

CHAPTER 8

Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia

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Post-Soviet central Eurasia presents a bewildering array of constantly shifting state strategies. In the decade after 1991, Russia sometimes seemed bent on forming an anti-U.S. coalition in league with China, India, and Europe, but at other times it cooperated closely with Washington. At times, Moscow's neighbors appeared to be acting vigorously to counter Russian hegemony in the region by rushing to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or forming their own security alliances. Yet at other times they cooperated closely with Russia and allowed themselves to become dependent on it for markets, energy, or security.

Is this confusing set of strategies the outgrowth of the age-old balance of power imperative? No general theory can explain each subtle shift in every state's strategic behavior. But if balance of power theory captures the core security problem of the region, then the seemingly contradictory and confusing strategic behavior of central Eurasia's newly independent states can be explained as a function of larger forces that international relations scholars have long understood. Armed with the theory, and given certain assumptions about global and regional trends in relative power, we might forecast the future trajectory of the region's international politics.

This chapter assesses the applicability of balance of power theory to post-Soviet Eurasia. It suggests that the theory applies, but very weakly. Russians worry about the continued concentration of power in the United States, and Moscow's neighbors fear Russia's declining but locally formidable capabilities. Many Russian policymakers would prefer a world in which U.S. power were balanced, just as many of Moscow's neighbors would be delighted to see Moscow cut down to size. When push comes to shove, however, policymakers in the region act as if the most serious long-term threat they face is not domination by an aspiring hegemon but poverty and marginalization.

They frequently use balance of power rhetoric to describe policies driven by the desire to enrich their countries—or often themselves and their cronies. Most policymakers in the region would prefer a more even distribution of power. None, however, is willing to pay the economic, political, or military costs of balancing.

Specifying the Theory

Balance of power theory posits that because states residing in global anarchy have an interest in maximizing their long-term odds on survival, they will check dangerous concentrations of power (“hegemony”) by building up their own capabilities (“internal balancing”) or aggregating their capabilities with other states in alliances (“external balancing”). It predicts that the higher the probability of hegemony, the more likely states are to balance. In his introduction, T. V. Paul argues that scholars tend to formulate the theory too restrictively and thus miss crucial dynamics that might fall within its purview. Here, by contrast, I contend that even the simplest renderings of the theory turn out to be fearsomely complex in practice. In particular, two tasks must be addressed before applying even the sparest version of the theory to any contemporary case.

The first task is to clear away the confusion created by the common conflation of two quite distinct balance of power theories—each with different definitions of “hegemony” and different predictions concerning unipolarity—that are currently in widespread use. Scholars have made much of the distinction between balance of power theory and Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory.¹ Do states balance against power or threat? Many neorealists exclude intentions from their assessment of the probability of hegemony. For these scholars, threat inheres in power alone, and large concentrations of material capabilities should spark balancing behavior regardless of intentions. Thus the debate comes down to whether to include intentions in the calculation of the probability of hegemony; that is, whether balancing only occurs when some state reveals its hegemonic aspirations by the specific policies it adopts.

Less widely recognized but ultimately far more important is a deeper distinction between two kinds of balance of power theories. One is a universal balance of power theory that defines a hegemon as any state with unrivaled power, and thus predicts a general tendency toward equilibrium in any sys-

tem of states. Kenneth N. Waltz transformed this line of thinking from classical writings into a full-blown social science theory in his 1979 *Theory of International Politics*.² Waltz claims that his structural theory explains outcomes, not state strategies. In other words, the theory explains how the willy-nilly pulling and hauling of routine security competition produces equilibrium even if no state actually seeks to balance prospective hegemons.

While classical writers sometimes stated their theory in a universal form, most of them were actually talking about the continental European system. In practice, they described a different balance of power theory in which hegemony meant "a concentration of military power that raises the specter of the conquest of all the other great powers in a given system." The theory is contingent because it expects balance of power dynamics to occur only in regional or contiguous interstate systems. It would not expect powerful "offshore" states like Britain in the 19th century and the United States today to spark counterbalancing coalitions because of the "stopping power of water." Indeed, the failure of other states to balance the British empire simply never presented itself as a puzzle to the classical balance of power theorists. As dominant as such offshore states may be globally, their ability to achieve real mastery over the international system is circumscribed by the difficulty of projecting military power overseas, and so they are unlikely to spark counterbalancing. Because classical writers included intentions in their discussions of the hegemonic threats that elicited balancing reactions, by modern terminology they would be called conditional balance of threat theorists. But a purely power-centric version of the conditional theory survives today. Because of its greater precision, for example, the contingent version is invariably the choice of scholars seeking formal rigor.³ In addition, John J. Mearsheimer incorporates the contingent balance of power concept into the offensive realist theory presented in his 2001 volume, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.⁴

These definitional distinctions yield the theories mapped out in Table 8.1. They matter for the analysis that follows because scholars' failure to be specific about their theoretical assumptions has generated confusion in post-Cold War debates about balance of power theory and unipolarity. The universal theory presupposes the contingent theory, but not vice versa. If there is a general tendency toward equilibrium, then there must be balancing against regional military hegemons, but regional balancing of military capabilities does not necessarily produce a tendency toward global equilibrium. This is crucial for our case, because the universal theory predicts that Russia

TABLE 8.1
Balance of Power Theories

PROBABILITY OF HEGEMONY FUNCTION	DEFINITION OF HEGEMONY	
	"Ability to conquer all others"	"Unrivaled power"
<i>Material capabilities + intentions</i>	Conditional balance of threat (Classical writers: Dehio, Gulick)	Universal balance of threat (Waltz)
<i>Material only: military power/ geographical/ technical</i>	Conditional balance of power (Mearsheimer, Levy, Wagner, Powell)	Universal balance of power (Waltz, Layne)

will try to balance the United States, but the contingent theory does not. Even if the stopping power of water did not disqualify the United States as a hegemonic threat, nuclear deterrence would. After all, the theory is based on the assumption that states are security maximizers. By that assumption, existential deterrence must be credible: a would-be hegemon would have to conclude that other great powers would use their nuclear forces if their sovereign existence were ever threatened by territorial conquest. Hence, no rational would-be hegemon, no matter how overwhelming its conventional capabilities, would contemplate the territorial conquest of other nuclear-armed great powers, and no rational, nuclear-armed great power would fear hegemony as contingent balance of power theory defines it.

Before setting forth hypotheses on balancing, however, a second task emerges: to establish clear operational guidelines for distinguishing "balancing" from other routine kinds of security competition. If all security policies are "balancing," then balance of power theory becomes vacuous. Waltz and some of his followers have claimed that their theory explains balanced outcomes without necessarily predicting balancing strategies by states. This argument makes the theory exceedingly general, extremely difficult to test, and impossible to apply to any specific case. Fortunately, we can set it aside, for both Waltz and Christopher Layne have stated clearly that their universal theory predicts balancing against U.S. unipolarity. Hence, they expect that causal mechanism to be in play today, however subtly.⁵

How then do we tell whether states are balancing? While they may part ways on some issues, nearly all balance of power theorists agree that the theory is *systemic*. It is not about dyads. The intellectual history of the balance of power as well as classical and modern efforts to develop it as a theory all testify to the centrality of this systemic element.⁶ It follows that *balancing* is action taken to check a potential hegemon. It is action, moreover, that would not have been taken in the absence of a dangerous concentration of power in the system. And it is action that actually has the potential to affect the systemic distribution of capabilities. State behavior unrelated to systemic concentrations of power—and that is arguably much of what goes on in international politics—has nothing to do with balance of power theory. This yields two often-overlooked distinctions that are central to any analysis of balance of power theory in today's unipolar system.

First is the distinction between routine security competition and genuine balance-of-power dynamics. During the Cold War, for example, the United States and its allies frequently disagreed on important policy matters. Often, allies withheld cooperation and even struggled vigorously to get Washington to change course, as in the Vietnam War. For its part, the United States sometimes took very tough action against its own allies, as in Suez. Terrorists repeatedly attacked U.S. interests in the Cold War as well. Truck bombs and other forms of “asymmetric warfare” were employed, as against the U.S. Marine compound in Lebanon in 1982. It rarely occurred to anyone to try to use balance of power theory to explain these phenomena, for the simple reason that a compelling example of real balancing—against the Warsaw Pact—stood right before their eyes.

Today's unipolar system lacks such potent balance of power dynamics, and analysts are consequently tempted to trumpet nearly any action that might complicate U.S. policy as balancing. Some of this behavior is completely unrelated to U.S. power; that is, the states or other actors involved would do much the same thing if the United States were half as strong as it is in reality. And many of these actions are genuine responses to U.S. primacy, but do not have any prospect of affecting the scales of world power. While it may make sense to use terms such as rhetorical, prestige, cultural, or soft balancing, to describe some of these actions, it is important not to confuse them with the real thing.⁷

The second key distinction is between economic growth and internal balancing. Internal balancing is enhancement of a state's power in response to

a potential hegemon. Not all shifts in relative power—not even all power shifts that work against the international system's leader—are caused by balance of power dynamics. Most states want their economies to grow rapidly and would prefer their power to increase relative to others whether there is a hegemon on the horizon or not. In other words, internal balancing is the net growth in states' relative capabilities caused by a systemic concentration of power. It may be difficult to distinguish routine increases in states' power from increases specifically sparked by balance of power imperatives. The clearest case is when a state chooses to translate economic potential into military power in order to check another state's bid for mastery of the system. But not all military buildups are necessarily internal balancing.

Russia's Response to U.S. Power

By 1993, Russians realized that the distribution of power had undergone a massive shift yielding a systemic concentration of raw capabilities in the United States that was unprecedented in four centuries of world history. As this realization set in, Russian leaders and policy commentators began to speak incessantly of the need to take action to create multipolarity. By the mid-1990s, there appeared to be a consensus in Moscow on this approach.⁸ From 1995 to 2000, Russia's foreign ministry engineered a parade of ostensibly anti-U.S. diplomatic combinations: the “European troika” of France, Germany, and Russia; the “special relationship” between Germany and Russia; the “strategic triangle” of Russia, China, and India; and, most important, the “strategic partnership” between China and Russia. This evidence appears to ratify universal balance of power theory's prediction that Russia will try to balance the United States. But talk is cheap. A close examination of what Russia actually has done to augment its capabilities alone or with others shows that appearances are deceiving.

IS RUSSIA BALANCING?

There is no evidence of Russian internal balancing. On the contrary, between 1992 and 1998, Russia experienced what was probably the steepest peacetime decline in military spending by any major power in history.⁹ Despite much loud talk, to date nothing serious has been done to advance

real military or defense industrial reform.¹⁰ Russian defense policy appears to have been one of malign neglect—let the military decline until a more propitious moment arrives to begin to construct a modern armed force from the rubble. Even after defense budget increases in 1999, outlays in 2000 remained less than 40 percent of those in 1992. Weapons procurement declined even more dramatically after 1991, and by 2000 only 20 percent of Russia's operational weapons stocks were modern, compared to 60–80 percent in NATO countries.¹¹ Maintenance and training are dismal; personnel problems are dire and getting worse.¹² Unable to subdue the Chechen rebels, the Russian military is beset by so many problems of such magnitude that virtually all experts agree that major reforms entailing huge expenditures are critically necessary simply to forestall its self-destruction. Hence, increased budgetary outlays and intensified reform efforts are driven by deep problems of decay that are unrelated to counterbalancing U.S. power. If Washington were to cut its defense outlays by two-thirds tomorrow, the pressure on Moscow to forestall further military decline would be undiminished.

Neither did Russia engage in external balancing. Moscow's most widely touted treaty relationships—those with China and India—simply are not power-aggregating alliances. All three states continued to cooperate closely with the United States on a very large range of security and economic matters, behavior bearing scant resemblance to any normal understanding of balancing. The relationship with India amounts to a Soviet holdover based on the Friendship Treaty of 1971, whose language implied weak security obligations even in the Cold War, and a largely symbolic Declaration on Strategic Partnership signed by Putin and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in 2000. The Russia-China Treaty on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation signed in July 2001 capped over a decade of improving bilateral ties, but it similarly lacks anything resembling a mutual defense clause.¹³ While the treaty obligates the signatories in a general sense to maintain the global equilibrium and to consult each other in the event of security threats, neither it nor any public Russo-Chinese agreement entails any observable or costly commitment to counter U.S. power.

At the core of Russia's relationships with India and China are major arms sales and extensive military coproduction arrangements. The need to counterbalance U.S. power does not drive Russia's interest in these exports. Rather, they are desperately needed to slow the inexorable decline of Russia's military industrial complex. Given the collapse of domestic orders (in 2001,

only 10 percent of Russian defense firms received state orders), Russia's defense sector possesses massive excess capacity.¹⁴ Exports are a crucial life-line for a military industry producing less than one-third of its 1992 output, and rapidly losing technological competitiveness. The defense sector supplies income and welfare services to hundreds of thousands of workers and their families, provides the economic lifeblood of dozens of cities, and enriches numerous managers and public officials. The evidence concerning Russia's major arms relationships overwhelmingly indicates that they have little to do with U.S. power. Again, the United States could cut its defense outlays by two-thirds tomorrow, and Moscow would remain just as eager to sell weaponry to Beijing and New Delhi. Moreover, while arms sales to its Asian clients do alter local power balances, not even the most alarmist interpretation of them suggests that they will provide a genuine counterbalance to U.S. power overall.¹⁵

The bottom line is that Russia's putative efforts to counter U.S. power fall far short of "hard balancing." Much of Moscow's strategic behavior is driven by security or development concerns that are unrelated to U.S. unipolarity, and so it does not count as "soft balancing." The external-balancing initiatives that Moscow pursued did not hold out even a vague promise of affecting the scales of world power, and the Russians eventually concluded that even that game was not worth the candle. There is simply no evidence that Moscow has been willing to pay any significant costs in order to hasten the end of American primacy. That is, the Russians have done nothing to augment their power that they would not have done in a world without an overpowering United States.

UNIVERSAL BALANCE OF THREAT OR CONDITIONAL BALANCE OF POWER?

Russia's behavior belies universal balance of power theory's prediction of balancing. This result leaves two competing hypotheses derived from the theories arrayed in Table 8.1:

- H2 (universal balance of threat theory): Russia is not balancing because the United States has benign intentions.
- H3 (conditional balance of power theory): Russia is not balancing because nuclear deterrence and America's offshore location ensure no genuine threat of hegemony.

Which is right? The answer matters not just for academic theory but for policy as well. If universal balance of threat theory is true, only the benign nature of U.S. intentions prevents dangerous counterbalancing. If U.S. behavior gets too threatening, other states will revise their estimates of American intentions and possibly bring unipolarity to an end. If conditional balance of power theory is true, the absence of counterbalancing is driven by material factors unrelated to U.S. intentions, and Washington need not be concerned that overly aggressive or unilateral actions might spark a costly counterbalancing reaction. It is not possible to reject either hypothesis conclusively, of course, but two quick tests are suggestive.

First, H2 predicts that America's benign intentions should figure prominently in Russian assessments of the security environment. In other words, the benign nature of U.S. primacy should be an important reason why Russians do not consider it necessary to counterbalance. In fact, this is not the case. Russia's two post-Soviet presidents (as well as the last Soviet one); all its defense ministers, foreign ministers, chiefs of staff, and national security advisors; and all of its official doctrines on national security, military policy, and foreign policy have stated unequivocally that the military subjugation of Russia by the United States or any other major power is not a concern on the policy-relevant horizon.¹⁶ The main reason given for this state of affairs is nuclear deterrence. In addition, Russian analyses highlight the punishing costs that real balancing would impose, especially the extent to which it would run counter to Russia's aim of integrating itself into the world economy, and the greater salience of local security threats. So their basic argument is that balancing is not critical for Russian security and therefore that the costs outweigh the benefits. Even Russian liberals, who might be expected to highlight the ultimately benign nature of U.S. intentions, do not do so. Rather, they stress the economic opportunity costs argument, as well as the greater long-term threat posed by Russia's erstwhile balancing partner, China.¹⁷

Second, H2 predicts that a Russian propensity to balance should correlate with aggressive U.S. behavior, which indicates malign or hegemonic U.S. intentions. At the rhetorical level, there is some evidence for this proposition. The best indicator of Russia's propensity to balance is probably its "multipolar" policy line, inaugurated in the mid-1990s by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov. It is important to stress that the real goal of the policy was modest: to try in concert with other players to get the United States to alter specific policies. In other words, it was not power balancing,

but policy bargaining, more typical of coalition politics among allies or even in domestic politics than the military balancing of the Cold War or the 19th century. Russia sought to present itself as the linchpin member of global coalitions aimed at countering specific U.S. policies, such as NATO expansion, the maintenance of sanctions against Iraq, intervention in the Balkans, and abandoning the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty to construct missile defenses. The policy arguably reached its apex during NATO's war in Kosovo. Realist commentators in the United States consequently railed against these expansionary U.S. moves. Their argument appeared to be derived directly from universal balance of threat theory: further expansionary U.S. policies are likely to push Russia toward more, and more consequential, balancing behavior. In other words, if the United States became too militarily active, resistance to its policies would grow.

From 1999 to 2001, however, tough U.S. policies produced effects precisely the opposite of H2. Russian analysts and policymakers became increasingly disenchanted with the multipolar policy.¹⁸ The most important criticism was that the old policy simply did not work. It did not maximize Moscow's bargaining leverage either with Washington or the other main players in the policy counterbalancing game. On each issue with the United States throughout 1993–2000, Russian diplomats stated their opposition in unambiguous terms and then ended up backing down, sometimes in a humiliating manner. By publicly backing down from such clearly stated positions, Moscow squandered its limited prestige and advertised its weakness. The multipolar policy scattered Russia's limited foreign-policy energies around the globe, preventing a necessary concentration on priority issues. It constrained Russia's flexibility, trapping it into taking a lead position in most global anti-U.S. policy coalitions. Other powers, such as France and China—often with greater interests at stake and far greater capabilities—were letting Russia do the dirty work of seeking to constrain the United States, all the while making lucrative deals with Washington on the side. Moreover, critics argued, if relations between any of the other multipolar partners and Washington were to deteriorate seriously—for example, between Beijing and Washington over Taiwan—Russia might have been drawn into a confrontation in which it had no stake and which it could not afford.

The evidence strongly suggests that Vladimir Putin was ahead of the curve on this issue and came into office knowing that most of his military and national security elite were indulging in nostalgic fantasies regarding the

real role Russia could play in world affairs.¹⁹ He used the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States as a pretext to accelerate the strategic shift toward bandwagoning that was already under way. The centerpiece of the effort was a retreat on issues Putin knew Russia would eventually have to compromise on in any case: NATO expansion and the Bush administration's push to abandon the ABM Treaty. Once Russia further softened its stance on these issues, the path was open to major improvements in relations with the United States, signified by Russia's signing of a strategic arms reduction agreement during U.S. President George W. Bush's May 2002 visit to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and formally joining the new NATO-Russia council later that month. Adding weight to these modest policy moves was a dramatic increase in the clarity with which Putin and other top officials described the rapprochement with the West.²⁰

This rapprochement took place as the United States embarked on one of the most expansionist periods in its history, inserting military force into Russia's backyard in central Asia and proceeding to vanquish the Taliban in Afghanistan. The new U.S. expansion elicited cries of opposition in Russian military and foreign policy circles, but Putin elected to bandwagon with America's war on terror. Within a year of that decision, universal balance of power theory faced its greatest test: the U.S. war in Iraq. This time, Russia refused to lead the policy coalition against Washington, choosing instead to shelter behind France and Germany. When he could hedge no longer, Putin ultimately decided to support the European powers against Washington. Yet again, even in the face of U.S. expansion far more significant than Kosovo, Russo-American relations never became as tense over Iraq as they had in the Balkans. Moscow's tack toward Europe reminded Washington that the Russians still have some bargaining room, but it did not come at the expense of a working strategic partnership with the United States. As Putin's foreign policy aide Sergei Prikhodko put it: "Our partnership with the United States is not a hostage of the Iraq crisis. There are far too many common values and common tasks both short term and long term . . . our cooperation never stopped, even during the Iraq crisis."²¹ And this was not just rhetoric; concrete cooperation continued on intelligence sharing, nuclear arms control, NATO expansion, peacekeeping in Afghanistan, and the North Korea issue. The policy reflected a bet that the Americans would not allow Iraq to derail the most important parts of the new U.S.-Russian relationship—the antiterrorism coalition and managing Russia's further entry into the world economy.

The real story is the opposite of what H₂ predicts. Tougher and more imperious U.S. behavior yielded an improvement in Russo-American relations and a reduction in Moscow's opposition to U.S. policies. Ultimately, H₃ accords best with the evidence. Russians appear to place less emphasis on U.S. benignity than on a hardheaded assessment of its material capabilities. While most Russians resent U.S. primacy and would love to see it checked, the security problems created by the concentration of power in the United States are often not the most salient for Moscow, and so Russians are unwilling to pay the costs of balancing. Attempting to balance the United States would take resources away from more pressing needs. Indeed, declining relative power has caused Moscow progressively to pare down its security agenda. As a result, the list of issues where U.S. unipolarity appears to threaten Russian interests has grown shorter even as the list of pressing near-term and local threats has lengthened. And, as the example of the war on terror demonstrates, many of those threats require cooperation with—not balancing against—the world's most powerful state.

Central Eurasia's Response to Russian Power

At first glance, balance of power theory appears to apply more directly to the post-Soviet region of central Eurasia, where genuine military hegemony is at least possible. While Russia today is utterly incapable of reconquering its erstwhile provinces, it may someday regain that capability. Russia's underlying superiority is enormous, as Table 8.2 shows.

Not surprisingly, given these power realities, elites and leaders in the newly independent states do discuss the probability of hegemony as realistic, if currently very low. Based on a simple reading of balance of power theories, both the universal and contingent versions should predict that these states would be balancing as hard as they can. Moreover, given Moscow's imperial history and its bellicose behavior throughout much of what Russian officials ominously call "the near abroad," balance of threat theory only reinforces the predictions of balance of power theory.

Unfortunately, however, applying the theory to a specific region is complicated. Even though the probability of hegemony in Eurasia is comparatively high, the theory still does not necessarily yield precise predictions. The reason is that Russia's neighbors are generally so weak that their collective

TABLE 8.2.
Central Eurasia's Balance of Power^a

	Population		GDP		Defense Expenditures		Military Personnel	
	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000	1995	2000
<i>Russia</i>	50.54	50.38	91.30	88.52	96.24	93.04	63.03	58.24
<i>Armenia</i>	1.17	1.19	*	*	*	*	2.85	2.51
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	2.63	2.66	*	*	*	*	3.51	4.30
<i>Belarus</i>	3.52	3.50	*	*	*	*	4.24	4.94
<i>Estonia</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>Georgia</i>	1.85	1.68	*	*	*	*	n.a.	1.00
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	5.76	5.53	1.49	1.34	*	*	1.99	3.81
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	1.54	1.62	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>Latvia</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>Lithuania</i>	1.26	1.25	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>Moldova</i>	1.48	1.51	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>Tajikistan</i>	2.09	2.15	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	1.43	1.53	*	*	*	*	*	1.04
<i>Ukraine</i>	17.40	17.30	3.06	2.36	1.29	1.71	19.90	18.11
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	7.98	8.44	*	1.4	*	*	1.49	3.3

SOURCE: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (London: IISS, 1996, 2002).

^a Expressed as percentage of total; * indicates less than 1%.

ability to balance Moscow is limited. Hence, they face a strong temptation to pass the balancing buck to others or even to bandwagon actively with the hegemon to curry its favor and derive benefits from Moscow. Referring to great powers, Mearsheimer notes that "threatened states are reluctant to form balancing coalitions against potential hegemon because the costs of containment are likely to be great; if it is possible to get another state to bear those costs, a threatened state will make every effort to do so."²² If buck-passing temptations appeal to great powers, they are likely to be nearly irresistible to weak regional states whose potential contribution to a balancing coalition is marginal.

Balance of power theorists have long recognized that weak states often

cannot respond optimally to balancing imperatives, which is why many of them restrict the theory to great powers. Consequently, they do not provide deductively based predictions of when to expect balancing, buck-passing, or bandwagoning in regional interstate systems. The theory's basic logic, however, suggests three conditional variables that affect the propensity of states to balance in regional systems where the probability of hegemony is comparatively high.

First, the availability of allies will affect any state's strategic choice. By virtue of geography or possession of some strategically valuable resource, some states are better able to secure allies than others. If powerful allies are available, the theory expects neighbors to take advantage of them. Second, the greater a state's relative power (defined as the capability to balance the hegemon), the more likely it is to balance. Only the weakest states whose marginal contribution to containing the hegemon is negligible should bandwagon. For stronger states, bandwagoning materially increases the probability of hegemony and thus the possibility that the state might lose its sovereignty. The strongest regional actors are the most likely to be able to balance. States whose power falls in the middle of this range should prefer to balance, but may not be able to. They can be expected to follow ambiguous hedging strategies that allow them to cooperate with the potential hegemon even as they encourage other states to pay the costs of balancing it. Third, geography affects the choice between balancing and buck-passing. Contiguity lowers the costs and raises the benefits of balancing. By the usual three to one offense/defense rule, a state can balance against a possible offensive by its potentially hegemonic neighbor relatively cheaply. At the same time, contiguity begets balancing because neighbors are the most likely victims of territorial conquest by aspiring hegemon. For all these reasons, buck-passing is hard for states bordering on potential hegemon.

It follows from the foregoing discussion that while the theory predicts that states will want to balance potential hegemon, it cannot predict that balancing will succeed in a particular time or region. In any given region, history and geography might conspire to produce a "natural" hegemon that cannot be balanced no matter how much its regional neighbors might want to. The theory cannot predict success or whether balancing behavior actually will occur; it only can predict the intensity of various states' propensity to balance. Bearing this inevitable limitation in mind, balance of power theory predicts that the most likely candidates for balancing are the most capable

regional states that border on the potential hegemon and are lucky enough to find powerful great-power allies. States that have only two of these attributes still might balance. States with one or none have no realistic balancing options and should opt to pass the buck to those that do. Only the very weakest and most vulnerable states should opt to bandwagon.

THE EVIDENCE: HEDGING BALANCING BETS

The evidence since the mid-1990s overwhelmingly indicates that hedging is the dominant strategy among Russia's neighbors. This might seem surprising, given the strong balancing rhetoric emanating from many regional capitals. But, as in the case of Russia's mainly symbolic balancing against the United States, rhetoric is a poor indicator of the strategic realities on the ground in central Eurasia. Three major strains of evidence are most important here.

First, there is no measurable internal balancing. Table 8.2 essentially tells the story. In terms of aggregate indicators of military might, the region is just as primed for hegemony as it was in 1995: none of Russia's neighbors has managed to enhance its relative share of military power to any significant degree. Looking beyond these indicators, Russia's real ability to conquer neighboring lands is far more limited than the numbers suggest. Yet most of Russia's neighbors are even less capable militarily than their miniscule shares of aggregate capabilities imply. They face immense challenges of institution building, and in most cases military reforms have barely begun. Ukraine is an important case in point. Like Russia, Ukraine inherited a seemingly impressive military establishment from the Soviet Union. But the mismatch between that imperial inheritance and the real security needs of a smaller successor state was much greater in Ukraine's case. It presented the Ukrainians with even greater challenges, and exacted greater relative economic costs than those faced by military reformers in Russia. With far greater resource constraints, Ukraine's response has been less coherent than Russia's. While the military has been downsized and partially rationalized, it remains fundamentally unreformed.²³

Thus, indicators of military power for Ukraine need to be deflated even more than those for Russia. And the same goes for most other former Soviet states. In the central Asian republics, as well as Belarus, Georgia, and Armenia, local militaries not only are struggling with reform, but they

remain deeply penetrated by direct and indirect Russian influence. Russia maintains military or naval bases on the territories of Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Ukraine. It has command posts and extensive military cooperation arrangements with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It remains the principal arms supplier for most former Soviet republics, whose own defense industrial structures remain vertically integrated with Russia's. Only the Baltic militaries have undergone substantial reforms, and they may well represent capabilities that exceed the impression given by small scores on the indicators of power, but they remain tiny and lack defensible borders.

Second, external balancing in the region is mainly symbolic. The main intra-regional balancing effort is GUAM, a loose political and security grouping formed in 1997 that comprises Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. (Uzbekistan's brief membership between 1999 and 2001 inserted another "U" into the group's name, but had no lasting consequence.) The group's main purpose is ostensibly to counter Russia diplomatically and politically. But it lacks real institutions and coordinating mechanisms and has had no measurable effect on its members' real capabilities, or even their joint ability to resist Russia politically. As former Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze put it, "GUAM is an artificial organization . . . [with] rather bleak prospects."²⁴

The main problem was that Ukraine, the keystone in GUAM's arch, simply failed to rise to the role of a regional balancer. Other regional governments carefully watched Kyiv's statements and actions in the late 1990s, and what they saw gave them scant comfort: every move against Russia was hedged with a commensurate move accommodating Russia. Faced with a wavering Ukraine whose government contained many pro-Russian elements, weaker members like Georgia and Moldova could hardly be expected to spearhead anti-Russian coalitions. Both of those countries contain territory under Russian military control and are much more vulnerable to Russian pressure than Ukraine. In the end, Azerbaijan proved to be the member state able to take the most consistent anti-Russian stance in regional politics, a bold stance that owed nothing to the Ukrainian-led regional balancing effort and everything to its energy riches and U.S. interest in exploiting them.

Hence, external-balancing action in the region centers on outside powers and especially NATO. The three Baltic states stand out as the region's earliest, most consistent and now successful NATO aspirants. Politically and

TABLE 8.3
Former Soviet States: Bandwagoning, Balancing, or Hedging?

	High trade dependence on Russia (c)	High energy dependence on Russia (a)	Dependent on Russian energy transport infrastructure (b)	Russian military base or troops stationed in territory	Member CIS Coll. Sec Treaty	Newly Independent State	Stated to join NATO or strong interest in joining	U.S. troops on territory	Standard Score (left side - right side)	Real score (left side - right side, including shaded indicators)
	X	X	X	X	X	Belarus			2	4
		X	X	X	X	Armenia			2	4
	X	X	X	X		Moldova			1	4
	X	X	X	X	X	Kazakhstan			2	4
	X	X	X	X		Ukraine	X		0	3
	X	X	X			Latvia	X		-1	2
	X	X	X			Lithuania	X		-1	2
				X	X	Kyrgyzstan		X	1	2
				X	X	Tajikistan			2	2
	X	X	X	X		Georgia	X	X	-2	2
						Turkmenistan			0	0
	X	X	X			Azerbaijan	X		-1	1
	X	X	X			Estonia	X		-1	0
			X			Uzbekistan		X	-1	0

NOTES: (a) High energy dependence means Russia is the main energy supplier. (b) High dependence on Russian energy transport infrastructure means a country's energy imports and exports largely flow through Russian pipelines. (c) High trade dependence means more than 30% of a country's exports or imports are accounted for by Russia.

diplomatically, if not yet militarily, their campaign for NATO membership carried clear costs and risks vis-à-vis Moscow, and promised some benefits. Georgia and Azerbaijan also have stated repeatedly their preference for NATO membership, but their location and fragile political institutions make membership unlikely. Once again, the Ukrainian case is instructive. After spending most of the 1990s hedging its bets, Ukraine finally announced its intention to sign a NATO Membership Action Plan in July 2002. Yet, Kyiv also agreed to join the Russia-sponsored Eurasian Economic Community, and, most important, its demarche occurred only after Russia itself had accommodated NATO. The signing of the new charter on the NATO-Russia Council dramatically lowered the political costs of Ukraine's decision. Indeed, as long as Russia retains a cordial and institutionalized relationship with NATO, the geopolitical significance of expressed intentions to join the organization remains questionable. Ukraine's decision to opt for NATO membership thus did nothing to reduce the studied ambiguity it has maintained in regional alignments.

The third strain of evidence is the most important: the strongest regional balancers remain critically dependent on Russia economically and especially for energy resources. Table 8.3 compares indicators of bandwagoning with Russia on the left side with external balancing with the west on the right side. The shaded areas display indicators of economic dependence often excluded from balance of power analyses. Ignoring those indicators leads to overestimating the degree and success of balancing in the region. The most consistent balancers, the Baltic states, have been unwilling or unable to absorb the economic costs of reducing their deep dependence on Russia for energy (oil, gas, and electricity) and transportation infrastructure, and Russian companies purchase strategic assets in all three countries. Russian influence and Baltic vulnerability continue and in some ways increase, despite NATO membership. In pure strategic terms, ongoing energy dependence could make the three Baltic states very vulnerable to Russia if matters ever came to a real crisis. Even more important, the region's most powerful actor, Ukraine, remains much more dependent on Russia than the tiny Baltics. Ukraine gets over 90 percent of its overall energy supplies from Russia, owes Russia's gas monopoly Gazprom over US\$3 billion, is crucially dependent on earnings from transshipping Russian gas to Europe, is in arrears on its electricity debt to Russia's energy giant UES, depends on Russia for key markets, and is a central site for strategic foreign direct investment from Russian

companies. These dependencies go a long way toward explaining Kyiv's hedging strategy.

BALANCE OF POWER THEORY IN CENTRAL EURASIA:
A BALANCE SHEET

How well does balance of power theory do? Overall, the theory accurately predicts the widespread regional preference for balancing. Most of Russia's neighbors would like to see Russia balanced. Many have pursued allies vigorously, though only the tiny Baltic states have succeeded in joining a significant alliance. Many tried ardently to find allies against Russia, but have simply been unable to do so—Georgia is a notable case in point. The non-shaded areas of Table 8.3 capture the balancing aspirations of states, if not their degree of success. And many states are working to reduce their economic dependence on Russia. Since 1995, the number of states that are trade dependent on Russia has decreased. The region has witnessed intensive efforts to reduce reliance on Russia for energy transportation. Many states are hedging because they have no choice—Moldova is an example. Table 8.3 also indicates that the number of states that have actually *chosen* to bandwagon with Russia by acceding to Moscow's Commonwealth of Independent States Treaty on Collective Security is small. Most of these states are very weak and lack outside allies. Armenia is a prime example that accords with the theory's expectations.

The theory thus captures an important piece of strategic reality in central Eurasia, and it remains a necessary part of the analyst's tool kit. Yet it also faces major limitations. It is of little utility in explaining much of the variation in local responses to Russia. Even when we add conditional variables to the theory to derive more discrete hypotheses, it fails to add much to the explanation of why Kazakhstan is such a faithful bandwagoner despite its proximity to Russia; why Turkmenistan eschews all external balancing of any kind while Tajikistan cozies up to Russia; and why Belarus has been such a faithful bandwagoner despite relative power and a geographical position similar to the Baltics. The answers to these questions lie in local history and politics, in the details of the imperial dissolution rather than the insights from a general theory.

Balance of power theory's predictions utterly fail in the key case of

Ukraine. Ukraine's share of relative power, geographical position, and proximity and attractiveness to outside great-power allies all suggest that it should be more prone to balancing than any of the other successor states. The reasons Ukraine failed to respond to balancing imperatives all center on the classic "weak state" problem: the country lacks effective state institutions and hence cannot act as coherently on the world scene as balance of power theory expects.²⁵ It is thoroughly penetrated by Russian influence at all levels; it has one of the most corrupt governments in the world; it is currently run by a president who talks and frequently behaves like a gangster.²⁶ All these factors weigh heavily in Ukrainian policymaking and help account for Kyiv's inability to balance internally, and its reluctance to unambiguously provide leadership to GUAM or to court NATO.

In addition, balance of power theory's myopic focus on the problem of hegemony diverts attention from the varied security agendas of the region's states. That is, while it accurately predicts a widespread preference for balancing, it tends to exaggerate the strength of that preference. For many, Russian hegemony is too far down the list of strategic priorities to warrant expending too much economic or political capital on balancing. For most, the chief threats are internal opponents to the regime, or, more generally, the potential of an internally generated failure to develop and prosper.²⁷ The balancing preference is thus a weak predictor of what these states will actually do strategically to counter Russia, especially when Russia can offer some economic and (internal and external) security benefits. The problem of hegemony is but one variable in a complex equation of the costs and benefits of cooperating with the local great power.

Uzbekistan is an important case in point. By standard measures, it is the region's third most powerful state after Russia and Ukraine, but unlike the latter it is blessed with energy riches of its own. Hence, the importance attached to President Islam Karimov's decision to join GUAM in 1999. But other concerns than countering Russia drive Karimov, including his own aspirations to be a regional hegemon and his fears of Islamic extremists.²⁸ The former objective put Tashkent at odds with its central Asian neighbors, and the latter augured for cooperation with Russia. Both of these concerns sapped Uzbekistan's ability to counter Russia. At the same time, Tashkent's local imperialism is an important factor behind the decisions of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to bandwagon with Moscow.

Conclusion

Revisiting balance of power theory in post-Soviet Eurasia demonstrates old social science truisms. A theory that seems to apply everywhere all the time is likely to be of little practical utility. Any theory worth its salt is likely to be wrong about some things and simply inapplicable to others.

The most ambitious version of balance of power theory, which posits a universal tendency toward equilibrium in all international systems, adds little to the analysis of Russia's response to American primacy. The theory does capture Russian decision makers' subjective preferences: they would rather live in a world with a more equitable distribution of power. But the theory is misleading when it confuses those norms and beliefs with the concrete strategic decisions that Russian leaders are willing to make. In the end, users of the theory show a tendency to shoehorn nearly any Russian effort to aggregate or exercise power into a narrative of balancing the United States. In fact, it is hard to identify any such move that Russia would not have taken even if the United States were not so dominant in the scales of world power. If words could balance, the theory would be accurate and Russia would be the great organizer of a Eurasian anti-U.S. coalition. But Moscow's real strategy has varied between hedging and bandwagoning. As an explanation of real strategic behavior, the universal version falls short in this case.

Balance of threat theory does little better. It might be the case that over the long run Russia's propensity to balance hinges on the benign character of U.S. intentions, as revealed in its policies, rather than the threat inherent in U.S. power. But it is very hard to find Russian analysts who accord much strategic significance to the benign nature of U.S. power or the pacifying influence of its institutions. And the track record so far is the opposite of what balance of threat theory predicted: bellicose and expansionary U.S. policy elicited more cooperative Russian behavior. More bellicose and expansionary U.S. policy in 2001–2003—deploying military forces to central Asia, and forcefully changing regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq—elicited weaker responses from Russia than less threatening policies in the late 1990s.

Regarding Russia's neighbors in central Eurasia, balance of power theory does highlight a real strategic concern that underlies the region's politics. As the theory predicts, Russian hegemony is a background worry, and many local states have tried hard to find allies and reduce their vulnerability to Moscow. But this is hardly a novel insight for which one needs an elaborate

theory. A theory that generated discrete hypotheses about balancing versus buck-passing or bandwagoning strategies would be of real utility in making sense of the complex behavior of the region's states. Unfortunately, it is not yet possible to extract such hypotheses from current writings on the balance of power. The only way to make sense of the pattern of strategic responses in the area is to delve deeply into the domestic and local politics of all the actors involved—a task well suited to area experts trained in comparative politics, but to which balance of power theory has little to add beyond common sense. The clearest prediction that current theory can offer is that Ukraine should be the post-Soviet state most prone to balancing. Thus far, Ukraine has not been able to rise to the role the theory assigns to it, mainly because of the standard weak-state reasons with which regional experts are all too familiar.

Ultimately, balance of power theory faces major problems when it is applied to restricted domains. If the theory is divorced from concern with systemic concentrations of power, it becomes a catchall surrogate for any and all security policies. If the theory is specified such that it only deals with hegemonic threats—which is in keeping with the existing literature, can generate falsifiable hypotheses, and is thus what we have done here—then it yields precise predictions only in the rare cases when hegemony is sufficiently probable that it overwhelms other security (and nonsecurity) concerns. For all of the states in central Eurasia, either hegemony is not nearly the most important problem in the near to medium term, or, if it is, there is nothing materially that they can do about it. Under those circumstances, given a trade-off between balancing and economic growth, governments will choose not to balance in the short term in the expectation that enhanced economic growth will put them in a better position to balance—and so maximize their security—in the longer term when and if it becomes necessary or possible. Hence, the conclusion most charitable to balance of power theory is that it does not apply to this group of states at this time.

Notes

1. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).
2. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
3. For formal treatments that yield the conditional variant, see Morton A.

Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: Wiley, 1957); Emerson M. S. Niu, Peter Ordeshook, and Gregory F. Rose, *The Balance of Power: Stability in International Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and R. Harrison Wagner, "What Was Bipolarity?" *International Organization* 47 (Winter 1993): 77–106. For a strong argument that the conditional variant is the only testable version, see Jack S. Levy, "Balances and Balancing: Concepts, Propositions, and Research Design," in John A. Vasquez and Colin Elman (eds.), *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003).

4. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

5. Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Arise," *International Security* 14 (Spring 1993): 86–124; and Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security* 25 (Summer 2000): 5–41.

6. On the intellectual history, see Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978); and Herbert Butterfield, "Balance of Power," in Philip P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Scribner's, 1968).

7. See T. V. Paul's introductory chapter, as well as Stephen M. Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off Balance': Self-Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy"; and Josef Joffe, "Defying History and Theory: The United States as the 'Last Remaining Superpower,'" both in G. John Ikenberry (ed.), *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

8. See the result of a poll of foreign policy elites reported by Gudrun Domeit, "Vision of Greatness," *Focus* (Munich), June 3, 1996, 235–38, reprinted and translated in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service—Daily Report: Central Eurasia* 96–109; D. Furman, "O veshnepoliticheskikh prioritetskakh Rossii," *Svobodnaya mysl'* 2 (1996): 13–18. A comprehensive review is provided by Hannes Adomeit, "Russia as 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Image and Reality," *International Affairs* (London), 71 (January 1997): 35–68.

9. Christopher Hill, "Russian Defense Spending," in United States Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *Russia's Uncertain Economic Future* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2002), 168.

10. See especially Dale R. Herspring, "Recreating the Russian Military: The Difficult Task Ahead," draft report presented at the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination Conference "The Future of the Russian State," Triesenberg, Liechtenstein, March 14–17, 2002.

11. "Only 20% of Russian Arms Are Modern," RFE/RL *Daily Report*, May 21, 2001.

12. "Every Third Potential Conscript Said Not Fit For Military Service," ITAR-TASS, May 23, 2002.

13. For a detailed analysis of the treaty, see Elizabeth Wishnick, "Russia and China: Brothers Again?" *Asian Survey* 41 (September–October 2001): 797–821.

14. Kevin P. O'Prey, "Arms Exports and Russia's Defense Industries: Issues for the U.S. Congress," in Joint Economic Committee, *Russia's Uncertain Economic Future*.

15. The major effect is on the power assessments that overshadow bargaining on the Taiwan issue. See Thomas Christensen, "China," in Richard J. Ellings and Aaron L. Friedberg (eds.), *Strategic Asia: Power and Purpose, 2001–2002* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2001).

16. See, for example, the most recent drafts of the foreign policy concept, the national security concept, and the military doctrine, which are available at the Security Council's Web site: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/Documents/Documents.htm>.

17. See Aleksandr G. Yakovlev, "'Tretiya ugroza': Kitaai—Vrag No. 1 dlya Rossii?" *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka* (January 2002): 48–61, and sources cited therein.

18. An excellent example of expert criticism of the multipolar line is the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy's "Strategiia dlya Rossii IV," which is available on the council's Web site: <http://www.svop.ru>.

19. For more analysis and evidence, see William C. Wohlforth, "Russia," in Richard J. Ellings and Aaron L. Friedberg (eds.), *Strategic Asia 2002: Asian Aftershocks* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2002).

20. See, for a good example, the interview with Igor Ivanov reported in Svetlana Babaeva, "Igor Ivanov: Glavnoe-stoby vneshnyaya politika ne privodila k raskolu vnutri strany," *Izvestiya*, July 10, 2002, 1.

21. Quoted in Andrew Jack and Stefan Wagstyl, "Optimism on Russian Post-war Accord with U.S.," *Financial Times*, May 16, 2003.

22. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 269.

23. See Walter Parchomenko, "The State of Ukraine's Armed Forces and Military Reform," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 13 (September 2000).

24. Taras Kuzio, "GUUAM Reverts to GUAM as Uzbekistan Suspends Its Membership," *Eurasia Insight*, August 19, 2002.

25. See Randall L. Schweller, "Missed Opportunities and Unanswered Threats: Domestic Constraints on the Balance of Power" (American Political Science Association, 2002).

26. On Transparency International's Year 2000 Corruption Perception Index, Ukraine ranked 87 (tied with Azerbaijan) out of 90 countries. Only Yugoslavia and Nigeria ranked worse. The country has been in political turmoil since the release of secretly recorded audiotapes in November 2000, with the president's voice apparently ordering his Interior Minister to "rub out" Georgy Gongadze, an opposition journalist. Several days prior to the release of the tapes by one of President Kuchma's security guards, Gongadze's decapitated body was found in a forest outside Kyiv, two months after his disappearance.

27. See Stephen R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Poli-*

tics 43 (January 1991), 233–56; and Stephanie G. Neuman (ed.), *International Relations Theory and the Third World* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

28. See Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996); and Olcott, "Central Asia," in Ellings et al., *Strategic Asia*.

CHAPTER 9

The International System and Regional Balance in the Middle East

BENJAMIN MILLER

The international politics of the Middle East are dominated by a variety of regional conflicts, civil wars, and external interventions. The great powers are heavily engaged in the region because of oil, the strategic location of key actors, formal and de facto alliances, and significant economic interests. As a result, great-power involvement in the Middle East makes a major difference in regional politics, especially if great-power involvement takes the form of competitive balancing by a number of states or hegemonic management by a single great power.¹ Competitive intervention by several great powers will lead to a regional balance of power and the prevention of regional hegemony. By contrast, states will tend to bandwagon with a global hegemon that regularly intervenes in the region. Under these conditions, revisionist actors are likely to be contained and marginalized, and their attempts at forming a countervailing coalition are likely to fail.

To explain the current balance of power motivations and behavior in the Middle East, the chapter will first present several propositions about the effects of the international system on the regional balance of power. It then describes balance of power politics in the Middle East during the Cold War, explaining why American exclusionary policies could not succeed in a bipolar situation. The third section explores how the United States has emerged as the Middle East hegemon following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War. The chapter considers the effects of 9/11 and the Iraq War and concludes by describing how the revisionist forces and enduring regional conflicts continue to pose major challenges to Pax Americana in the region.