the use of force, preferably police force.⁶⁷ The Bush administration's rationale for preemptive and preventive military strikes without UN sanction, based on anticipatory self-defense, has been less than convincing to Germany and many other European states.

From the perspective of France, Germany, and Russia, as well as a majority of other states in the international system, the U.S. intervention in Iraq posed a limited yet important challenge to the Westphalian sovereignty norm. In the

62. Keith B. Richburg, "French See Iraq Crisis Imperiling Rule of Law; Concern Focuses on Future International Order," *Washington Post*, March 6, 2003, p. A19.

63. Robert J. McCartney, "France Opposes New U.N. Vote," *Washington Post*, March 22, 2003.

64. Michael Wines, "3 War Critics Want U.N. Effort to Rebuild but Say Allies Must Act Now," *New York Times*, April 12, 2003.

65. Peter Finn, "U.S.-Style Campaign with Anti-U.S. Theme: German Gain by Opposing Iraq Attack," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2002.

66. Klaus Larres, "Mutual Incomprehension: U.S.-German Value Gaps beyond Iraq," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 23–42; and Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Gulf War: The German Resistance," *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring 2003), pp. 99–116.

67. David B. Rivkin Jr. and Lee A. Casey, "Leashing the Dogs of War," *National Interest*, Fall 2003, pp. 57–69; and Joachim Krause, "Multilateralism: Behind European Views," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 43–59.

perception of the concerned states, the Bush administration's case against Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and terrorist groups allegedly linked to al-Qaida was less than convincing for at least three reasons. First, they suspected that the real U.S. motive was to assert power in the region and to use Iraq as a source for its increasing oil demands. Second, they assumed that U.S. success in Iraq would increase the Bush administration's appetite for further military actions in the region against other states (e.g., Iran). Third, they wanted to restrain the United States from undertaking unilateral military action by using the veto in international institutions. Unlike the Kosovo operation, which received support from France, Germany, and other NATO members, no formal regional alliance backed the intervention against Iraq. Even without UN approval, the Kosovo intervention had partial legitimacy: it was a NATO undertaking to reestablish regional order. The intervention in Iraq, on the other hand, was essentially a U.S.-led operation, although it did receive support from the United Kingdom and other U.S. allies, including Spain, Italy, Japan, and Australia. Traditional U.S. allies such as Canada and Belgium opposed the war and refused to lend assistance by way of troops and matériel. To them, the Bush administration was "making a claim to the sovereign right to intervene to disarm and carry out regime change in other countries, subject to no external restraint."⁶⁸

Still, opposition to the U.S.-led invasion by second-tier major powers and their allies did not result in hard balancing against the United States. The coordination of diplomatic positions at the UN and in other forums (e.g., NATO and the EU), as well as summit diplomacy involving national leaders, were the main soft-balancing tactics used by the principal second-ranking powers. These efforts did not prevent the United States from launching the offensive, but they did help to reduce the legitimacy of the U.S. military action. They also made it more difficult for the United States to gain peacekeeping forces from other countries, as they demanded UN approval before dispatching their troops. Thus, in the case of Iraq, U.S. power has been partially constrained by the soft-balancing efforts of second-tier major powers. The less-than-successful outcome of the war and the growing insurgency against the occupation make it increasingly unlikely that, at least in the short term, the United States will undertake similar regime-changing military actions against Iran, another regional challenger pursuing nuclear weapons and a member of President Bush's "axis of evil."

68. William Pfaff, "The Iraq Issue: The Real Issue Is American Power," *International Herald Tribune*, March 14, 2003.

Despite the opposition of France, Germany, and Russia, the United States invaded Iraq using overwhelming force and toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein within three weeks of the start of major combat operations. After the war, the three states continued their opposition by challenging U.S. efforts to gain UN support for the stabilization of the country and the legitimization of the occupation. Their soft-balancing efforts culminated in a partial victory in June 2004, when the United States agreed to adopt UN resolution 1546/2004, which returned partial sovereignty to the Iraqi government and took away some U.S. powers in the day-to-day running of the country, except in security matters. The unanimous approval of the resolution was the result of diplomatic bargaining among the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Russia. According to the resolution, the U.S.-led coalition agreed to end its occupation of Iraq before June 30, 2004, when an interim Iraqi government would assume responsibility for, among other things, the “convening of a national conference reflecting the diversity of Iraqi society, [and the] holding of direct democratic elections to a transitional national assembly, no later than 31 January 2005.” This transitional government will draft a permanent constitution leading to a democratically elected government by December 31, 2005.⁶⁹

Conclusion

The analysis in this article suggests that in the post–Cold War era, second-tier major power states have been increasingly resorting to soft-balancing strategies to counter the growing military might and unilateralist tendencies of the United States without harming their economic ties with it. They are opting for institutionalist and diplomatic means to balance the power of the United States, although the success of such strategies remains less than certain. This does not make soft balancing a futile strategy, as the success of hard balancing is also uncertain, given the difficulty in determining when balancing has or has not occurred. If, however, the hegemonic power in response to soft-balancing efforts tempers its aggressive behavior, then one can deduce that the efforts by second-tier major power states partially succeeded.

Balance of power theory has traditionally focused on military balancing as a way to restrain the power of a hegemonic actor. This perspective held true for the European era and the Cold War period, but in the post–Cold War world, it has become a difficult strategy for second-ranking great power states to pur-

69. Brian Knowlton, “UN Accord Emerging on Iraqi Governance,” *IHT.com*, June 7, 2004.

sue. Hard balancing no longer has an appeal for second-tier powers because they do not believe, at least as of now, that the United States is a threat to their sovereign existence. They are, however, worried about the unilateralism and interventionist tendencies in U.S. foreign policy, especially since September 11, 2001, and they have resorted to less threatening soft-balancing means to achieve their objective of constraining the power of the United States without unnecessarily provoking retribution. Thus, if balancing implies restraining the power and threatening behavior of the hegemonic actor, strategies other than military buildups and alliance formation should be included in balance of power theory.

The Bush administration's national security strategy, which was adopted following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, has challenged some of the notions of second-ranking major powers about the impact of U.S. policies on their vital interests. To date, however, they have not resorted to hard balancing because none of these states fears a loss of its existential security. Still, they are concerned about the increasing imperial tendencies in U.S. strategy. The conquest of Iraq was a quasi-imperial act planned and executed by a group of ideologically oriented U.S. policymakers who operated on the basis of misinformation and miscalculations. Although some administration officials sought to pursue an overt imperial strategy, the U.S. offensive against Iraq has been primarily confined to deposing Saddam Hussein and transforming the country to suit U.S. interests in the region. If this strategy is extended to other states, however, it could raise fears that the United States is on an imperial mission.

The policy implications of these changes in world politics are abundant. Hard balancing against U.S. military power or threatening behavior is not automatic, as realists would claim. It is very much tied to the security and foreign policies of the hegemonic state. If the United States pursues its foreign policy in less threatening ways, it can avoid the rise of hard-balancing coalitions. As long as the United States abstains from empire building that challenges the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a large number of states, a hard-balancing coalition is unlikely to emerge either regionally or globally. If, however, it pursues empire building, it would no longer be a status quo power, but a revisionist state bent on forcefully altering the international order. The constraints on the United States against an overt imperial strategy are many, but the war on terrorism and the need for oil could yet push it further in this direction. An overt imperial strategy, if adopted, would eventually cause great friction in the international system, built around the independent existence of sovereign states, especially major power actors.