H-Diplo | ISSF

Roundtable 10-29 (2019)
issforum.org

Editors: **Kai He**, **Robert Jervis**, and **Diane Labrosse**
Web and Production Editor: **George Fujii**

T.V. Paul. ***Restraining Great Powers: Soft Balancing from Empires to the Global Era.*** New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-300-22848-9 (hardcover, $30.00).

Published on **24 June 2019**

URL: https://issforum.org/to/ir10-29

Contents

Introduction by Robert Jervis, Columbia University

After the end of the Cold War many scholars thought that other states would balance against the United States since it now lacked a rival superpower to check it, and with the apparent abuse of its power epitomized by the invasion of Iraq in 2003 these expectations were heightened. In parallel, many observers thought that China's rise would call up a local counter-balancing coalition. These predictions did not come true, leading scholars to wonder whether balance of power theory was obsolete—or even wrong. T.V. Paul shined a new light on this question with his seminal article, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," in 2005.[1] Since then, the concept of "soft balancing" has become a staple of the literature, with multiple applications and critiques. To this Paul has now added a full volume that pushes the argument further.

Our Roundtable grew out of a panel at the March 2019 International Studies Association meeting and so consists of six reviews. All very much welcome Paul's contribution, although of course all also have some suggestions and criticisms. Steve Chan says that "the book is well-written, cogently argued, and quite accessible to even non-experts." I would just underscore the value of the latter attribute. One does not have to endorse all of Michael Desch's critique of the field to argue that greater reaching out to the educated public would benefit both the country and our scholarship.[2] Even our most sophisticated arguments have a core that can be made intelligible to those non-professionals who are interested in international politics, and stating them clearly often helps us see what the essential arguments are, and what might be wrong with them. Paul's clarity is one reason why Jack Levy sees the book as "an important contribution to the scholarly literature," a judgment with which the other four reviewers concur.

They agree in locating the contribution in the breadth and depth of Paul's discussion. As Kai He points out, Paul shows that soft balancing can be applied not only to the behavior of second-rank states, but also to peer rivals. Furthermore, this behavior is not new, and Paul argues that we find it in the operation of the Concert of Europe in the early nineteenth century. As Deborah Welsh Larson stresses, this brings up another contribution of the study, which is the inclusion of legitimation and institutions in soft balancing. Furthermore, Jeffrey Taliaferro notes, Paul discusses the conditions under which soft balancing is possible and the considerations that go into states' decisions as to whether to go down this path.

The reviewers raise questions along with their praise. Levy argues that Paul's conception of traditional or "hard" balancing misconstrues the theory, particularly in his argument that the outbreak of major wars contravenes the theory. Chan wishes that Paul had looked for "dogs that do not bark"—cases in which his theory expects soft balancing to occur but where states do not behave accordingly. Bhubhindar Singh argues that Paul pays insufficient attention to domestic politics. All of our reviewers express some unease with what is the opposite side of the coin from Paul's useful expansion of the idea of what soft balancing is, since this may

[1] T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30:1 (Summer 2005): 46-71; also see the responses by Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, Keir Leiber and Gerard Alexander, and Robert Pape in ibid.

[2] Michael Desch, *Cult of the Irrelevant: The Waning Influence of Social Science on National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

dilute its analytical power by stretching it to cover kinds of behavior that are better captured by other concepts.

The reviews all speak to the shared sense that "*Restraining Great Powers* is an enormously stimulating book," as Levy puts it. This Roundtable will begin a discussion that many of us will want to continue in our own writings and classrooms.

Participants:

T.V. Paul is James McGill Professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Science at McGill University, Montreal, Canada and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He served as the President of International Studies Association (ISA) for 2016-2017. Paul is the author or editor of 20 books and over 75 scholarly articles/book chapters in the fields of International Relations, International Security, and South Asia. He is the author of the books: *Restraining Great Powers: Soft Balancing from Empires to the Global Era* (Yale University Press, 2018); *The Warrior State: Pakistan in the Contemporary World* (Oxford University Press, 2013); *Globalization and the National Security State* with N. Ripsman (Oxford University Press, 2010); *The Tradition of Non-use of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford University Press, 2009); *India in the World Order: Searching for Major Power Status* with B.R. Nayar (Cambridge University Press, 2002); *Power versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); and *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge University Press, 1994). Paul currently serves as the editor of the Georgetown University Press book series*: South Asia in World Affairs.* For more, see www.tvpaul.com.

Robert Jervis is Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics at Columbia University and Founding Editor of ISSF. His most recent book is *How Statesmen Think* (Princeton University Press, 2017). He was President of the American Political Science Association in 2000-2001 and is the founding editor of the International Security Studies Forum. He has received career achievement awards from the International Society of Political Psychology and ISA's Security Studies Section, the Grawemeyer Award for the book with the Best Ideas for Improving World Order, and the National Academy of Science's tri-annual award for behavioral sciences contributions to avoiding nuclear war.

Steve Chan is College Professor of Distinction at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he teaches political science. His most recent book is *Thucydides's Trap? Historical Interpretation, Logic of Inquiry and the Future of Sino-American Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

Kai He is a Professor of International Relations at Griffith Asia Institute and Centre for Governance and Public Policy, Griffith University, Australia. He is currently an Australian Research Council (ARC) Future Fellow (2017-2020). He is also a visiting Chair Professor of International Relations at the Zhou Enlai School of Government, Nankai University, China (2018-2021).

Deborah Welch Larson is professor of political science at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include the application of psychological theories to states' pursuit of status and foreign policy decision making. Her publications include *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton University Press, 1985); *Anatomy of Mistrust: US-Soviet Relations during the Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 1997); and "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International*

Security 34:4 (Spring 2010): 63-95 (with Alexei Shevchenko). She has most recently published *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), with Alexei Shevchenko.

Jack S. Levy is Board of Governors' Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University and Adjunct Senior Research Scholar at the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University. He is past-president of the International Studies Association and of the Peace Science Society. Levy's primary teaching and research interests are the causes of interstate war, foreign policy decision-making, political psychology, and qualitative methodology. His recent books include *Causes of War* (2010, with William R. Thompson), *The Arc of War: Origins, Escalation, and Transformation* (2011, with William R. Thompson), and *The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics, and Decision-Making* (2014, co-edited with John A. Vasquez).

Bhubhindar Singh is an Associate Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University. His main research area is in the international relations of Northeast Asia with a special focus on Japan's security policy. He has published in the *European Journal of International Relations*, *International Relations of Asia-Pacific*, *The Pacific Review*, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *Asian Survey*, *Asian Security*, *Asia Policy*, *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, *Korean Journal of Defense Analyses*, *The Round Table*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* and *Issues & Studies*; and his book is entitled *Japanese Security Identity Transformation: From a Peace-State to an International-State* (Routledge 2013). He is a member of the Editorial Advisory Committee of the *Asia Policy* journal (published by the National Bureau of Asian Research).

Jeffrey W. Taliaferro is Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University. He is author of *Defending Frenemies: Alliance Politics and Nonproliferation in US Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2019) and *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Cornell University Press, 2004); co-author, with Norrin M. Ripsman and Steven E. Lobell, of *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2016); and co-editor, also with Lobell and Ripsman, of *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and of *Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). He has published articles in *International Security*, *Security Studies*, *International Studies Review*, and *Political Psychology* and contributed chapters to several edited volumes.

Review by Steve Chan, University of Colorado, Boulder

T.V. Paul's argument is that hard balancing—defined typically by realists to mean forming alliances and ramping up armament[1]—has subsided in the post-Cold War era compared to the days of Soviet-American rivalry. This form of statecraft has also not occurred as frequently historically as some realists have supposed, and it has certainly not always worked effectively to promote peace and stability. Instead, he argues that states are now more often practicing "soft balancing" intended to obstruct, impair and deny legitimacy to objectionable policy on the part of great powers.[2] This is a subtler and less confrontational approach to managing powerful countries. Although this form of statecraft has also not always worked to restrain such countries, it has not been an infrequent phenomenon in the history of diplomacy.

The book is well written, cogently argued, and quite accessible to even non-experts. I also find myself in basic agreement with the book's analysis of other states' management of the United States (U.S.), China and Russia in recent years. I raise some issues below in the hope of further advancing the debate on this important topic.

Paul makes an important point that hard balancing has not occurred after the Cold War. Realists would have expected other major states to undertake such action against U.S. preponderance. He is also right in pointing out that hard balancing has not always occurred historically or worked effectively to prevent war. If it has thus been largely discredited, why should balance-of-power theory be given a prominent place in the book's discussion? The fact that most major states had bandwagoned with the U.S. rather than joining the Soviet Union (the weaker of the two superpowers) to balance against the U.S. during the Cold War would and should count against this theory. Moreover, the Soviet Union's collapse presents yet another refutation to realism, which is preoccupied with external threats to a state's existence and would expect a state to fight rather than to submit to its demise voluntarily. One can evaluate a theory according to different criteria—one of them may be to 'get the big picture right.' If a theory cannot account for monumental developments such as the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a unipolar world, its credibility is severely strained.[3]

Presumably, 'hard balancing' and 'soft balancing' are not binary choices. Paul recognizes rightly that these are not mutually exclusive approaches. States can undertake both approaches—to different degrees. This

[1] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

[2] For some other writings on soft balancing, see Davis B. Bobrow, ed., *Hegemony Constrained: Evasion, Modification, and Resistance to American Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 72-108; Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and U.S. Policy toward China," *Security Studies* 17:2 (2008): 363-395; Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 109-139; Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 7-45; and T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 46-71.

[3] For some critiques and reviews of realism, see Steve Chan, *Looking for Balance: China, the United States, and Power Balancing in East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Daniel H. Nexon, "The Balance of Power Theory in Balance," *World Politics* 61:2 (2009): 330-359; and John A. Vasquez, "Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition," *American Political Science Review* 9:4 (1997): 899-912.

observation in turn raises the question about conditions that are likely to incline a state to give greater or lesser emphasis to one or the other approach. For instance, how does the interstate distribution of power affect a state's calibration between these two approaches? When this distribution is highly asymmetric in favor of a country like the U.S. which is truly peerless, would hard balancing be judged to be just too dangerous and futile? It would be too dangerous because a country undertaking this approach would become the target of U.S. retaliation and could be 'picked off' and suffer adverse consequences such as those experienced by Afghanistan and Iraq. Alternatively, would the emergence of a country that can serve as a possible focal point for a countervailing coalition provide a necessary condition for hard balancing to occur? For instance, would China's rise embolden others to give more serious consideration to the possibility of hard balancing against the U.S.?

These questions in turn point to history and learning. Importantly, despite its recent rise, China has avoided competing with U.S. in building alliances or engaging in armament races. Beijing has refrained from recruiting allies or waging an ideological campaign in regions that Washington has declared to be strategically important to it, specifically, Western Europe, the Western Hemisphere, and the Middle East. Moreover, although its military expenditures have increased significantly in recent years, China still lags very much behind the U.S., whose military expenditures have been greater than the next seven or eight countries with the largest defense budgets *combined*. History and learning come into the picture because Beijing has evidently drawn lessons from Moscow's mistakes during the Cold War. The Soviet Union's pursuit of strategic power defined as recruiting foreign allies, developing military prowess, and fostering client states caused its imperial over-stretch, exacerbating its domestic economic stagnation and legitimacy deficit.[4] A turn to stress soft balancing is thus not unrelated to how the Chinese and other leaders have learned from the disastrous fate that befell the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union's demise in turn raises an interesting question. To what extent can changes in the interstate balance of power be attributed to the policies pursued by a country—and to what extent can they be due to the mistakes made by others? To put the point less clumsily, to what extent can self-defeating policies by one's rival redound to one's advantage without one's own policies deserving much credit for one's relative gain? That is, could the U.S. rise to its unipolar status be more a result of the self-inflicted injuries committed by the Soviet Union than to its own policies? Could these countries' similar pursuit of strategic power have caused a deterioration in both of their international positions to the relative benefit of "trading states" like Japan, Germany, and most recently, China?[5] In this respect again, could the turn to soft balancing by many countries after the Cold War's end have reflected their leaders' understanding of the processes generating these power shifts?

Looking back in history, it seems that hard balancing occurred sometimes because of what a powerful country did rather than the fact that it was powerful. Thus, an anti-French coalition finally formed because Napoleon Bonaparte did not know when to stop attacking repeatedly against his neighbors.[6] His own aggression

[4] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).

[5] Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

[6] Paul Schroeder, "Historical Reality Versus Neo-Realist Theory," *International Security* 19:1 (1994): 108-148.

brought about a countervailing coalition that British diplomacy alone had failed to accomplish. Similarly, by invading the Soviet Union and by attacking Pearl Harbor, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan finalized the alliance that opposed and eventually defeated them in World War II. Thus, whether other countries engage in hard balancing or soft balancing against a powerful country has something to do with its own actions. Moscow's actions antagonized major European states, Japan, and China (in the 1960s and 1970s) so that they joined the U.S. during the Cold War. Recent actions by the Trump administration may also alienate Washington's traditional allies and drive Beijing and Moscow into closer relations.

Soft balancing can be a ubiquitous phenomenon. What then can be an instance of non-soft balancing? If, say, the U.S. imposition of sanctions on Russia or tariffs on China represent soft balancing, should a decision by President Donald Trump to lift the sanction or postpone the tariffs be interpreted as a decision to stop soft balancing against these countries? When China casts a veto on the U.N. Security Council to block a U.S.-supported resolution on Syria, if this action is seen to be tantamount to soft balancing the U.S., how should one interpret a decision by Beijing to abstain (or to be absent) so that the resolution can be passed despite its known objections? What is an instance of non-soft balancing? Is there 'conceptual overstretching' in the application of 'soft balancing,' so that what is gained in connotation is lost in detonation (the breadth of a concept's coverage versus the precision of its meaning).[7] What behavior does 'soft balancing' rule out (besides obviously engaging in armament races and alliance competition)? We need to take up this important question before trying to test any hypothesis on why states undertake or fail to undertake soft balancing.

This remark in turn brings me to my final set of points. One of them is about when 'the dog fails to bark.' When should we expect balancing behavior, hard or soft? Was Britain's failure to intervene in the American Civil War an instance of failure to balance? What are we to make of the U.S. intervention in the Chinese Civil War long before China's recent rise? Could this intervention be construed as hard balancing against a monolithic Communist bloc under Moscow's leadership? If so, this means that we need to consider balancing behavior to be more than just a matter of policies undertaken by one country against another. Balancing can be aimed against international coalitions. Moreover, since there can be several rising and declining states at the same time, ostensible accommodation of one country can be at the same time an effort to balance another. Thus, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, British concessions to U.S. regional hegemony in the Western Hemisphere could be a conscious policy to recruit Washington as an ally to balance against the more nearby threat from Germany. Thus, A's conciliation with B can simultaneously be an effort to balance against C. This observation in turn implies that balancing policy may be directed at a more immediate threat, which may or may not be the most powerful country in the world. Here, Paul's book points to a new avenue for research. How have the respective neighbors of China, Russia, India, and Brazil acted toward these regional powers? How have these countries behaved similarly and differently? And what conditions or circumstances have influenced these similarities or differences? Just as China and Russia can try to soft balance against the U.S., they themselves can be a target of similar behavior.

[7] Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review* 64:4 (1970): 1033-1053.

Review by Kai He, Griffith University, Australia

Since the end of the Cold War, Realism—a dominant research paradigm in International Relations (IR)—has faced serious theoretical and empirical challenges. The U.S.-led 'unipolar moment' has lasted almost three decades because other states seemingly forgot what they should do—a balance of power response— according to Realist theory. Some realists have tried hard to rescue realism by introducing a "soft balancing" argument.[1] Differing from traditional, military-based, balance-of-power theory, soft balancing theory argues that second-tier powers have not forgone a balance-of-power response against the United States, which is the unipole in the system. Instead, they have chosen non-military strategies, including soft balancing, to countervail U.S. hegemony.

T.V. Paul, as one of the pioneer scholars in the soft balancing research program, initiated and engaged in the "soft balancing" debate in the top IR journal— *International Security* (IS) in 2005.[2] Thirteen years after the *IS* debate, Paul published a new book, *Restraining Great Powers: Soft Balancing from Empires to the Global Era,* reinvigorating the soft balancing scholarship in the field with more nuanced theoretical underpinnings and intriguing case studies.

Restraining Great Powers makes two pathbreaking contributions to the soft balancing research program. First, Paul suggests that soft balancing is not a unique policy choice by second-tier states against the hegemon in a unipolar world. Instead, soft balancing as a security strategy has been practiced for centuries. The first case is the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe system, when European powers relied on institutions to conduct soft balancing in restraining one another. It was the first "golden periods" of soft balancing, because Europe maintained a relatively long peace through a soft balancing mechanism (32).

It is worth noting that Paul is not the first scholar to expand the soft balancing scholarship beyond unipolarity. After the 2005 *IS* debate, many soft balancing scholars explored soft balancing cases beyond unipolarity as well as across history.[3] However, Paul's book is the first systemic examination of soft balancing strategies from the Concert of Europe to the present U.S.-China competition in the globalization era. While some scholars will challenge Paul's innovative elaborations of soft balancing in the past two hundred years of world politics, the real value of Paul's work lies not only in his elegant theoretical articulations and convincing case studies; it also reflects a new wave of the soft balancing debate that will inspire in the field.

The second contribution of Paul's book is his progressive perspective on realism and balance-of-power thinking in world politics. Globalization and legitimacy, two key words that are not popular in the traditional

[1] See Robert Pape, "Soft balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 7-45; Judith Kelley, "Strategic Non-Cooperation as Soft Balancing: Why Iraq Was not just about Iraq," *International Politics* 42:2 (2005): 153-173.

[2] T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 46-71.

[3] See Ilai Z. Saltzman, "Soft Balancing as Foreign Policy: Assessing American Strategy toward Japan in the Interwar Period," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8:2 (2012): 131-150; Max Paul Friedman and Tom Long, "Soft Balancing in the Americas: Latin American Opposition to U.S. Intervention, 1898-1936," *International Security* 40:1 (2015): 120-156.

realist vocabulary, are frequently mentioned in the book. Globalization is mentioned 65 times, while legitimacy occurs 96 times. Paul suggests that the deepening globalization among states has changed the way of conducting traditional balance-of-power strategies. Military-based alliance formation and arms races have become too costly given the deepening economic interdependence in the globalization era. Therefore, soft balancing—non-military coercive strategies—becomes a rational decision for states living in the realist world. Paul's soft balancing is still a realist theory. However, it is a refined realist answer regarding the puzzles of world politics against the backdrop of globalization and economic interdependence.

Another not-so-realist feature of Paul's soft balancing is his emphasis on legitimacy. As opposed to traditional realists, who believe that power equals legitimacy, Paul's soft-balancing arguments suggest that legitimacy is the key mechanism of soft balancing in constraining state behavior. In particular, states can rely on institutions to de-legitimate and restrain the ambitions and behaviors of great powers. Although soft balancing did not always succeed in achieving this goal in history, Paul argues that globalization will in the future make soft balancing matter more in world politics.

The theoretical merits and empirical riches of Paul's book do not mean that soft balancing theory has reached its research apex. Paul's book will inspire other IR scholars to advance soft balancing in three directions. First, scholars can dig deeper into the reasons for soft balancing as well as the conditions for its success. Paul suggests four major reasons for states to conduct soft balancing: "the intensified globalization" (15); "the technological innovations of warfare…that restrains direct conquest" (16); "the norms of territorial integrity" (17), and "the absence of expansionist ideologies" (18). He does not, however, explicitly examine which variable or variables are the most important ones in encouraging states to prefer soft balancing at the expense of hard balancing in his case studies. It is also worth exploring how the interactions among these four variables can shape states' policy choices between soft balancing and hard balancing. Other scholars can follow in Paul's footsteps by digging into the causal mechanisms behind a state's soft balancing choices.

In addition, how and why some soft balancing efforts failed in history is another research focus of Paul's book, which suggests seven ideal conditions in which soft balancing is more likely to succeed, including a low threat environment, the importance of international legitimacy, the immediate aftermath of a major conflict, the flourishing of institutions, the defensive advantage in military affairs, high economic interdependence, and domestic support. As Paul points out, "these conditions are ideals, and not all of them need to be present for soft balancing to succeed" (33). Given the scope of the book, it is impossible for Paul to examine all of these conditions thoroughly in case studies. Therefore, he makes some forward-looking suggestions to other scholars, especially recent Ph.D. students, about where they should go in order to advance the soft balancing scholarship.

The second direction that Paul's book inspires is to focus on how states conduct soft balancing. Paul argues that states can rely on four instruments to execute soft balancing against their rivals: institutions, limited alignments, economic sanctions, and legitimacy denial. In his case studies, Paul skillfully uses historical events to support his arguments. The book is undeniable as an exemplary work that links a new theory with historical evidence.

However, one unsolved problem remains. Critics might ask about the conceptual differences between Paul's soft balancing strategies and traditional research programs on institutions, economic sanctions, and even strategic alignments. Before the invention of the concept of soft balancing, states relied on these instruments to constrain others' behavior. Theoretically, how to consolidate the soft balancing scholarship and these

existing studies is an unsettled problem. Empirically, what the soft balancing argument can really bring to the field is still in question, as critics might argue that the so-called soft balancing is just pouring these old state behaviors into the new bottle of soft balancing.

Therefore, other scholars who intend to enhance the soft balancing scholarship will have two tasks. On the one hand, they will need to carefully define what soft balancing is and, even more importantly, what soft balancing is not. One major problem of the first generation of soft balancing scholarship is that it conceptualized soft balancing too loosely, thereby leaving soft balancing to face an analytical dilemma of claiming too much but ending up explaining too little.

On the other hand, other scholars will need to further explore the operational mechanisms of soft balancing. Paul's book has proposed a repertoire of soft-balancing mechanisms. How states exercise different soft-balancing instruments is still worth further scrutiny. For example, no one denies that states can use institutions to countervail pressures from and restrain behaviors of others. One interesting but less-studied question is how states can use institutions to do so. Institutional membership, the rule-making process, and agenda-setting procedures are some research areas that scholars can look into for more insights.[4] More importantly, scholars might want to examine under what conditions states are more likely to prefer one type of soft balancing, such as institutions, to others, such as economic sanctions.

The last direction to which Paul's book points is to widen the research areas of soft-balancing scholarship. Most soft-balancing research focuses on the traditional security domain. The purpose of economic sanctions is to fulfill a state's security-oriented goals, which is certainly understandable, given the fact that soft balancing is rooted in Realism that highlights the utmost importance of security for states under anarchy. However, deepening economic interdependence and globalization have broadened the scope of security in world politics. Military-related security issues, such as territorial disputes and armed invasions, are no longer the only security threats that concern states under anarchy.

Instead, many non-traditional security issues, such as climate change, cybersecurity, human trafficking, and natural disasters also threaten the 'security' of a state as well as the well-being of its citizens. Therefore, one unanswered question for soft-balancing scholars is: can states exercise soft balancing strategies in these new domains of security in world politics? For example, will the United States engage in a soft balancing competition with China in cybersecurity or over climate change policies? If so, how will it do so? Will Paul's four strategies be sufficient for the United States to conduct soft balancing against China in these non-traditional security domains?

In sum, Paul's book has paved a clear theoretical path to advance soft-balancing scholarship. His case studies are also an analytical exemplar of how to elaborate soft-balancing arguments across history. Paul's book will

[4] For institutional balancing, see Kai He, "Institutional Balancing and International Relations Theory: Economic Interdependence and Balance of Power Strategies in Southeast Asia," *European Journal of International Relations* 14:3 (2008): 489-518; He, *Institutional Balancing in the Asia-Pacific: Economic Interdependence and China's Rise* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); He, "Role Conceptions, Order Transition and Institutional Balancing in the Asia-Pacific: a New Theoretical Framework," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 72:2 (2018): 92-109; and He, "Contested Multilateralism 2.0 and Regional Order Transition: Causes and Implications," *The Pacific Review* 32:2 (2019): 210-220.

signify the beginning of the second wave of soft-balancing scholarship in the IR field. This time, soft balancing is no longer a unipolarity phenomenon. Instead, soft balancing will survive and even flourish after the end of U.S. hegemony and unipolarity.

Review by Deborah Welch Larson, University of California, Los Angeles

In *Restraining Great Powers: Soft Balancing from Empires to the Global Era*, T.V. Paul amends overly narrow conceptions of balancing behavior, derived from Kenneth Waltz,[1] as limited to arms buildups and alliances. States have a repertoire of diplomatic tools to restrain great powers, including non-aggression pacts, ententes, accommodation, or the creation of new norms or institutions.[2]

Since his seminal 2005 article, Paul has elaborated and built on his previous definition of "soft balancing."[3] In his earlier work, Paul referred to soft balancing as the use by second-tier great power states of "limited, tacit, or indirect balancing strategies, largely through coalition building and diplomatic bargaining within international institutions."[4] In *Restraining Great Powers*, Paul defines soft balancing as "restraining the power or aggressive policies of a state through international institutions, concerted diplomacy via limited, informal ententes, and economic sanctions in order to make its aggressive actions less legitimate in the eyes of the world and hence its strategic goals more difficult to obtain" (21). The most significant difference is the inclusion of delegitimation as the principal means by which major powers restrain a more threatening power. Soft balancing also works by depriving the target states of economic benefits from aggressive behavior (through economic sanctions), impeding the target's military operations, and signaling that continued noncompliance may trigger hard balancing (23).

Although both hard and soft balancing are coercive strategies, soft balancing is less likely to arouse the target state's resistance or provoke retaliation than more overt, confrontational military means. If the state is part of a coalition, then the costs imposed by the hegemon are likely to be diffused. By showing that the great power's actions violate international norms, soft balancers hope to appeal to public opinion within the target state. The ultimate goal of soft balancing is to change the target state's behavior in order to reach a diplomatic equilibrium.

While soft balancing may include military coordination, it is more informal. In contrast to formal alliances, in an entente, there is no formal guarantee that the partner will come to the aid of the other in case of an attack. "Limited hard balancing" is an intermediate strategy that involves a limited arms buildup or semi-formal alliances, such as strategic partnerships (21).

Paul argues that the tools that states use to balance against threatening power have changed with historical eras, and yet balance of power theory itself is static (11). He reviews the use of balancing strategies across major historical eras. This survey of history allows him to develop proposition about the conditions favoring

[1] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

[2] Paul W. Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-realist Theory," *International Security* 19:1 (Summer 1994): 108-148.

[3] T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30:1 (Summer 2005): 46-71, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/0162288054894652. See also Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30:1 (Summer 2005): 7-45, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/0162288054894607.

[4] Paul, "Soft Balancing," 58-59.

soft balancing. In the eighteenth century, the security and sovereignty of states could be threatened by a state with superior power. Hence, balancing against a more powerful state was essential for a state's survival. After the Napoleonic wars, through the Concert of Europe (1815-1853), the great powers used institutional mechanisms to prevent aggression. Hard balancing reemerged at the end of the nineteenth century, when states adopted mercantilist economic policies and competed to acquire overseas colonies, provoking the formation of military alliances and arms buildups, tendencies that perhaps reached their culmination in the Cold War, when the world was largely divided into two blocs and the superpowers competed over nuclear weapons and client states in the Third World.

But in the post-Cold War era, important changes have taken place, including the vast increase in economic globalization and the emergence of American unipolarity. These changes have made traditional balancing efforts in the form of alliances and arms buildups too costly for second-tier major states—both in terms of potential loss of markets and technology, but also the risks of antagonizing the United States. At the same time, states have less incentive to engage in alliance building or arms accumulation. International institutions such as the United Nations are available as a means of restraining the United States and other major powers without the need for traditional alliances. Norms of territorial integrity reduce the likelihood that a state will invade another to conquer its territory. The absence of expansionist ideologies, such as Marxism-Leninism or Fascism, alleviates anxiety that rising powers such as China will become revisionist in the future.

The conditions favorable to the success of soft balancing include a benign threat environment, great powers' concern for maintaining legitimacy, inclusion of all major powers in important international institutions, the target state's dependence on other states for its economic well-being, and domestic opinion that is not overly nationalistic (31-33).

One of the important contributions of the book is its demonstration of the use of soft balancing in very different historical eras, not just the current unipolar one. Paul highlights the use of soft balancing even in periods when the climate was highly unfavorable for its success, showing that institutional means of restraining expansionist or aggressive great powers are not limited to the post-Cold War era. Nor is soft balancing confined to opposing unilateral or aggressive U.S. actions in the current period. Major powers have engaged in coordinated action to impose costs on a rising China and resurgent Russia.

Paul's discussion of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the Cold War is particularly insightful. In 1961, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito played a major role in organizing the initial 1961 conference of non-aligned nations at Belgrade, Serbia. Members of the NAM rejected the option of membership in the Cold War alliances of the United States and Soviet Union. They promoted decolonization, nuclear disarmament, and a nuclear test ban treaty. Competing for the allegiance of the Third World, the superpowers were obliged to give some consideration to the demands of the non-aligned states. The Limited Test Ban Treaty, signed in 1963, prohibited testing in the air, under water, and outer space, and the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty affirmed the superpowers' commitment to eventual nuclear disarmament. While this promise was purely rhetorical on the part of the superpowers, who had no intention of giving up nuclear weapons, the non-aligned states did much to delegitimize nuclear weapons as an instrument of great power diplomacy.

After the Cold War, other states did not engage in hard balancing against the United States, not because they lacked sufficient capabilities, as neorealists argue,[5] but because America is a uniquely constrained hegemon and its actions do not threaten others' sovereignty (99). The rise of more assertive Russian and Chinese foreign policies after 2010 has generated more use of hard balancing, but even so, Paul asserts, there has been no return to intensive military competition. The West has shown greater willingness to use hard balancing against Russia than China, because Russia is less deeply enmeshed in the international economy. In addition, Western countries regard Russia's takeover of Crimea and subversion of eastern Ukraine as a more blatant infringement of the norm of territorial integrity than China's island-building in the South China Sea.

While Paul has made major advances in defining and conceptualizing soft balancing, some aspects of the concept need additional clarification and elaboration. The concept of limited hard balancing is difficult to distinguish from hedging or hard balancing. The example Paul provides is India's military cooperation with the United States, Australia, and Japan along with increased defense spending to meet the threat posed by a rising China. But India has forsworn formal alliances in favor of strategic autonomy, and wishes to increase its exports to China, which seems more like hedging.

Paul includes the economic sanctions voted against Italy in 1935 by the League of Nations and the use of economic sanctions imposed by the United States from 1938 to 1941 to stop Japan's war on China as instances of soft balancing. How, then, does soft balancing differ from the traditional concept of collective security, which also rejects traditional alliances?[6]

Paul adds the condition that soft balancing must be aimed at restraining a great power—it must be primarily motivated by security concerns. This raises the question of how to distinguish between soft balancing and the use of institutions or diplomatic coalitions for other goals, such as enhancing a state's status. Paul acknowledges that states may pursue soft balancing for status reasons, because they want to prevent an increase in another state's status that could undermine their own position (196n). For example, China and Russia joined together in vetoing six United Nations Security Council resolutions related to Syria not because they want to restrain the United States (which has no intention of intervening militarily) but to reaffirm their status as permanent members and to express their disapproval of collective intervention in other states' internal affairs.[7] Critics have charged that behavior that superficially appears to be soft balancing directed at restraining the United States may reflect other motives, such as economic interests, domestic politics, or diplomatic disagreements.[8] The issue relates to whether assertive or expansionist behavior by a rising power

[5] See, for example, Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[6] Inis L. Claude Jr., *Swords into Plowshares*, 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1971).

[7] "Security Council–Veto List," Dag Hammarskjold Library, https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick; Deborah Welch Larson, "An Equal Partnership of Unequals: China's and Russia's New Status Relationship," *International Politics*, forthcoming.

[8] Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security* 39:1 (Summer 2005), 74-75, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1162/0162288054894634.

elicits a counterbalancing response. The motives behind soft balancing, then, are very important but often difficult to discern.

Overall, Paul considers numerous counter-arguments by liberals and neorealists against the existence and importance of soft balancing. His thesis about how soft balancing maintains order without major war is clear and convincing, supported by a wealth of contemporary and historical examples. The dynamics of soft balancing—and in particular, the role of delegitimation in encouraging restraint—are worthy of more intensive empirical investigation. For example, we need to know more about when great powers care enough about the legitimacy of their policies to restrain their pursuit of self-interest.

Review by Jack S. Levy, Rutgers University

By emphasizing the use of international institutions, limited ententes, economic instruments of policy, and denial of legitimacy to balance and restrain powerful and threatening states, T.V. Paul's *Restraining Great Powers* makes an important contribution to the scholarly literature on state strategies of influence and restraint. Building on his influential and widely-cited 2005 article on "soft balancing,"[1] Paul broadens and refines the concept, responds to common criticisms, develops the concept of 'limited hard balancing,' and demonstrates how strategies of soft balancing and other forms of restraint have become increasingly common over time. The value of the book goes beyond soft balancing, however, to include a useful discussion of the evolution of traditional balancing through alliance formation and internal military build-ups. I have previously thought a lot about balance of power, but *Restraining Great Powers* has forced me to refine and broaden my conceptualization of the nature, sources, and consequences of balancing. Given the considerable expertise of the other reviewers on soft balancing and other strategies of restraint, I focus my remarks on Paul's discussion of more traditional forms of balancing. I begin with some background comments on the concept of balancing in order to provide a theoretical context for my responses to Paul's book.

In my essay in Paul's 2004 edited volume on balance of power, I expressed concern about excessively broad conceptions of balancing.[2] I argued that most alliances and military buildups can be interpreted as some state balancing against some kind of power or threat in some system. Unless we specify who balances against whom, against what kinds of threat and what level of threat, and in what international system or subsystem, then nearly everything can be interpreted as balancing, and the concepts loses its analytic utility. We need a more differentiated conceptualization of balancing. The instruments through which balancing strategies are conducted is one important dimension. If conceived properly, soft balancing is a useful step toward a more nuanced conception of balancing.

Equally important for a discriminating conception of balancing are the questions of who balances and against what or whom. As for who balances, we need to recognize that balance of power theorists developed the theory largely with the great powers in mind.[3] The behavior of small powers, especially those contiguous with or otherwise proximate to powerful states, is much less predictable, Given their vulnerability and their limited

[1] T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 30:1 (Summer 2005): 46-71.

[2] Jack S. Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance Against and When?" In T.V. Paul, James Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power Revisited: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 29-51.

[3] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 72-73; and Inis L. Claude Jr., "The Balance of Power Revisited," *Review of International Studies* 15:2 (April 1989): 78. For my own views on the great power bias inherent in balance of power theory, see Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance Against and When?" 38-39.

capacity to contribute to balancing coalitions, small states sometimes balance against the threat and sometimes bandwagon with the threat.[4]

The question of what states balance against has generated considerable debate in the last three decades. Reacting to the traditional balance of power argument that states balance against the leading power in the system,[5] Stephen Walt argues that states balance instead against the greatest threat to their interests.[6] Whereas Walt argues that one cannot determine a priori the sources of primary threat,[7] Jack Levy and William Thompson argue that sea powers generally pose less of a threat to other great powers than do land powers with large armies. They show that during the last five centuries great powers have generally balanced against disproportionate concentrations of land-based power in Europe but not against disproportionate concentrations of power in the global maritime system.[8]

Regularized patterns of balancing in Europe help to explain the absence of a sustained hegemony in Europe for at least a half millennium. In contrast to the European experience, hegemonies have emerged from multi-state systems outside of Europe (the Warring States period in China, for example).[9] This and other considerations lead Paul and others to argue that the European experience is different, and perhaps unique. However, we do not have a fully satisfactory answer to the question of why hegemonies have arisen in other autonomous multistate systems but not in modern Europe.[10]

---

[4] See the Symposium on "Balancing vs. Bandwagoning," *Security Studies* 1:3 (Spring 1992): 383-482.

[5] Hans. J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1948); Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

[6] Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). Lobell argues that states balance not against aggregate power, but the specific component of power that is perceived as most threatening—army strength, air power, naval power, etc. Steven E. Lobell, "A Granular Theory of Balancing." *International Studies Quarterly* 62:3 (September 2018): 593-605.

[7] Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, 26.

[8] Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally Against the Leading Global Power?" *International Security* 35:1 (Summer 2010): 7-43. Levy and Thompson also demonstrate that while European great powers have tended to balance against hegemonic threats, they have exhibited a much weaker (and not statistically significant) tendency to balance against the leading state in the system, regardless of the magnitude of its advantage. This runs contrary to the predictions of many traditional balance of power theories, and suggests that counter-hegemonic balancing is distinctive. Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe, 1495-1999," *Security Studies* 14:1 (January-March 2005): 1-33.

[9] Stuart Kaufman, Richard Little, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[10] For one useful effort see Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

With these considerations in mind, let us turn to Paul's discussion of the theory and practice of balancing. A central puzzle motivating *Restraining Great Powers* is the failure of states to balance against the United States in the two decades following the end of the Cold War or against rising China in the last decade. Paul argues that "Balance-of-power theory would predict balancing against the U.S." (97), and that that the failure of an "active balance-of-power coalition" to form against China is an "anomaly" in and a "challenge to balance-of-power theory" (124).

As emphasized above, there are many versions of balance of power theory, and whether the absence of balancing against the U.S. or China is an anomaly in the theory depends on which version of the theory one has in mind. The absence of balancing against the U.S. after 1991 is an anomaly for the widely-shared proposition that states, or at least great powers, balance against hegemonic concentrations of power in the system.[11] It is not an anomaly for balance of threat theory, if one accepts its proponents' arguments that the threat posed by the U.S. to other states is significantly limited by America's liberal democratic character, by the fact that the American hegemony has been a "benevolent" one, by America's geographical distance and isolation from other leading powers, by the non-threatening role of off-shore balancers, and by the ability of the U.S. to exert its extensive influence through its dominant economic position rather than through military means.[12] Similarly, the absence of balancing against the U.S. is not an anomaly for the proposition that the leading powers balance against dominant continental powers but not against dominant maritime powers.[13]

Paul provides a general answer to the puzzle of the recent absence of hard balancing by identifying changes in the international system since the end of World War II, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, that have worked against the repetition of patterns of balancing behavior from earlier eras (15-19).[14] Later, however, he makes a theoretically more powerful argument. With respect to the U.S., Paul argues that states have "forgone active military balancing primarily because they do not fear losing their sovereignty to the hegemon, a necessary condition for traditional hard balancing to occur at the systemic level" (98). He makes a similar argument about the absence of balancing against China, claiming that "perhaps most important … China's position and military behavior … do not yet challenge the sovereign existence of other states" (125).

---

[11] For the stronger (and more problematic) proposition that states balance against the leading power in the system, the absence of balancing against the U.S. is an anomaly for the entire post-1945 period. The U.S. has been the leading power in the system since 1945 but is not usually described as hegemonic before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

[12] Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005). The arguments about geographic distance and off-shore balancers are shared by John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), chap. 7.

[13] Levy and Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea." One might argue that U.S. power projection capabilities pose a historically unprecedented threat to the sovereignty of distant states. This is true, but the question here is whether the US threatens the sovereignty of other great powers, not of states in general.

[14] These factors include intensive globalization, technological innovations favoring deterrence and defense rather than offense, the development of international institutions, norms of territorial integrity, and the absence of expansionist ideologies like Fascism, Nazism, and Marxism-Leninism.

The argument that the fear of losing sovereignty is a necessary condition for hard balancing is striking, in part because general theoretical statements of necessary conditions are relatively rare in the International Relations field. First consider small powers, which are more likely than great powers to find themselves in a situation that threatens their sovereignty. Perceptions of such a threat may create an incentive to join a balancing coalition,[15] but one can imagine a small state balancing under other conditions. If it has a great power patron that asks (or demands) that its client balance against a third state, the smaller state might do so, especially if the patron offers economic incentives that are badly needed for domestic purposes.[16] Alternatively, a small power might join a balancing coalition in the absence of a threat to its sovereignty or even to its territorial frontiers, either through the logic of "the enemy of my friend is my enemy" or through other mechanisms. This is especially likely during a multilateral war.[17]

Great powers face fewer immediate threats to their sovereignty. Driven by systemic interests and longer-term time horizons, they often balance to minimize a wide range of security threats that fall short of threats to sovereignty itself. For many centuries Britain formed coalitions to block any single state from attaining a position of dominance on the European continent, and done so long before any threat to its sovereignty. The U.S. did the same, in the two world wars of the twentieth century and at the time of the formation of the NATO alliance early in the Cold War. At none of these times can one plausibly argue that the US leaders perceived a serious and immediate threat to the country's sovereignty.

One might respond that states' primary goal is to maintain sovereignty, that they define a range of security interests as being instrumental to maintaining sovereignty, that balancing to preserve those interests is driven by their overarching concern for sovereignty, and that consequently fear of the loss of sovereignty is a necessary condition for balancing. The problem with this argument is that the sovereignty motivation is always present, reducing it to a trivial necessary condition. There would be no state behavior that might lead us to conclude states were not driven by the ultimate threat of the loss of sovereignty, however distant. We must conclude, based on the preceding discussion, that the hypothesis that the fear of the loss of sovereignty is a necessary condition for balancing is either non-falsifiable or false.

Chapter six of "Restraining Great Powers" focuses on "Rising China and Soft Balancing," but Paul also attempts to explain the puzzle of the "reluctance of regional states in Asia-Pacific to form active hard-balancing coalitions" against a rapidly rising China" (124). He begins with the argument mentioned above that China does not yet threaten the sovereignty of states in the region. The validity of that statement is an interesting question in itself, but I focus here on some broader theoretical implications of his inference that

[15] A threat to sovereignty is not a sufficient condition for small state balancing, because a small state might choose instead to bandwagon with the threat.

[16] On the domestic political economy of alliance formation, see Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962-73," *International Organization* 45:3 (Summer 1991): 369-395.

[17] On the enemy-of-my-friend-is-my-enemy logic, see Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 221-226. On a variety of mechanisms through which states might join an ongoing war, see John A. Vasquez, *Contagion and War: Lessons from the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

balance of power theory predicts regional balancing against a rising power. Paul may be correct, but it is hard to say, since the literature on regional balancing is theoretically underdeveloped. First, the predicted balancers in regional systems are primarily small states, and as noted above, balance of power theory does not make clear predictions about the behavior of small states. Second, balance of power theory is based on the assumption of states (or other territorially-based units) interacting in an anarchic system, one that is unaffected by significant influences emanating from outside the system. This was certainly true for the great power system centered in Europe that goes back at least five centuries.[18] The autonomy assumption does not hold for most regional systems, where behavior and outcomes are influenced in part by the actions of outside great powers.[19] If we were to observe an absence of balancing against extreme concentrations of power or threats in a regional system, it is not clear whether this is a violation of balance of power theory or the product of the deterrent threats or other actions of external great powers. I am not arguing that Paul is wrong to say that the absence of regional balancing against China is a puzzle, only that regional balance of power theory needs to be more fully developed before we can evaluate the argument.

Restraining Great Powers describes balance of power theory as making another prediction that I find problematic. Paul treats balance of power theory as a theory of peace, so that the occurrence of major wars constitutes evidence contrary to the theory. In his discussion of the period following the Concert of Europe system, for example, Paul argues that "Hard balancing by the great powers in the post-Concert era was more a catalyst for war than a means of preventing it" (53). Regarding the polarization of the alliance system at the end of the nineteenth century, Paul argues that "these well-established military coalitions should have been sufficient to preserve the peace…." Although some notable IR scholars contend that balance of power theory is a theory of peace,[20] most argue that states generally rank peace below other goals, including maintaining independence, avoiding hegemony, and maintaining the multistate system. These scholars argue that states will go to war if necessary to achieve or maintain these higher level goals.[21]

One of the most important contributions of *Restraining Great Po*wers is to analyze the role of international institutions in restraining potentially threatening great powers, and how this causal pattern has increased over time. I will leave it to other reviewers to elaborate on the role of international institutions in soft balancing. Instead, I want to emphasize that some of Paul's institutionalist predictions are not as distinct from the predictions of some prominent versions of balance of power theory as Paul and other scholars imagine. In

[18] I consider the Ottoman Empire (until 1699), Russia/U.S.S.R. (after 1721), and the United States (after 1898) as part of the system. See Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495-1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

[19] Europe before 1945 was an exception because it was a dominant subsystem within the larger international system. On the concept of subsystem dominance, see Morton A. Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: Wiley, 1957).

[20] *Inis L. Claude Jr., Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), 55; Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), chap. 8.

[21] Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1955), 35-37; Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 112; Jervis, *System Effects*, 131; Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance against and When?" 31.

contrasting the nineteenth century Concert system with the eighteenth century balance of power system, for example, Paul writes that "European great powers after 1815 did not seek to destroy or diminish the status of other great powers …." Instead, "they sought to maintain the territory, status, and vital interests of their peers." After defeating France in the Napoleonic Wars, for example, "the victorious powers [avoided] making France too weak to play a meaningful role as a great power" (51).

It is interesting to compare Paul's conception of the operation of the Concert system, which he contrasts with the raw balance of power politics of the eighteenth century, with Morton Kaplan's conception of the balance of power system, which he says persisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and probably into the twentieth century. In his attempt to systematize a balance of power system, Kaplan constructs six "essential rules." Two of Kaplan's six rules include "Stop fighting rather than eliminate an essential national actor"; and "Permit defeated or constrained essential national actors to re-enter the system as acceptable role partners or act to bring some previously inessential actor within the essential actor classification. Treat all essential actors as acceptable role partners."[22]

Kaplan's rules for a balance of power system suggest that the leading powers in the system act with a certain amount of restraint and limit their expansionist ambitions. This is consistent with Paul's conception of a Concert system, and indeed with other institutionalized and constructivist conceptions of concert systems.[23] As noted earlier, Paul includes the "absence of expansionist ideologies" as one of the factors explaining the decline of hard balancing in the contemporary system (18).[24] This raises the important question of whether self-restraint emerges from the deliberate intentions of actors and their domestic politics (as defensive realists argue), and perhaps from international norms (as constructivists argue), or whether such restraint is structurally induced by the international system.[25] In a Waltzian conception of international politics, restraint is endogeneous to the system. States do not intentionally aim for balance and stability in the international system, but they understand and anticipate that excessive ambition will generate a counter-balancing coalition and subsequent defeat.

Assessing the validity of these competing arguments is not an easy task. Yet the fact remains that the extent of self-restraint and expansionist ambitions varies significantly over time. It is not clear that variations in the material structure of the international system are sufficient to explain this variation in state strategies. This points to some causal impact of domestic politics, individual political leaders, and perhaps international

[22] Kaplan, *System and Process*, 22-36. Note that Kaplan (*System and Process*, chap. 2) treats a balance of power system as one of six different international systems, including loose and tight bipolar systems. This is why Kaplan does not describe the Cold War as a balance of power system.

[23] Paul treats the Concert system as the first of three phases of balance of power politics in the nineteenth century (9). In contrast, Claude (*Power and International Relations*) distinguishes between three systems: balance of power system, collective security, and world government. For a more detailed analysis of the Vienna Concert system and how it emerged, see Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[24] Similarly, Morgenthau (*Politics Among Nations*, chap. 20) emphasizes the destabilizing effects of "nationalistic universalism" in the twentieth century.

[25] For a good discussion see Jervis, *System Effects*, 135-137.

norms as important autonomous sources of international stability. Theoretical debate on this question, however, needs to be joined by systematic empirical research.

To conclude, although I have expressed some concerns about T.V. Paul's conceptualization of traditional balance of power theory, I want to emphasize that *Restraining Great Powers* is an enormously stimulating book. The breadth of Paul's study and the theoretical centrality of his arguments have led me to think much more deeply about a variety of analytic issues relating to balance of power and about the broader range of strategies states adopt to restrain great powers.

Review by Bhubhindar Singh, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore

The debate on soft balancing entered into mainstream theoretical discussion following the publication of a special issue of the journal *International Security* in 2005.[1] The collection of papers in this special issue, which included articles by proponents and critics of soft balancing, resulted in a healthy debate on whether soft balancing could be viewed as an independent strategy that states use to address threatening behaviours.[2] Despite receiving criticism, soft balancing has evolved both conceptually and has been successfully applied to a variety of cases.[3] The publication of *Restraining Great Powers* is a critical development in this debate, as the book clearly strengthens the legitimate position of soft balancing (and other limited balancing strategies) in the balance of power literature.

The argument is based on the premise that there are fewer instances of direct hard balancing behaviour against threats in the post-Cold War environment (until 2010). Instead of relying on traditional instruments of balancing (such as arms build-ups and formal alliances), the post-Cold War conditions are more conducive for states to adopt 'low-cost' strategies to constrain threatening behaviours. These strategies, as illustrated in the book, are soft balancing (where states mainly rely on international institutions, limited ententes, and economic instruments to constrain threatening actors) and limited hard balancing (where states rely on limited arms build-ups and quasi-balancing coalitions, such as strategic partnerships, to constrain threatening actors). *Restraining Great Powers* expertly shows that far from being a post-Cold War phenomenon, limited balancing strategies were practiced by states beginning from the early nineteenth century.

This book is one of the most important contributions to the balance of power theory in recent years. It is a convincing attempt to craft a legitimate space for soft balancing (as well as limited hard balancing) to exist alongside other balancing strategies, such as hard balancing, to explain how states address threatening powers. The introduction of limited balancing strategies is a timely attempt to take into account how states respond to the complex regional and international strategic environment they face in the post-Cold War period. This

[1] For an earlier works on soft balancing, see T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Khong, Yuen Foong, "Coping with Strategic Uncertainty: The Role of Institutions and Soft Balancing in Southeast Asia's Post-Cold War Strategy," in J.J. Suh, P.J. Katzenstein, and A. Carlson, eds., *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 172-208.

[2] T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," *International Security* 30:1 (2005) [hereafter *IS*]: 46-71; Stephen G. Brooks and Wohlforth, William C., (2005), 'Hard Times for Soft Balancing,' *IS*: 72-108; Robert, A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *IS*: 7-45; Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World is Not Pushing Back," *IS*: 109-139;

[3] Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and U.S. Policy Toward China," *Security Studies* 17:2 (2008): 363-395; Kai He (2008), 'Institutional Balancing and International Relations Theory: Economic Interdependence and Balance of Power Strategies in Southeast Asia,' *European Journal of International Relations* 14:3 (2008): 489-518; Ilai Z. Saltzman, "Soft balancing as foreign policy: assessing American strategy towards Japan in the interwar period," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8:2 (2012): 131-150; Max Paul Friedman and Tom Long, "Soft Balancing in the Americas: Latin American Opposition to U.S. Intervention," *International Security* 40:1 (2015): 120-156.

complexity, defined by deepening globalization and economic interdependence, and the rising complexity in the types of actors (state and non-state) and security issues (traditional and non-traditional) that states are faced with, forces states to rely on multiple strategies to address threatening behaviours. These strategies may not fall into neat traditional categories of international relations that we are used to but are better captured by the limited balancing conception proposed in *Restraining Great Powers*.

Despite the insightful and enriching analysis in *Restraining Great Powers*, one could argue that there is still space for the further strengthening of the conceptualization and utilization of the soft-balancing concept. This review focuses on the following three points: (a) underscoring the importance of domestic politics that is under emphasized in the analysis in *Restraining Great Powers*; (b) expanding the normative aspect of the argument proposed by introducing two other sources of states' soft-balancing behavior not captured in *Restraining Great Powers*—the domestic normative context that shapes the balancing strategy a state pursues and the normative context where the balancing strategy is implemented; and (c) introducing defence diplomacy as a 'new' tool of soft balancing.

First, the predominantly structural-based analysis in *Restraining Great Powers* underplays the importance of domestic politics.[4] Relying solely on structural factors leads to an incomplete analysis, especially in light of the critical role that the domestic politics factor plays in a state's response against threats. The domestic politics factor allows us to take into account how the international pressures are translated within states; identify the various variables at the domestic politics level that influence the response of a state against a threat; and, finally, explain the differences in responses between states when faced with the same structural pressures.[5] Moreover, states face a range of domestic political, economic, and institutional challenges from a range of actors, such as political parties, interest groups, and businesses, which may pose constraints and result in a low-cost balancing strategy against a threat, such as soft balancing. Hence, the underplaying of the domestic politics factor is a notable challenge in *Restraining Great Powers*.

The second point relates to the normative aspect of the analysis in *Restraining Great Powers*. To be sure, Paul should be commended for incorporating a range of normative factors, such as norms of territorial integrity, expansionist ideologies, and legitimacy into its analysis. However, incorporating two other normative aspects into the understanding of when states opt for a limited or soft-balancing strategy to address threats could strengthen the analysis.

First, following from the previous point, *Restraining Great Powers* overlooks the impact of unique normative constraints within the state and society that influence strategic responses to threatening behaviours.[6] The constraints could be shaped by internal and external factors. The constraints influence the overarching normative framework that sets the parameters in all aspects of the foreign policymaking process, such as identifying the dominant interests, determining the desirable and undesirable behaviours, and shaping the outcome of foreign policy. A good example is Japan. The internal constraint for Japan is the pacifist normative

[4] A point raised by Brooks and Wohlforth (2005) as well.

[5] Gideon Rose, 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy, *World Politics* 51:1 (1998): 146.

[6] See the collection of chapters in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

structure and the external constraint is the lingering suspicion towards Japan's active military role amongst Asian countries. Both serve as restricting factors in shaping Japan's foreign policy strategy against threats. While Japan may adopt hard balancing measures to address threats from China and North Korea in the post-Cold War period, it also supplements this strategy with soft balancing measures to preclude any domestic and external opposition to its policies.

Second, the normative aspect of the argument in *Restraining Great Powers* underplays the importance of where the balancing strategy is implemented. A state's balancing strategy could be shaped by the unique material and normative context of where the balancing strategy is implemented. This is specifically important for regions. Each region has a unique normative context that shapes the nature of security threats, the dominant patterns of engagement between regional states, and dominant engagement patterns between the region and external partners. It is posited here that the balancing activity of the great and major powers is limited to soft balancing if the region's normative framework precludes great power competition. The normative framework, also known as the 'social milieu' within the institution, has a socialization and/or even a persuasive effect for the great and major powers to abide by the regional norms and practices of inter-state relations that preclude great power competition.[7] A good example is how the normative structure of Southeast Asia/ the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is based on ASEAN norms, limits great power competition in Southeast Asia/ASEAN.[8] For example, in response to China's escalated economic, political, and security engagement in Southeast Asia since 2000, Japan adopted a counter soft-balancing strategy against China that was aligned with the ASEAN regional normative structure. Japan's response was limited to utilizing the regional institutions (exercising 'thought' leadership that shaped the East Asian multilateral process to Japan's favour, and defending the U.S.-led regional order in East Asia). Even in the contentious South China Sea territorial disputes, Japan's counter-balancing measures included the multilateralization of the disputes, and Japan pursued limited measures, such as defending regional governance defined by international law and norms, strengthening the maritime capacity of Southeast Asian states, and providing funding as part of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) programmes to other claimant states. The goal of these policies was to ensure that China does not gain an upper hand in Southeast Asian affairs.

Finally, the understanding of soft balancing in *Restraining Great Powers* is overly focused on non-military measures. The analysis excludes the widened use of the military as a tool of foreign policy outside the traditional understanding of balancing. Defence diplomacy is an example. This instrument was elevated as a tool of foreign policy in the post-Cold War period due to the more complex nature of threats (traditional and non-traditional ones). As a result, the role of the military has evolved from the traditional focus of fighting wars against other militaries to a range of new and diverse roles known initially in the U.S. as "operations

[7] For 'social milieu' and socialization effect within institutions, see Alistair Iain Johnston, 'Socialization in International Institutions: The ASEAN Way and International Relations Theory' in G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[8] See Seng Tan, "Herding Cats: The Role of Persuasion in Political Change and Continuity in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)," *International Relations of Asia Pacific* 13:2 (2013): 233-265; Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* 32:3 (2007/2008): 113-157.

other than war" (OOTW),[9] such as humanitarian and disaster relief efforts, peacekeeping duties, and greater engagement in defence diplomacy efforts. While these missions contribute to the common good/security, they could also be used as a deterrence against threatening behaviours.[10] In short, the military through defence diplomacy could also be critical in the success of soft balancing against a threatening state.

In conclusion, *Restraining Great Powers* in a timely contribution that makes one of the oldest concepts in international relations—balance of power—more relevant to the complex strategic environment all states face today. This book is a must read for all interested in theorizing how states address threats in contemporary global affairs.

[9] Charles W. Hasskamp, *Operations Other Than War: Who Says Warriors Don't Do Windows?* Air War College Maxwell Paper No. 13 (Maxwell: U.S. Air War College, March 1998).

[10] See See Seng Tan and Bhubhindar Singh, "Introduction: Special Issue on Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," *Asian Security* 8:3 (2012): 224-225. For a conceptual discussion on defence diplomacy, see Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance*, Adelphi Paper No. 365 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2004).

Review by Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Tufts University

In the nearly thirty years since the end of the Cold War, balance-of-power theories, especially Kenneth Waltz's structural realist (or neorealist) reformulation, have been under sustained assault from a variety of quarters. In the early and mid-1990s, proponents of liberal institutionalism, democratic peace theory, constructivist theories, and others, faulted balancing theories for failing to predict or provide an adequate explanation for the peaceful end of the Cold War. Therefore, balancing theories, and structural realism as a whole, had limited relevance in a post-Cold War international system.[1] By the decade's end, the debate had shifted to explaining an anomaly for Waltz's theory, namely the United States' overwhelming preponderance of material capabilities and the lack of any overt move by second-tier powers to forge military alliances or rearm themselves to counterbalance American power.[2] Finally, in the mid-2000s, after the George W. Bush administration's invasion of Iraq, the debate again shifted to whether or not other states were or even were capable of employing alternative strategies to restrain the United States.[3]

[1] For example, Bruce M. Russett, *Controlling the Sword: The Democratic Governance of National Security* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye, and Stanley Hoffmann, eds., *After the Cold War: International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe, 1989-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism," *International Organization* 48:2 (1994): 249-277; Paul Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory," *International Security* 19:1 (1994): 108-148; Richard Ned Lebow, and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). For various structural realist rebuttals see, John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15:1 (1990): 5-56; Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security* 18:2 (1993): 44-79; Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17:4 (1993): 5-51; John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19:3 (1994): 5-49; and Colin Elman, Miriam Fendius Elman, and Paul W. Schroeder, "History vs. Neo-Realism: A Second Look," *International Security* 20:1 (1995): 182-195.

[2] See Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25:1 (2000): 5-41, William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24:1 (1999): 5-41; Christopher Layne, "U.S. Hegemony and the Perpetuation of NATO," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 23:3 (2000): 59-91; Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security* 22:1 (1997): 86-124; and G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). For an assessment of these debates up to 2004, see Christopher J. Fettweis, "Evaluating IR's Crystal Balls: How Predictions of the Future Have Withstood Fourteen Years of Unipolarity," *International Studies Review* 6:1 (2004): 79-104.

[3] Other seminal contributions to the debates over balance of power theory and likely responses to the United States' preponderance in the 2000s include: John J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivalled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman, eds., *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003); T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., B*alance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005). For an insightful review of these debates see Daniel Nexon, "The Balance of Power in Balance," *World Politics* 62:1 (2009): 330-359.

T. V. Paul stepped into this third debate with the provocative hypothesis that second-tier power, such as Russia and China, emerging powers, like India, and even long-time NATO allies, like France and Germany, were engaged in "soft balancing," the use of international institutions and the formation of alignments short of full-fledged military alliances in an effort to impose marginal costs upon the United States or at the very least to de-legitimate the threatening use of U.S. economic and military capabilities.[4]

Various critics quickly pointed out problems with the soft-balancing hypothesis. These include the empirical difficulties of distinguishing soft balancing from "normal" diplomatic friction between states; the observation that soft balancing clearly failed in dissuading the Bush administration from invading Iraq in 2002-2003, and thus had limited utility; assessments that the marginal costs that Washington incurred from "defying the will of the international community" post-1990 were quite low compared to the marginal costs incurred by past great powers; the apparent dearth of historical cases of soft balancing before the Cold War's end; and the claim that soft balancing was simply an attempt to explain an anomaly for Waltz's structural theory.[5]

Revisiting this debate more than decade later, Paul's *Restraining Great Powers* both advances a full-fledged theory of soft balancing and finds empirical support for the pursuit of soft-balancing strategies by great powers and other states over the past two centuries. Paul defines soft balancing as a deliberate and sustained strategy to restrain the "power or aggressive policies of a state through international institutions, concert diplomacy via limited, informal entities, and economic sanctions in order to make its aggressive actions less legitimate in the eyes of the world and hence its strategic goals more difficult to obtain" (20). Like hard balancing and limited hard balancing, soft balancing is fundamentally a coercive strategy aimed at altering the target state's cost-benefit calculations. The three balancing strategies, however, have different political objectives, require different combinations of politico-military-economic tactics, and activate different coercive mechanisms within the target state.

Whereas the objective of hard balancing (whether of the limited or full-scale variety) is to deter or, if necessary, defeat a more powerful or aggressive great power, Paul contends that soft balancing has four overlapping objectives: (1) to impede the target's ability to profit from objectionable behavior; (2) to increase the target's marginal costs in carrying out its plans; (3) to de-legitimate the target's behavior in the eyes of third parties; and (4) to signal that target's continued non-compliance may trigger hard balancing (23). The pursuit of soft-balancing strategies, however, only becomes possible in an international system characterized by all of the following: high levels of economic interdependence; the prevalence of defense-dominant weapon systems; the existence of international institutions; and most great powers' acceptance of the norms of territorial integrity (31-33).

[4] T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing is the Age of U.S. Primacy," International Politics," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 46-71.

[5] Other contributions to the first iteration of the soft-balancing debate include: Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 7-45; Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 109-139; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security* 30:1 (2005): 72-108; idem, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), esp. 60-97; and Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," *World Politics* 61:1 (2008): 86-120.

Assuming these four necessary conditions are present, the perceived threat level that a great power poses determines other states' choices among hard balancing, limited hard balancing, or soft balancing. Great powers that espouse revolutionary ideologies or that have unlimited territorial aspirations generally provoke hard balancing. "But if the balancing state perceives the threatening state as having only limited aims and can be persuaded to alter its policies through instrumental or limited coercive means," Paul writes, then "soft balancing or limited hard balancing may be the most cost-effective option" (24)."

Crucially, Paul makes a persuasive case that soft balancing is not simply an ad-hoc addendum to balance-of-power theory to explain the lack of hard balancing against the United States since 1990. Rather, soft balancing has a longer pedigree in international politics, going back to the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and the Concert of Europe (1815-1853). Great Britain and France pursued soft-balancing strategies to restrain Japan, Italy, and Germany in the early 1930s. While the Soviet Union and the United States (and their allies) pursued hard balancing strategies toward each other during the Cold War, the newly independent states of Asia and Africa pursued soft-balancing strategies toward both superpowers primarily through the Non-Alignment Movement. Yet, the two superpowers combined hard balancing strategies (e.g., conventional and nuclear arms racing and alliance formation) with 'limited' soft balancing by routinely using the United Nations Security Council as a venue to de-legitimate each other's actions. Finally, Russia and China have been pursuing soft balancing strategies against the United States since roughly 1994 and India and Japan have pursued soft balancing against China since 2014.

Paul advances the soft-balancing debate, in particular, and the balance of power theory literature, more broadly, in several important directions. As he points out, neither hard balancing nor soft balancing is guaranteed to successfully deter aggressors or to prevent wars. In this sense, soft balancing is akin to any other coercive strategy. The likelihood of any coercive strategy achieving the objectives of the state pursuing it, therefore, is contingent. Like hard balancing, and what Paul terms limited hard balancing, the pursuit of soft balancing can also produce unintended consequences. A case in point is the soft balancing pursued by Great Britain and France in the early 1930s. As Paul details in chapter 3, the use of the League of Nations by Britain and France to condemn and impose limited economic sanctions in response to Japan's invasion of Manchuria, Italy's war against Abyssinia (Ethiopia), and Germany's violations of the Versailles Treaty produced a nationalist backlash in all three target states (58-72). Nor did the eventual 'switch' to hard balancing against Germany after the annexation of what remained of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 deter the outbreak of a general war six months later.

Hard balancing, limited hard balancing, and soft balancing are on a continuum of coercive strategies. The same state can pursue each of these strategies over time or elements of each concurrently. Similarly, different states can concurrently pursue different strategies toward the same great power target. For example, although Paul characterizes the Cold War as the "archetypical era of hard balancing, with two power blocs relying on alliances and arms build ups," he also notes that the United States and the Soviet Union concurrently engaged in soft-balancing strategies targeting the other via the UN Security Council (75). Moreover, while admitting soft balancing by the newly independent states of Africa and Asia though the Non-Alignment Movement had a very limited impact on the superpowers' behavior, Paul notes its "normative influence was seen in areas such as decolonization, the creation of a new international economic order, and nuclear disarmament" (75).

Paul's theory of soft balancing is a good example of what I term "theoretical layering"—the integration of concepts and variables previously associated with different (and often competing) schools of IR theories to

create a mid-range theory accounting for new or under-explained phenomena.[6] Paul builds upon realist core assumptions about positional competition among conflict groups (for example, tribes, city-states, empires, and nation states) in an environment of scarce resources and pervasive uncertainty.[7] The external threat posed by a great power, which is a function of its relative material capabilities and perceived intentions, prompts a strategic response. Paul then layers in concepts and variables previous associated with other schools of IR theories to delimit the conditions under which threatened states could pursue one type of balancing strategy over another. It is important to note that high levels of economic interdependence and globalization, the availability of international institutions (specifically multilateral security institutions), and the territorial integrity norm do not cause weaker great powers and their allies to pursue soft balancing. Instead, these variables are simply necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for pursuit of soft-balancing strategies. Again, what prompts a state to pursue soft balancing, as opposed to limited or full-fledged hard balancing, are its calculations about the level of external threat.

Paul reaffirms the notion that any balancing strategy requires human agency. Soft balancing, limited hard balancing, and hard balancing are just three among several possible coercive strategies that states might pursue in response to more powerful and threatening states. The ability of any great power or group of states to pursue one of these three strategies not only depends on their available material resources, but also upon the international context. It also depends on the ability of leaders to reach consensus on the magnitude of the external threat, to decide upon an appropriate strategic response, and then to extract and mobilize the human and material resources needed to pursue their chosen strategy. In this sense, Paul builds upon twenty years of scholarship by neoclassical realists about the practical difficulties of implementing balancing strategies in a timely and efficient manner against more powerful or threatening states. The main take away from various neoclassical realist theories is that the pursuit of any type of balancing strategy is often difficult.[8]

Finally, Paul brings the notion of legitimacy back into debates about the balance-of-power and balancing strategies. Legitimacy played an important role in the classical realist treatments of the balance-of-power. For twentieth century classical realists like Hans J. Morgenthau, Henry Kissinger, Arnold Wolfers, and Edward

[6] Although my co-authors and I do not use the term "theoretical layering," this is the approach we take in our discussion of the different clusters of intervening variables in neoclassical realism. See Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 59-79.

[7] See Randall L. Schweller, "Realism and the Present Great Power System: Positional Conflict over Scarce Resources," in Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 28-68.

[8] See Steven E. Lobell, "A Granular Theory of Balancing," *International Studies Quarterly* 62:3 (2018), 593-605; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Strategy of Innocence or Calculated Provocation? The Roosevelt Administration's Road to World War II," in Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman and Steven E. Lobell, eds., *The Challenge of Grand Strategy: The Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 193-223; Norrin M. Ripsman and Jack S. Levy, "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s," *International Security* 33:2 (2008): 148-181; Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Gulick, the balance-of-power was simultaneously a mechanism to preserve the continued existence of independent (and European) great powers, a set of diplomatic and military strategies that astute leaders ought to pursue, and a set of guidelines for discerning what was and what was not acceptable behavior for great powers.[9] Legitimacy also plays an instrumental role in Robert Gilpin's hegemonic theory: A hegemon simply cannot use military force to preserve its privileged position at all times and in all places; the costs would be prohibitive. As Gilpin writes, "Although the rights and rules governing interstate behavior are to varying degrees based on consensus and mutual interest, the primary foundation of rights and rules is the power and interests of the dominant group or states in a social system."[10] However, questions about legitimacy and status are entirely absent in Waltz's reformulation of balance-of-power theory. For Waltz, balancing against concentrations of power is solely motivated by survival. Only by aggregating capabilities can threatened states possess the wherewithal to deter or, if necessary, defeat a more powerful adversary. As Paul notes, the objective of legitimacy denial is to raise the marginal costs of the target's bad behavior. Denying legitimacy, in and of itself, may not stop a target. However, legitimacy denial aims to increase the marginal costs that the target state has to bear in order to fulfil its objectives.

[9] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations; the Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York,: Knopf, 1954); Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957); Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965); Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of the Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

[10] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 35.

Author's Response by T.V. Paul, McGill University

I am gratified by the largely positive reviews of *Restraining Great Powers* by prominent International Relations scholars who have a long-standing scholarly interest on the theme of balance of power. They highlight many strengths of the book, while offering some valuable criticisms and comments that are very useful for further research on this subject area. These comments show that much work is needed on this largely neglected subject matter and the unique opportunity the soft balancing research agenda offers to students of international politics, in particular those who work on regional orders and foreign policies of individual states.

Let me take up some of the comments by the reviewers. Steve Chan correctly points out that soft and hard balancing choices are often not binary. In fact, that is also the message of the book, although during some periods one type of balancing dominated over the other. There is also some element of truth in his argument that China has been learning from the Soviet example, although with a cautionary note that this maybe eroding under the Xi regime. He is also right in suggesting that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) may reduce the appetite for hard balancing by threatened states. But lessons from past examples such as the experiences of the East India Company during the colonial era suggest that economic expansion of this magnitude needs military protection. The crunch time to test if China can forgo the strategies of previous empires, especially the colonial powers, is when China feels it needs to deploy naval power and acquire naval bases to protect its assets. For now, the Chinese strategy appears to be asymmetrical, hoping that the U.S. will decline in the coming decades. I am also not sure if learning itself cannot change from one period to the other. It seems odd that Deng's axioms (and learning from previous expansionist powers about the dangers of quick rise) are at least partially lost in the Xi Jinping era, with a desire to expand faster than previously thought, and also Beijing's claims, like the idea that China will replace America by 2030 as the global hegemon with technological superiority in areas such as artificial intelligence (AI). This has already generated temptations in the U.S. to initiate a new containment strategy toward China.

It should be noted that the definition adopted in the book is an effort to re-define soft balancing and conceptualize it more rigorously than previous works have done. Soft balancing is one of the several strategies states may undertake especially in an uncertain asymmetrical power situation. It can never a 'be-all and end-all' strategy.

Jack Levy's argument that balancing is more likely against land powers as opposed to naval powers is an interesting one. This argument has to be qualified by the fact that most historical great powers were European and they were competing for a congested land space. They did fight in the oceans to carve out their colonial possessions, but this was away from their homelands. In an era of supersonic jets, intercontinental missiles, drones, and a whole host of new technologies, the challenge of distance has compressed. Actually, the increasing cyberspace competition will shrink this even further. I am not sure how all these factors will affect the balancing behavior of states.

Levy highlights my argument that the fear of losing sovereign existence is a necessary condition for the emergence of hard balancing coalitions. This appears to be the case for the U.S. and China until now, as there has been only limited hard balancing against them. Based on this logic, part of the hard balancing that Russia faces today may be due to the military challenge it poses to the former Soviet republics and neighboring states such as Ukraine in terms of their existential security.

Although some classical balance-of-power theorists argued that war prevention is not the primary goal of balance of power, it is an inconsistent position, as the aim of balancing is ultimately to prevent hegemony and aggression by a powerful actor.[1] If the choices of the potential attacker are to be influenced through arms and alliance, the logic of hard balancing has to be that when the potential attacker sees a formidable coalition equal in power, it will forgo war initiation. If balancing is not the key strategy for war prevention in realism, there are hardly any mechanisms left to deal with rising powers and their expansionism. Moreover, according to the realist cannon, balancing, and its associate deterrence logic, have to succeed if we ever want to prevent a major power war.[2] The only acceptable form of warfare could be of the preventive war variety, but there is no guarantee that such a war can produce an optimal balance of power for the initiator.

Deborah Larson makes a number of interesting points. I would contend that hedging is an umbrella strategy and soft balancing, limited hard balancing, and diplomatic engagement are sub-strategies under that umbrella, as countries are doing vis-à-vis China today. Only some strategic partnerships with serious content can be included in soft balancing, as many exist on paper only. I include alignments and ententes that do not involve coordination of military forces and immediate support when attacked as examples of limited hard balancing variety. Alliances such as NATO with Article 5 obligations are examples of hard balancing.

Collective security and soft balancing have differences too. Strategies using the imposition of collective security provisions are clearly meant to weaken the threatening state in order to stop it from aggression. In some sense, the collective security provisions of the League of Nations were used for soft balancing during the inter-war period. The U.S., however, went beyond this with its own individual sanctions toward Japan. In fact the Japanese decision for war accelerated because of U.S. decisions and not because of the League-imposed sanctions alone. I do include the unequal arms control treaties as examples by Western powers to restrain Japan institutionally from becoming a threating power. All these suggest that techniques in different forms of statecraft can be used for restraining/balancing purposes.

I concur with Larson for the need to conduct more research on when and how soft balancing is used for status concerns. This opens up another fruitful avenue for research. Also, her point about how legitimacy matters to great powers in different periods calls for examining in detail the domestic politics and individual level preferences of leaders. For instance, some U.S. presidents showed more proclivity to respect international institutions and the legitimacy accorded to them than others. The preferences of Barack Obama versus Donald Trump clearly show these differences.

Jeffrey Taliaferro's "conceptual layering" is an important idea and it is somewhat similar to eclecticism, but it may be worth examining the manner in which such a strategy can be accomplished without losing rigor. Taliaferro agrees with my claim that "legitimacy denial increases the marginal costs that the target state has to bear in order to fulfil its objectives."

---

[1] See, for example, Harold Laswell, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity*, (New York: Free Press, 1965) and Randolph Schweller, "The Balance of Power in World Politics," *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2016). https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-119?rskey=8oGq7L&result=1.

[2] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. (New York: Random House, 1979), 127.

Kai He offers many possible research avenues that other scholars of soft balancing can pursue. These include the effects of conditioning variables that produce opportunities for soft balancing, and conditions under which soft balancing is likely to succeed or fail. I believe I have convincingly argued the conditions under which institutions, economic sanctions, and limited ententes can be used as tools of soft balancing. This does not mean that other purposes do not exist for these instruments and mechanisms. This is also based on a logic that different instruments of statecraft can have multiple functions, more than what the key IR paradigms contend. The conditions under which states prefer one or the other mechanism also will depend on the availability of the instrument in question. I agree that soft balancing in non-traditional security domains may open up interesting research avenues.

Bhubhindar Singh proposes new avenues for understanding domestic politics, normative contexts, and adding defense diplomacy to the menu of soft balancing. I believe the last task can be covered under limited alignments and ententes if they are meant for restraining purposes. Other defense diplomacy tools are interesting but this would require a much wider research agenda to show if they are used for restraining purposes or for bolstering or for regular diplomatic purposes only.

Overall, the reviewers have made many interesting points and suggestions for further research. My interactions with young doctoral and master's students in different parts of the world during my book tour during the past year showed that there is a great deal of interest in this area and many theses are in the making. I thank all of my colleagues for their contributions to this forum as well as their suggestions to improve and broaden the research agenda on soft balancing. In particular, I would like to thank Kai He for organizing this symposium and the preceding ISA panel as well as Professor Robert Jervis for writing a thoughtful introduction and Diane Labrosse for working hard to make this roundtable possible.