

Chapter 2

Balance of Power and Soft Balancing

2.1 The Evolution of Balance of Power Theory

Balance of power occupies a central role in international relations (IR) theory and especially in various schools of realist thought (Ikenberry 2010, p. 48; Levy 2004, p. 34; Paul 2005, p. 51; Yesiltas 2009, p. 28).¹ Not surprisingly, it has been the subject of sophisticated criticism aiming to knock it off its elevated pedestal (Kaufman et al. 2007).² Scholars have even concluded that it “does not deserve pride of place in international theorizing” (Kaufman et al. 2007, p. 246). However, even attempts at censure offer a backhanded compliment, in the sense that balance of power has enjoyed a resurgence of attention and scrutiny since the beginning of the twenty-first century (Zala 2010, p. 246).

An antique lineage is often bestowed upon balance of power, Hans Morgenthau having pronounced it “as old as political history itself” (Morgenthau 1973, p. 186; as cited in Little 2007a, p. 96).³ Thinking along, the concept’s lines has been traced to Kautiliya’s *Arthashastra* (Seabury 1965, pp. 7–18). Demosthenes’ oration for the Megapolitans is usually cited primarily because of his pleading to his fellow Athenian citizens “not to abandon the Megapolitans, nor indeed any other of the weaker states to the stronger” (as cited in Seabury 1965, p. 28). Polybius cautioned that “we should never contribute to the attainment of one state of a power so preponderant,

¹ A succinct overview can also be found in Ifestos (2003, pp. 344–355). It is part of a much larger study that deserves an English translation. There can be no doubt that realist theorists have consistently grappled with the balance of power. However, for an argument that the concept is not necessarily central to realism, see Mowle and Sacko (2007, pp. 37–38).

² The scholars in this edited volume take full advantage of a World History approach, eschew Euro-centrism, and examine the purported significance of balance of power throughout several eras and regions. Also see the synopsis of their arguments in Wohlforth et al. (2007). For further significant criticisms of the primarily realist understanding of balance of power theory, see Hui (2005); Nexon (2009) and Schroeder (2003). The charge of a Eurocentric bias should not be taken lightly. Levy (2004, pp. 39–41).

³ On this point, see also Little (2007a, p. 5). It should also be noted that throughout this study references will be made only to the 1973 edition of Hans Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* because it was the last one that he personally supervised (Little 2007a, pp. 13–14).

that none dare dispute it even for their acknowledged rights” (as cited in Levy 2004, p. 32). In his essay, *Of the Balance of Power*, David Hume surveys ancient Greek and Roman history, takes particular note of Demosthenes, and concludes that the “maxim of preserving the balance of power is founded so much on common sense and obvious reasoning that it is impossible it could altogether have escaped antiquity” (Hume 1987, p. 337).

Upon closer scrutiny, however, Herbert Butterfield is almost certainly correct in arguing that balance of power is primarily a modern concept (Butterfield 1966, p. 133). It evolved in an intellectually and conceptually more systematic manner during the Renaissance (Haslam 2002, p. 91; Sheehan 1996, p. 29). Philippe de Commines wrote “the first public description...between 1488 and 1501” (Haslam 2002, p. 91).⁴ For Giovanni Botero, balance of power was in accordance with “natural order and the light of reason” (as cited in Sheehan, 1996, p. 35)⁵, while Niccolò Machiavelli counseled:

The prince who holds a country differing in the above respects [language, customs, or laws] ought to make himself the head and defender of his less powerful neighbours, and to weaken the more powerful. Amongst them, taking care that no foreigner as powerful as himself shall, by any accident, get a footing there; for it will always happen that such a one will be introduced by those who are discontented. (as cited in Gulick 1955, pp. 43–44)

Machiavelli’s younger contemporary and close friend, Francesco Guicciardini, offers a fuller and more colorful presentation and understanding of balance of power.⁶ In a memorable and justly celebrated passage, Guicciardini reflects on politics among the powers of the Italian Peninsula:

Since they were moved by mutual jealousy ... they were unremitting in the watch that they kept on one another’s movements, deranging one another’s plans whenever they thought that a partner was going to increase his dominion or prestige. And all this did not make the peace any less stable, but rather made the powers more alert and more ready to bring about the immediate extinction of all those sparks that might start a fire. Everything was so disposed and counter-balanced that not only was there no fear of change in the present—it was difficult to imagine what counsels or dynasties or armaments could succeed in disturbing such a peaceful order in the future. (as cited in Butterfield 1966, p. 137)⁷

Balance of power thinking was also in harmony with the more “mechanistic” philosophy that eventually emerged as intellectually dominant in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Gulick 1955, p. 24; Levy 2003, p. 33; Morgenthau 1973, p. 203). The so-called Age of Newton emphasized the law-based order and automatic responses in nature, economics and inevitably, international politics.⁸ Francis Bacon, writing about the conduct and statesmanship of monarchs, concluded that as regards:

⁴ The relevant book by Philippe de Commines was eventually published in 1524. See *ibid.*

⁵ On Botero and balance of power see also Haslam (2002, pp. 94–95).

⁶ On Machiavelli and Guicciardini, see Gilbert (1965).

⁷ On Guicciardini and balance of power, see also Little (2007a, pp. 43–44). For the dissemination of Guicciardini’s work to sixteenth-century England, see Sheehan (1996, p. 35).

⁸ Despite giving his name to the age, however, Isaac Newton ultimately represents a more complex intellectual case. See for example, Rée (2013).

Their neighbours: there can no general rule be given (the occasions are so variable), save one, whichever holdeth, which is, that princes do *keep due sentinel* that none of their neighbours do outgrow so (by increase of territory, by embracing of trade, by approaches, or the like) as they become more able to annoy them that they were. (Bacon 1985, p. 94; emphasis added)

For reasons among this line of thinking, Elizabeth I was highly praised by William Camden “as the ‘Umpire between the Spaniards, the French, and the Estates,’ [As a result] ‘England was the Holder of the Balance’” (Camden 1688, p. 233; as cited in Joffe 2013, p. 237). However, a few decades later, George Savile, the first Marquis of Halifax, bemoaned the fact that England had failed to balance the power of France and Spain (Raleigh 1970, pp. 87–89); while Frederick, the Great, warned of the grave consequences of when “the policy and the prudence of the princes of Europe lose sight of the maintenance of a just balance among the dominant powers” (as cited in Morgenthau 1973, p. 189).

In retrospect, it makes eminent sense that the reasoning of the Age of Newton eventually led to the “golden age” of balance of power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹ During this period, the Great Powers of Europe enjoyed a dominant global position and also shared (and apparently internalized), significant cultural, political, and ideological assumptions (Gulick 1955, p. 185, 298–299). Not surprisingly, the era’s most prominent statesmen and politicians made calculations and provided analysis on the basis of the balance of power. To offer an example, Edmund Burke argued that “As long as those two princes (the King of Prussia and the German Emperor) are at variance, so long the liberties of Germany are safe” (as cited in Morgenthau 1973, p. 176). This framework for understanding international politics contributed to attempts to achieve almost pan-European balanced outcomes not only through war but also through a series of massive diplomatic efforts centering around various Congresses (the 1814–1815 Congress of Vienna represents the most prominent of these efforts; King 2008; Kissinger 1973; Nicolson 2009; Zamoyski 2007).

In the twentieth century, thinking in a balance of power mode among political practitioners did not disappear. For example, it played a prominent role in the Crowe Memorandum that influenced British policy toward Germany before and even after the First World War.¹⁰ Written on 1 January 1907 by the Foreign Office official Eyre Crowe,¹¹ it is according to Henry Kissinger, “a classic document... at a level of analysis never reached by any document of post-Bismarck Germany” (Kissinger 1994, p. 192; as cited in Dunn 2013, p. 48 n. 4). Crowe argues that:

History shows that the danger threatening the independence of this or that nation has generally arisen, at least in part, out of the momentary predominance of a neighboring State at once militarily powerful, economically efficient and ambitious to extend its frontiers or

⁹ The phrase “golden age” belongs to Hans Morgenthau and is cited in Sheehan (1996, p. 97).

¹⁰ Its full title was “Memorandum on the Present State of Relations with France and Germany” and was published in 1928. It is reproduced in Dunn (2013, p. 97, 220–253). On the Crowe Memorandum, see especially Clark (2013, p. 97, 162–165); Dunn (2013, pp. 47–51); and MacMillan (2013, pp. 126–127).

¹¹ Eyre Crowe was, in 1907, senior clerk in the Western Department. He eventually became Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, a position that he held between 1920 and 1925.

spread is influence, the danger being directly proportionate to the danger of its power and efficiency and to the spontaneity or “inevitableness” of its ambitions. The only check on the abuse of political predominance derived from such a position has always consisted in the opposition of an equally formidable rival, or of a combination of several countries forming leagues of defence. The equilibrium established by such a grouping of forces is technically known as the balance of power, and it has become almost an historical truism to identify England’s secular power with the maintenance of this balance by throwing her weight now in this scale and now in that, but ever on the side opposed to the political dictatorship of the strongest single State or group at a given time. If this view of British policy is correct, the opposition into which England must inevitably be driven to any country aspiring to such a dictatorship, assumes almost the form of a *law of nature*. (Dunn 2013, p. 234; emphasis added)

In a significant speech given in 1936, echoing Crowe’s arguments, Winston S. Churchill reflected upon English diplomacy during the previous centuries. He concluded that:

For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating Power on the Continent, and particularly to prevent the Low Countries falling into the hands of such a power. (Churchill 1985, p. 186)¹²

During the same century, balance of power received a sophisticated treatment on the theoretical level through the work of IR scholars such as Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer (Morgenthau 1973, pp. 167–221; Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001).¹³ Morgenthau deals with the concept on the basis of an approach steeped in historical reflection as has often been the case with realist thinkers (Tziampiris 2009a, pp. 84–85).¹⁴ He considers the concept as the “natural and inevitable outgrowth of the struggle of power” (Morgenthau 1973, p. 186; as cited in Little 2007b, p. 138). It is at the very heart of international politics and modern warfare: “Most of the wars that have been fought since the beginning of the modern state system have their origin in the balance of power” (Morgenthau 1973, p. 210).

There are several factors that both mitigate and complicate the expected conflictual consequences of balance of power. Morgenthau seems to allow in his analysis for the existence of a certain “social dynamic...(that) helps produce a more stable

¹² Possibly hinting at the importance of Churchill’s speech, Hans Morgenthau opts to include a lengthy passage that represents one of the most extensive citations in his entire academic output Morgenthau (1973, pp. 196–197).

¹³ Of course, other important scholars also grappled with the balance-of-power concept. It is worth noting, for example, that for Herbert Butterfield “the institution of the balance of power entails the recognition of the legitimacy of all the states within the international order, and the fundamental premise of the balance is that no single state should be allowed to have such a predominance of power that it can threaten either the international order or the independence of the member states. Butterfield writes that balancing requires that ‘you should check the aggressor before he actually emerge[s]; in fact, what you ought to attack are the conditions that make for aggression’... Butterfield asserts that that ‘even if a state has been virtuous hitherto, a certain position of power—a position in which the state knows that it can act with impunity—will in fact produce a corrupting effect’” (McIntyre 2011, pp. 141–142).

¹⁴ For close readings and analyses of Hans Morgenthau’s understanding of balance of power, see Claude (1962, pp. 25–37); Little (2007a, pp. 91–127) and Little (2007b). For an excellent intellectual biography of Morgenthau, see Frei (2001).

and self-consciously managed international system” (Little 2007b, p. 139).¹⁵ Furthermore, he explicitly allows for mistakes and miscalculations on behalf of actors:

Rational calculation of the relative strength of several nations, which is the very lifeblood of the balance of power, becomes a series of guesses the correctness of which can be ascertained only in retrospect. (Morgenthau 1973, p. 204)¹⁶

Ultimately, Morgenthau does not view balance of power as operating in an unavoidable, more or less automatic manner, and certainly not to the extent that Kenneth Waltz does.¹⁷ To quote Waltz:

Morgenthau’s understanding of balance of power differs fundamentally from mine. For Morgenthau, balances are intended and must be sought by the statesmen who produce them. For me, balances are produced whether or not intended (Waltz 2003, p. 51–52)¹⁸... [My theory] is built up from the assumed motivations of states and the actions that correspond to them. It describes the constraints that arise from the system that those actions produce, and it indicates the expected outcome; namely the formation of balances of power. (Waltz, 1979, p. 118)

Most significantly, Waltz argues that the conditions that are required for a balance of power approach in world politics are an anarchical international system and a desire on behalf of the states for survival.¹⁹ Given these significant but somewhat minimal conditions, balance of power politics is expected to be both widespread and prevalent in a world populated by states that embrace self-help, worry about relative gains, and have as a “first concern...not to maximize power but to maintain their position in the system” (Waltz 1979, p. 126).²⁰

Although it is possibly correct to argue that Waltz’s theoretical framework eschews the role of revisionist states, the structure of the international system produces substantial pro-balance of power pressure regardless of state preferences (Waltz 2003, p. 53; Schweller 1998, p. 20; Little 2007a, p. 193). Freedom to ignore these imperatives does exist but it might come at a potentially grievous price. In this sense, it is fair to evaluate Waltz’s balance of power theory as “a moderately strong” one (Nexon 2009, p. 337).

In his approach to balance of power theory, John Mearsheimer sees states usually opting for a revisionist stance by focusing on relative gains, almost never being satisfied with their current power capabilities, and always aiming to maximize their power (Mearsheimer 2001, pp. 32–36; Little 2007a, pp. 213–248). Only hegemony

¹⁵ This does not make, of course, Morgenthau a constructivist even though it has indeed been argued that he was, in a sense, “a proto-constructivist” (Little 2007a, p. 93). See however also Little (2007b, pp. 157–158).

¹⁶ On this point, see also Morgenthau (1973, pp. 207–208).

¹⁷ This conclusion stands despite the rhetoric that Morgenthau often employs. Inis Claude makes the astute observation that “when Morgenthau asserts that ‘it is an iron law of politics that states must...’ he probably means to convey the idea that ‘it is a basic rule of wise policy that a state ought to...’” (Claude 1962, p. 35). On the inevitability of balance of power in Morgenthau’s work, see also Claude’s conclusive discussion in Claude (1962, pp. 32–37).

¹⁸ This passage is also cited in Chan (2012, p. 3).

¹⁹ On this point, Waltz is categorical (Waltz 1979, p. 121).

²⁰ See also Waltz (1979, pp. 106–107, 111, 118).

can persuade a great power to become a *status quo* actor and then with the crucial limitation that what can be achieved in actuality is merely regional hegemony. Mearsheimer is categorical: “The best outcome a great power can hope for is to be a regional hegemon and possibly control another region that is nearby and accessible over land” (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 41).

Thus, within a theoretical framework that places overwhelming emphasis on military capabilities and power maximization, Mearsheimer adds an important geographical and regional dimension to his balance of power analysis:

First, the geographical dimension opens up the idea that regionalism is an inherent feature of the structure of the system; second, Mearsheimer finds that he has no alternative but to investigate the impact of unipolarity on state behavior; and third, Mearsheimer’s approach shows how the structure of the system has different effects on the foreign policy orientation of states depending upon their geographical location. (Little 2007a, p. 226)²¹

Based on all of the above, it emerges that balance of power thinking has been central to both practitioners and scholars of IR for several centuries. However, even if focusing is only on the selective sample of aforementioned quotations and arguments, it also becomes apparent that a clear or uniform understanding of what is meant by balance of power does not necessarily exist. The concept’s meaning and definition requires elaboration.

2.2 Balance of Power: Definitions and Commonalities

Despite its long-standing existence, the concept of balance of power remains notoriously difficult to define. Scholars have described it as “nebulous,” (Sheehan 1996, p. ix), “least tractable” (Levy 1989, p. 228–229; as cited in Levy 2003, p. 128), and “ambiguous” (Schroeder 1989, p. 135; as cited in Sheehan 1996, p. 1). Frederick the Great pronounced it “an empty sound” (as cited in Little 2007a, p. 9). Others have pointed out that it “may mean almost anything” (Pollard 1923, p. 58; as cited in Sheehan 1996, p. 15; Claude 1962, p. 120), and that it is often “used in a very loose and imprecise manner” (Morgenthau 1973, p. 212). Richard Cobden has perhaps best exemplified the prevailing frustration with the concept’s meaning:

The balance of power is a chimera; It is not a fallacy, a mistake, an imposture—it is an undescribed, indescribable, incomprehensible nothing; mere words, conveying to the mind not ideas, but sounds, like those equally barren syllables which our ancestors put together for the purpose of puzzling themselves about words. (as cited in Haas 1953, p. 443; Wight 1966, p. 171)²²

²¹ Mearsheimer’s analysis of the effects of regions and geography will be further addressed in a subsequent section dealing with balancing power, since its emphasis is primarily on specific state actions and strategies.

²² It is also worth noting that the confusion over the balance of power concept as observed by Kenneth Waltz: “Balance of power is seen by some as being akin to a law of nature; by others as simply an outrage. Some view it as a guide to statesmen; others as a cloak that disguises their imperialistic policies. Some believe that a balance of power is the best guarantee of the security of

In attempting to put some order to this confusion, various scholars have identified multiple meanings of balance of power. Hans Morgenthau views balance of power in four different ways: “(1) as a policy aimed at a certain state of affairs, (2) as an actual state of affairs, (3) as an approximately equal distribution of power, (4) as any distribution of power” (Morgenthau 1973, p. 167 n. 1). Inis Claude sees balance of power as a situation, policy, and system (Claude 1962, pp. 13–25); and Richard Little as metaphor, myth, and model (Little 2007a, pp. 19–87). Ernst B. Haas established eight ways to approach the concept²³ while Martin Wight found the following nine:

1. An even distribution of power.
2. The principle that power ought to be evenly distributed.
3. The existing distribution of power. Hence, any possible distribution of power.
4. The principle of equal aggrandizement of the Great Powers at the expense of the weak.
5. The principle that our side ought to have a margin of strength in order to avert the danger of power becoming unevenly distributed.
6. (When governed by the verb “to hold”): A special role in maintaining an even distribution of power.
7. Predominance.
8. An inherent tendency of international politics to produce an even distribution of power (Wight 1966, p. 151).

Within these possibilities, a multiplicity of definitions have inevitably been offered.²⁴ Hans Morgenthau focuses on equilibrium and views balance of power as “an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among several nations with approximate equality” (as cited in Sheehan 1996, p. 3). John Mearsheimer utilizes a more narrow approach and concludes that “the balance of power is largely synonymous with the balance of military power” (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 56). Another, broader definition, considers the concept as “a particular distribution of power among the states of that system such that no single state and no existing alliance has an ‘overwhelming’ or ‘preponderant’ amount of power” (Zinnes 1967, p. 272; as cited in Sheehan 1996, p. 4).

It is perhaps impossible and probably overambitious (if not quixotic), to try and establish a definitive balance of power approach or definition. Nevertheless, this admission of relative defeat should not lead to the abandonment of scholarly efforts to

states and the peace of the world; others that it has ruined states by causing most of the wars they have fought” (Waltz 1979, p. 117).

²³ Ernst Haas distinguished the following verbal meanings of the balance of power: “distribution of power,” “equilibrium,” “hegemony,” “stability” and “peace,” “instability” and “war,” “power politics,” “universal law of history” and, finally, “system” and “guide” (Haas 1953). It has also been pointed out that “policy-makers in the nineteenth century used balance of power in eleven different ways” (Little 2007a, p. 27 n. 12). Little states that this claim was originally made in Schroeder (1989, p. 137).

²⁴ A list of the most significant definitions is usefully compiled and presented in Sheehan (1996, pp. 2–4).

grapple with a key concept in IR. An alternative (and potentially fruitful) approach is to focus not on the differences but on the commonalities that are observed when dealing with balance of power. What emerges is a picture of the common parameters, issues, and points of emphasis, which, ultimately comprise most attempts to understand the concept.

Balance of power theories almost always portray states as being seriously concerned with power (especially military power), and its distribution in an international system that is characterized by the uncertainties and insecurities of anarchy. Furthermore, states are considered to be the most significant actors in international politics. They are taken to be rational actors, making decisions on the basis of cost-benefit calculations, and utilizing existing information and resources. Crucially, adopting a balance of power approach may be prudent, but offers no “inherent results” and no guarantee of success (Claude 1962, p. 89). Ultimately, “balance of power theories comment on the ordering principles of international relations.... These theories stress the enduring mechanisms induced by the international system’s structural properties” (Chan 2012, p. 23). Disagreements exist on the relative strength and extent of influence of these properties (Nexon 2009, p. 337). That they exist and have at least some significance is generally agreed upon.

Balance of power theories are less useful in explaining more specific state policy choices. Kenneth Waltz had warned about this limitation: “To explain the expected differences in national responses, a theory would have to show how the different internal structures of states affect their external policies and actions” (Waltz 1979, pp. 122–123). It may thus be the case that balance of power theories cannot tell us enough about “target selection” (why and against whom specific states balance), given the existence of various circumstances (Chan 2012, p. 42). To provide answers to such questions, we will turn next to theories of balancing power.

2.3 Theories of Balancing Power and Soft Balancing

Theories of balancing power address the specific foreign policy-balancing choices, options, and actions that a state may or may not decide to pursue toward some other state (or states) while aiming to “match, exceed, or block (its) power” (Mowle and Sacko 2007, p. 66). For example, a country may opt for internal balancing (“self-help in the purest sense of the term;” Mearsheimer 2001, p. 157) that aims to increase domestic power capabilities that have multidimensional sources and aspects (military, economic, diplomatic, political, cultural, etc.). Alternatively, it could choose external balancing efforts that involve forming alliances (or cooperating) with at least one state on a variety of levels, or attempting to weaken other actors in order to affect the power of the targeted state.²⁵

²⁵ See the useful discussion in Waltz (1979, p. 118). See also Lieber and Alexander (2005, p. 119). For an excellent discussion of the internal and external balancing strategy of Periclean Athens, see Platias and Koliopoulos (2010, pp. 44–45).

At this point, it is necessary to consider the concept of alliance, especially since there exists a multitude of definitions.²⁶ What most of them have in common is an emphasis on formal (and possibly), informal cooperative arrangements of some consequence, among at least two states, usually concerning military and security affairs. Among these lines, Stephen Walt defines “alliances as a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states” (Walt 1987, p. 1, n. 1).²⁷

For the purposes of this study, we will opt for the definition of Stefan Bergsmann because it is somewhat more nuanced and broader in scope. However, following Walt’s approach, we will also add an implicit dimension to it. This is because significant security cooperation does not necessarily have to be explicit, formal, public, or enshrined in a treaty (the case of Israel and the USA possibly offers an example of such an occurrence). Thus, an alliance will be considered to be:

An explicit [or implicit] agreement among states in the realm of national security in which the partners promise mutual assistance in the form of a substantial contribution of resources in the case of a certain contingency the arising of which is uncertain. (Bergsmann 2001, p. 26)

Concerning external balancing, of which the formation of alliances is a primary manifestation, Stephen Walt has argued that states ultimately balance against threat and not merely power. In other words, balancing actions will be targeted against the state that poses the greatest threat (Walt 1997, p. 933). The extent and severity of its threat is produced by the presence and severity of four factors: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions (Walt 1987, pp. 21–28).²⁸ Walt acknowledges that weak states are likelier to bandwagon (defined somewhat generally as “alignment with the source of danger” Walt 1987, p. 17).²⁹ He concludes that balancing is more widespread in the conduct of international politics despite beliefs to the contrary (Walt 1987, p. 5, 29, 173). In this,

²⁶ Edwin H. Fedder was already pointing out in 1968 that “the concept of an alliance in the literature of international relations is ambiguous and amorphous... [There is] great confusion in the literature regarding the most elemental variables present in alliances” (Fedder 1968, p. 70). More recently, Stefan Bergsmann reported that he had come across 35 different definitions of the concept of an alliance. (Bergsmann 2001, p. 25, n. 3). The literature on alliances is immense and a full treatment of the concept and its various parameters is beyond the scope and goals of this study. For some of the classic and most significant arguments and presentations of alliances, see especially Booth (1975); Fedder (1968); Liska (1962); Morgenthau (1959); and Snyder (1984; 1990).

²⁷ See also Walt’s somewhat different definitions and discussions of the concept in Walt (1993, p. 20); Walt (2009, p. 86); Walt (2001, p. 23). See also the definitions by Arnold Wolfers and George Liska (as cited in Snyder 1991, p. 123, 125).

²⁸ Walt acknowledges the particular difficulties in delineating offensive power (Walt 1987, p. 165). He also explains that “an increase in any of these factors” will lead states toward balance of threat policies (Walt 2002, p. 133). From this, it is not unfair to deduce that not all four sources of threat have to be in operation simultaneously or at the same level.

²⁹ Walt has further elaborated on bandwagoning: “Bandwagoning involves unequal exchange; the vulnerable state makes asymmetrical concessions to the dominant power and accepts a subordinate role... Bandwagoning is an accommodation to pressure (either latent or manifest)... Most important of all, bandwagoning suggests a willingness to support or tolerate illegitimate actions by the

he is in agreement with Kenneth Waltz who categorically asserts (albeit through a different reasoning) that “balancing, not bandwagoning, is the behavior induced by the system” (Waltz 1979, p. 126).

The theoretical debate concerning bandwagoning is far from settled. Randall Schweller considers bandwagoning far more prevalent in international politics because states can profit from such a policy (Schweller 1994, 1998).³⁰ He thus describes in a somewhat “picturesque” (Vasquez 2003, p. 33) manner a series of different bandwagoning policies and reasons that states may pursue in order to gain from this sort of behavior.³¹ Schweller advances a balance of interest theory on the basis that “the most important determinant of alignment decisions is the capability of political goals, not imbalance of power or threat” (Schweller 1998, p. 22). Ultimately, these theoretical disputes can only be decided on the basis of rigorous and in-depth empirical case studies.³²

It has also been argued that balancing behavior by states is additionally influenced by geographical factors. According to Mearsheimer:

The crucial issue regarding geography is whether the threatened state shares a border with the aggressor or whether a barrier, be it the territory of another state or a large body of water, separates those rivals. Common borders promote balancing; barriers encourage buck-passing. (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 271)

At this point, it is important to note that theorists of balancing power have never claimed that their approach only applies to a global level or merely concerns an era’s greatest powers:

Balancing behavior need not be directed against a would-be hegemon to qualify as balancing...[such an approach would] cause us to miss a lot of *regional balancing behavior among medium and small powers*. (Art 2005/2006, p. 184; emphasis added)

Regional subsystems are, thus, also relevant and subject to this analysis as the subsequent chapters of this study will demonstrate (Paul 2004, p. 7). However, it was the apparent absence of observable balancing behavior at a global level against the USA that led to the development of the concept of soft balancing. In this sense, if balance of power theory has historically been connected with a certain degree of

dominant ally” (Walt 1988, p. 55; as cited in Schweller 1998, p. 68). See also Schweller’s further comments on this point (1998, p. 226, n. 30).

³⁰ For Schweller’s critique of Walt’s definition and approach to bandwagoning, which he considers to be close to something like “capitulation,” see Schweller (1994, pp. 80–83). For an excellent discussion of the different approaches pursued by Walt and Schweller, see Litsas (2014, pp. 129–130). Schweller has also produced an elegant analysis of instances of underbalancing in international politics (Schweller 2006).

³¹ Thus, we are presented with “jackal bandwagoning, piling on, wave of the future, and the contagion of domino effect” as possible explanations for state behavior. See Schweller (1994, pp. 93–98) and his slightly more expanded treatment and list in Schweller (1998, pp. 77–83). It is worth contrasting this analysis with Mearsheimer’s arguments concerning the options states pursue for survival in an anarchic world that include not only balancing, bandwagoning but also appeasement and buck-passing. See Mearsheimer (2001, pp. 138–140).

³² For an important and interesting attempt to predict the coming prevalence of balancing policies in the South China Sea as the twenty-first century advances, see Kaplan (2014, pp. 5–31).



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