Balancing on Land and at Sea

Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?

Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson

The end of the Cold War and the emergence of the "unipolar moment" have generated considerable debate about how to explain the absence of a great-power balancing coalition against the United States. The proposition that near-hegemonic concentrations of power in the system nearly always trigger a counterbalancing coalition of the other great powers has long been regarded as an "iron law" by balance of power theorists, who often invoke the examples of Spain under Philip II, France under Louis XIV and then under Napoleon, and Germany under Wilhelm II and then under Adolf Hitler.[1] That the United States, which is generally regarded as the "greatest superpower ever," has not provoked such a balancing coalition is widely regarded as a puzzle for balance of power theory.[2] Fareed Zakaria asks, "Why is no one ganging up against the United States?" G. John Ikenberry asks why, despite the unprecedented concentration of U.S. power, "other great powers have not yet responded in a way anticipated by balance-of-power theory."[3]

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1. David Hume, "Of the Balance of Power," in Paul Seabury, ed., *Balance of Power* (San Francisco, Calif.: Chandler, 1965 [1752]), pp. 32–36; Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948); and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
2. Paul Kennedy, "The Greatest Superpower Ever," *New Perspectives Quarterly,* Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 8–18. See also Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 1. Recently, the anticipated rise of new regional and global powers, growing U.S. deficits and their implications for the long-term viability of the dollar as the world's reserve currency, and other structural changes in the global economy have led to increasing questions about the persistence of U.S. dominance. See Parag Khanna, *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order* (New York: Random House, 2008); National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends, 2025: A Transformed World* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008); Kishore Mahbubani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008); Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009); Christopher Layne, "The Waning of U.S. Hegemony—Myth or Reality? A Review Essay," *International Security,* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Summer 2009), pp. 147–172; and Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: Penguin, 2009).
3. Fareed Zakaria, "America's New Balancing Act," *Newsweek,* August 6, 2001, p. 37; and G. John Ikenberry, "Introduction," in Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*

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Realists offer several explanations for the absence of balancing against U.S. dominance. Some argue that it is just a matter of time before such a coalition arises. Others argue that a balancing coalition will not arise because the United States is a benign hegemon that does not threaten most other states, because offshore balancers do not provoke balancing coalitions, or because the United States is too strong and balancing is too risky. We argue that the absence of balancing against the United States is not a puzzle for balance of power theory, at least not for leading versions of the theory that have developed in the West and that reflect the European experience. Europe was a relatively autonomous continental system until the mid-twentieth century,[4] and it has not witnessed a sustained hegemony since the time of Charlemagne more than twelve centuries ago. Balance of power theory was developed to explain the balancing mechanism that accounted for this outcome and to guide future policymakers. It was never intended to apply to transregional maritime systems characterized by high concentrations of naval power and economic wealth.

Although great-power balancing coalitions often form against states amassing high concentrations of military power in autonomous continental systems, particularly in Europe, they generally do not form against states amassing high concentrations of naval power and wealth in the global maritime system. Predominant sea powers differ from dominant continental powers in their goals, strategies, and behavior, as well as in the responses they elicit from other leading states. Consequently the patterns of strategic interaction are fundamentally different in the two types of systems.

We begin with a brief review of explanations for the absence of balancing against the United States. We then turn to balance of power theory, its key propositions, and its implicit scope conditions. Following this, we examine alliance behavior in the global system. After analyzing our findings, we end with a discussion of the implications of our argument for current debates about the absence of balancing against the United States and for contemporary debates between balance of power theory and balance of threat theory.

(Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 3. Others suggesting that neorealist or realist theory predicts balancing against the United States include Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 44–79; Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 2; and Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), p. 121.

4. An autonomous system is characterized by the absence of external actors with the power and incentives to significantly influence security behavior and outcomes in the system.

The Absence of Balancing against the United States

When scholars emphasize the "absence of balancing" against the United States, presumably what they mean is the absence of coalitional balancing, defined in terms of the formation of formal military alliances against a target state. One can certainly identify "soft balancing" against the United States, defined as resistance to or noncooperation through the use of nonmilitary instruments of policy.[5] One can also identify some degree of "internal balancing" in the form of a substantial expansion of military power, potential, or capacity, as illustrated by China's naval buildup or development of nuclear weapons capabilities by North Korea and potentially Iran and others.[6] Missing, however, is a great power alliance against the United States comparable to the grand coalitions of the past. Realists offer a number of explanations for this nonevent, and we group them into four primary categories.[7]

A MATTER OF TIME

Kenneth Waltz and Christopher Layne, each of whom had in 1993 predicted balancing against the United States, continue to insist that such balancing will still occur and argue that it is just a matter of time before it happens.[8] Each supports this prediction with reference to the unprecedented power of

5. Although "soft balancing" is certainly worthy of study, it is analytically distinct from traditional "hard balancing" through alliances or internal military buildups, and the two should not be confounded. See Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 7–45; T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 46–71; Walt, *Taming American Power,* pp. 126–132; and Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006). For critiques, see Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 109–139; and Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance,* chap. 2. For a useful exchange, see Robert J. Art, Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, and Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Correspondence: Striking the Balance," *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 3 (Winter 2005/06), pp. 177–196.

6. Coalitional balancing is the predominant form of "external balancing." On internal and external balancing, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics.* On China, see Robert S. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response," *International Security,* Vol. 34, No. 2 (Fall 2009), pp. 46–81.

7. The absence of balancing should in principle be less of a puzzle for liberals, who argue that democracy, economic interdependence, and international institutions minimize aggressive behavior and consequently reduce incentives for balancing.

8. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics"; Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security,* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 5–41; Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security,* Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5–51; and Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment," *International Security,* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), pp. 7–41.

the United States, its aggressive behavior,[9] and the logic of balance of power theory.[10]

RELATIVELY BENIGN INTENTIONS

A second set of realist arguments traces the absence of balancing against the United States to the relatively benign intentions and accommodative policies of the United States, which significantly reduce any perception by other states of a U.S. threat to their vital interests.[11] Proponents of this "benevolent hegemony" argument generally draw on balance of threat theory and defensive realism and emphasize the intentions of the adversary.[12] They argue that the multifaceted and historically unprecedented nature of U.S. advantages in material capabilities and its "command of the commons" allow the United States to exert its influence without threatening the vital interests of other states.[13] In particular, in its period of dominance the United States has demonstrated no interest in territorial conquest, which differentiates American primacy from that of the leading powers of the past.

In this view, the stable and nonthreatening nature of U.S. dominance is reinforced by the geographical isolation of the United States and by the emergence of a security community among advanced industrial states, which significantly retards the development of security dilemmas that might lead to conflict spi-

9. Layne argues that the United States is pursuing a strategy of extra-regional hegemony. Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited."

10. Layne has repeatedly argued that new great powers will rise and recently suggested that economic power and political influence have begun to shift away from the United States. If Layne is correct, the logic of balance of power theory would imply that other leading states would have fewer incentives to balance against the United States, refuting his own prediction that it is just a matter of time until other leading states will balancing against it. System-level balances can emerge without national-level balancing strategies. Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited"; and Layne, "The Waning of U.S. Hegemony," pp. 151–159.

11. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States"; Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy"; and Walt, *Taming American Power.* Lieber and Alexander ("Waiting for Balancing," p. 133) argue that U.S. aggressive behavior is directed selectively toward nuclear proliferator states and global terrorist organizations and is "not broadly threatening." For other useful discussions of the dynamics of unipolarity under the United States, see G. John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William C. Wohlforth, "Introduction: Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences," *World Politics,* Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 1–27; and Robert Jervis, "Unipolarity: A Structural Perspective," *World Politics,* Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 188–213.

12. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987); and Charles L. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help," *Security Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 122–163. Charles S. Maier speaks of "consensual hegemony," and Geir Lundestad speaks of an American "empire by invitation." Maier, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952," *Journal of Peace Research,* Vol. 23, No. 3 (September 1986), pp. 263–177.

13. Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security,* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003), pp. 5–46.

rals within that security community. States in other regions are more concerned with regional threats than with global ones, and they often seek U.S. support in counterbalancing those threats.[14] Some scholars in this group also emphasize the economic and security benefits provided by the United States and (invoking arguments traditionally associated with liberalism or constructivism) the further diminution of any potential threat as a result of the attractiveness of American values and institutions, the "soft power" that they provide, and the U.S. exercise of much of its power through multilateral institutions.[15]

LESS THREATENING NATURE OF OFFSHORE BALANCERS

John Mearsheimer offers a third line of argument based on his offensive realist theory.[16] He argues that global hegemony, unlike regional hegemony, is not feasible because no single state can acquire enough resources in the global system to dominate it, in part because of the "stopping power of water." For this reason, dominant powers limit their ambitions to regional hegemony and to the prevention of the rise of peer competitors in other regions. In addition, regional states are more worried about local threats to regional hegemony. They do not usually feel threatened by an extra-regional balancer, and they often seek its support. Thus Mearsheimer concludes, "Offshore balancers do not provoke balancing coalitions against themselves."[17]

TOO RISKY

Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth reject these arguments. They argue—correctly in our view—that balance of power theory predicts balancing to prevent the rise of a hegemon but ignores the question of what happens after a state has already achieved a dominant position, so that the theory does not apply to the United States after the end of the Cold War.[18] They argue that any at-

14. Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," *World Politics,* Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 86–120 at p. 97; Robert Jervis, "Theories of War in an Era of Leading-Power Peace," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 96, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 1–14; and Walt, *Taming American Power,* pp. 187–191.
15. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005); G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); John M. Owen IV, "Transnational Liberalism and U.S. Primacy," *International Security,* Vol. 26, No. 3 (Winter 2001/02), pp. 117–152; Walt, *Taming American Power;* and Martha Finnemore, "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity: Why Being a Unipole Isn't All It's Cracked Up to Be," *World Politics,* Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 58–85.
16. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).
17. John J. Mearsheimer, "The Future of the American Pacifier," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 80, No. 5 (September/October 2001), pp. 46–61 at p. 49.
18. Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance,* p. 35.

tempt by a Eurasian power to significantly increase its power and balance against the United States would threaten its neighbors and provide those neighbors with incentives to seek U.S. assistance, further reducing motivations for balancing against the United States. Their primary argument, however, is that the United States is too strong and that a balancing strategy would involve too many costs and risks.

Each of these explanations contains some elements of truth, but each is based on an insufficiently differentiated conception of balance of power theory, and none provides a fully satisfactory explanation of the absence of balancing against the United States. Before we develop our theoretical argument and test its major implications, we first turn to balance of power theory.

Balance of Power Theory

The many meanings of the balance of power concept and the multiple and often contradictory variations of the theory often preclude a rigorous and systematic empirical test.[19] Most alliance behavior or military buildups can be interpreted as some state balancing against some kind of power or some kind of threat by some other state. Unless one specifies who balances against whom, in response to what levels of concentration of what kinds of power or what kinds of threats in what kinds of systems, it is impossible to construct an empirical test of balancing propositions.[20]

Despite their many disagreements, nearly all balance of power theorists would accept the following set of interrelated propositions: (1) the prevention of others from achieving a position of hegemony in the system is a primary security goal of states; (2) threats of hegemony generate great-power balancing coalitions; and (3) as a result, sustained hegemonies rarely if ever form in multistate systems.[21] This consensus among balance of power theorists concerns counterhegemonic balancing by great powers, and that is our focus here. Balance of power theorists do not all agree that great powers balance against

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19. Ernst B. Haas, "The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept, or Propaganda?" *World Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (July 1953), pp. 442–477; and Inis L. Claude Jr., *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962).
20. 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), pp. 128–153.
21. Ibid.; and Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe, 1495–1999," *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (January–March 2005), pp. 1–33. Here we define balance of power theory broadly to include both balance of power theory per se and balance of threat theory. These two theories converge on the counterhegemonic balancing proposition, because if a state is strong enough to threaten hegemony, it will usually constitute a significant threat to the interests of all other great powers.

the strongest power in the system, irrespective of the magnitude of its advantage,[22] and they do not agree about the balancing behavior of weaker states in great power systems.[23]

Although these balance of power propositions about national-level preferences and strategies and about system-level outcomes appear to be uncontroversial, they are underspecified because they fail to identify the system over which hegemony might be established and the basis of power in that system. The balance of power literature generally neglects these distinctions, advances an undifferentiated conception of the great powers, and implies that balance of power propositions are universally valid in any historical system. We reject these arguments and contend that balance of power theories—like nearly all social science theories—are bound by certain scope conditions.

It is critical to distinguish between autonomous continental systems, where land-based military power is dominant, and transregional maritime systems, where naval strength and economic wealth are dominant. We give particular attention to the European continental system and the global maritime system, and we argue that power dynamics are different in these two systems. This distinction was implicitly recognized in the most influential balance of power literature in Western international theory developed during the last three centuries, which focuses almost exclusively on Europe, reflects its geostrategic context, and refers to balancing by European great powers against hegemonic threats to the European continent by land-based military powers.[24] Hypotheses on balances and balancing can be applied outside of Europe, but scholars

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22. R. Harrison Wagner, "Peace, War, and the Balance of Power," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 88, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 593–607.
23. The great power orientation of traditional balance of power theory is widely recognized by diplomatic historians and political scientists. Leopold von Ranke, "The Great Powers," in von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History,* ed. Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, [1833] 1973), pp. 65–101; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); Inis L. Claude Jr., "The Balance of Power Revisited," *Review of International Studies,"* Vol. 15, No. 2 (April 1989), pp. 77–85 at p. 78; and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* pp. 72–73.
24. On the historical development of balance of power theory beginning in the late fifteenth century Italian city-state system and progressing through David Hume, Emerich de Vattel, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, see Moorhead Wright, ed., *Theory and Practice of the Balance of Power, 1486–1914: Selected European Writings* (London: Dent, 1975); Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Richard Little, *The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths, and Models* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). More recent work includes Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations;* Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1955); and Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: The Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977). By arguing that global hegemony is out of reach, that states strive for regional hegemony where land power is dominant, and that global powers often act as offshore balancers, Mearsheimer (*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*) is an important exception to the universalizing tendency of most balance of power theorists.

must be sensitive to whether the key assumptions underlying balance of power theory are applicable in other systems.[25]

British theorists, later reinforced by Americans (who had a Eurocentric security outlook until the late twentieth century), have had a particularly significant impact on the development of balance of power theory. They have reflected the traditional definition of British interests in terms of a balance of power on the European continent, not a balance of power in the global system, which Britain preferred to dominate based on its commercial, financial, and naval power.[26]

The implicit Eurocentric bias in balance of power theory is closely related to the theory's focus on land-based military power as the primary basis of power in the system.[27] The concentrations of power that are implicitly assumed to be the most feared, and that are hypothesized to precipitate balancing behavior, are those that most directly and immediately threaten the territorial integrity of other states. States with large armies that can invade and occupy have traditionally been perceived as far greater threats than states that have large navies and economic empires.

It is hardly a coincidence that when balance of power theorists talk about balancing against hegemonic threats, the historical examples to which they usually refer are European coalitions against the land-based military power of the Habsburgs under Charles V in the early sixteenth century, Philip II at the end of the sixteenth century, and the combined strength of Spain and Austria in the Thirty Years' War; against France under Louis XIV and then Napoleon; and against Germany under Wilhelm II and then Hitler.[28] There is little men-

25. Key assumptions are that the system is anarchic, autonomous, and not significantly influenced by powers outside the system. These assumptions are not problematic for Europe, but they can be problematic for other regional systems. Recent attempts to apply balance of power theories to regional systems include Walt, *The Origins of Alliances;* and T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

26. For a plea for more attention to the rhetorical uses of the balance of power concept, see Daniel H. Nexon, "The Balance of Power in the Balance," *World Politics,* Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 2009), pp. 330–359 at p. 355.

27. By "Eurocentric bias," we mean a preoccupation not only with European powers but also with their behavior and outcomes on the European continent. Leading European states have also played a central role in the global system for the last five centuries, and any global perspective on the great powers would have to emphasize the European powers. See Jeremy Black, *Great Powers and the Quest for Hegemony: The World Order since 1500* (London: New York: Routledge, 2007).

28. Quincy Wright, *A Study of War,* 2d rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 750; Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe,* p. xix; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), chap. 2; and Kenneth N. Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 913–917 at p. 914. Kennedy and Waltz include the Habsburgs under Charles V in their respective lists of hegemonic threats, whereas Wright and Taylor exclude them. We agree

tion of balancing against leading global powers such as the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, Britain in the nineteenth century, or the United States in the twentieth century.[29] Even recent critics of balance of power theory focus almost exclusively on the European system.[30]

The Eurocentric bias in balance of power theory is reflected in the general acceptance of the proposition that sustained hegemonies do not emerge from multistate systems. As recent research has reminded scholars, however, sustained hegemonies have sometimes emerged, as illustrated by the Qin and Han dynasties in ancient China and by the Roman Empire, among others.[31] The relative frequency and duration of hegemonic and nonhegemonic systems have yet to be firmly established, but the argument that sustained hegemonies rarely if ever form in international systems is untenable.

Empirical research on balancing during the last quarter century is a welcome addition to a balance of power literature that had long been more anecdotal than systematic.[32] This research made some important theoretical advances, but the evidence presented in nearly all of these cases suffers from an unacknowledged problem of selection bias in their research designs. A problem with nearly all empirical studies of balancing—by both proponents and critics of the balancing proposition—is that they focus on major wars and ask whether states balance against or ally with the strongest or the most threatening state. They do not examine periods of peace and ask whether the absence of war might result from the anticipation of balancing. Presumably,

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with Kennedy and Waltz. Our data show that by 1550 the Habsburgs controlled 53 percent of great power military capabilities in Europe.

29. Morgenthau was not puzzled by either British dominance or the absence of balancing against it in the nineteenth century, and he would not have been puzzled by the absence of balancing against the United States after the end of the Cold War. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations.*

30. Paul Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-realist Theory," *International Security,* Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 108–148; Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security,* Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72–107; Richard Rosecrance and Chih-Cheng Lo, "Balancing, Stability, and War: The Mysterious Case of the Napoleonic International System," *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 40, No. 4 (December 1996), pp. 479–500; and John A. Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 899–912.

31. Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1992); Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Philip Streich, "The Failure of the Balance of Power: Warring States Japan, 1467–1590," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 2010.

32. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances;* Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-realist Theory"; Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit"; Rosecrance and Lo, "Balancing, Stability, and War"; Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs"; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics;* and Vasquez and Elman, *Realism and the Balancing of Power.*

potential aggressors are more likely to initiate war when they anticipate that potential third-party adversaries will not balance, so that looking only at cases of wars leads to a systematic underestimation of the causal impact of balancing. Empirical studies of balancing must include peacetime as well as wartime behavior.[33]

In the next section, we develop our theoretical expectations regarding alliance behavior in response to concentrations of power at the global level.

Alliance Behavior in the Global System

In this section, we identify the different goals and strategies of leading land powers and sea powers, specify the different kinds of threats they pose to other leading states in the system, generate a series of hypotheses about alliance behavior in maritime systems, and construct a research design to test these hypotheses.

LAND POWERS AND SEA POWERS

Our basic argument is that alliance behavior and other forms of strategic interaction are different in the global system than in continental systems. States' highest priorities are to provide for their territorial and constitutional integrity. The greatest threats to those interests come from large armies that can cross territorial frontiers, seize and occupy territory, take or destroy resources, depose political leaders, and impose new political structures and social systems. Dominant continental powers devote their resources to building armies that facilitate the defense of their frontiers and the expansion of regional territorial empires. They pose threats to other great powers as well as to less powerful states, and other great powers often respond by forming defensive alliances, building up their own military capabilities, or both.

Maritime powers have smaller armies, fewer capabilities for invading and occupying, and fewer incentives to do so. They pose significantly weaker threats to the territorial integrity of other states, particularly to other great powers, but greater threats to each other than to leading land-based powers. All of this reduces the incentives of land-based powers to balance against the leading global maritime power, even if the maritime leader is considerably stronger than all the rest. Thus, in 1915 Norman Angell addressed the issue of "why the world does not fear British 'marinism' and does fear German milita-

33. Levy, "Balances and Balancing," pp. 137–138.

rism" by arguing that "'marinism' does not encroach on social and political freedom and militarism does."[34]

Maritime power is not based on navies alone, but also, as Alfred Thayer Mahan recognized, on economic strength, and the leading sea power is usually the leading economic power in the global system.[35] This is as true of the United States today as it was of Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Indeed, the principal reason maritime powers develop their navies is to protect and expand trade, just as the principal reason land powers develop their armies is to protect and possibly expand territory. Leading sea powers also create international regimes to protect their positions of economic and naval dominance. They have evolved into leading air and space powers since the twentieth century, thereby technologically updating the means by which they control "the commons" so critical to predominance in the global system.[36]

Thus the distinction is not just between land-based military power and sea-based naval power and the different threats imposed by armies and navies, but even more important, the larger distinction between the threats posed by territorial hegemony over land and people and by economic hegemony over markets. Economic dominance does not necessarily require political control, certainly not over other great powers, as Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher recognized in their concept of the "imperialism of free trade."[37] Political leaders and their peoples may resent both the lack of fair access to distant resources and markets and poor terms of trade, but these resentments pale in comparison to the threat of physical invasion and imperial dominance posed by land-based hegemons.

Unlike land-based empires, dominance in markets and on the seas does not generally involve infringements on the territorial sovereignty of other leading powers in more developed areas, and sea powers have historically shown little interest in getting involved in territorial disputes on the continent. The clas-

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34. Norman Angell, *The World's Highway: Some Notes on America's Relation to Sea Power and Non-Military Sanctions for the Law of Nations* (New York: George H. Doran, 1915), p. 2.
35. Captain A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (New York: Dover, [1890] 1987).
36. This shift in the nature of capabilities does not detract from the need to distinguish global from regional systems, or to distinguish between powers that emphasize land and non-land capabilities (which we denote as maritime for convenience hereafter). For a comparison of major-power naval-capability shares with shares of strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and military satellites since World War I, see Michael Lee and William R. Thompson, "Measuring Command of the Commons and Global Capability Reach," Indiana University, 2010.
37. Ronald E. Robinson and John A. Gallagher with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism,* 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1981).

sic illustration is Britain. As balance of power theorists have long recognized, Britain's primary interests lay in expanding its markets and investment opportunities overseas.[38] Its primary interests on the European continent lay not in increasing its power and influence, but only in preventing any single state or combination of states from gaining control of a disproportionate amount of the resources on the continent, which could then provide a basis for challenging Britain's maritime dominance. This is the classic role of the offshore balancer, which many attribute to the United States with respect to both Europe and Asia in the contemporary system.[39]

Given these differences between the perceived threats associated with naval and economic dominance, on the one hand, and regional territorial hegemony, on the other, we expect high concentrations of land-based military power to generate counterbalancing coalitions of other regional great powers, but we do not expect high concentrations of sea power to have a comparable effect in generating counterbalancing coalitions against the leading global power. In fact, given the public goods often provided by leading economic states,[40] we argue that high concentrations of sea power are likely to be associated with a lower likelihood of balancing by continental great powers, and that great powers are more likely to ally with predominant sea powers than to ally against them. Great powers ally with predominant sea powers to secure military or diplomatic support against threats posed by the dominant land power or another traditional rival, gain economic benefits by associating with the leading economic power and the global system it has helped create, or reap a share of the spoils from being on the winning side of an anticipated war.

The stronger the leading sea power is, the more likely it is interested primarily in extending control over markets, as opposed to territory, especially in regions with other great powers. The economic costs of a strategy of territorial expansion are too great, and the leading sea power will usually find itself at a comparative disadvantage in attempts to project its maritime influence inland against significant land power resistance. States with mixed goals of regional territorial control and political-economic control of distant markets tend to wobble in their attempts to achieve multiple goals. They may build strong armies and navies, as did Philip II or Louis XIV, but there are limits to the ability to achieve supremacy in both spheres. The only states that have been likely to

38. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations;* and Ludwig Dehio, *The Precarious Balance: Four Centuries of the European Power Struggle* (New York: Random House, 1962).
39. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics;* and Layne, *The Peace of Illusions.*
40. This is emphasized by hegemonic stability theory. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

build and then maintain the largest navies are those such as Britain, which are somewhat removed from land-based threats and which are consequently free to choose to avoid the extension of nearby territorial control. Leading sea powers are likely to become concerned with territorial control—over weaker peoples outside of Europe, not over other European great powers—only as their economic influence wanes and as they fall back on more coercive strategies in an attempt to maintain their naval bases and competitive positions.[41]

Strong land powers confront more difficulties in developing coercive resources for deployment at sea. Late-sixteenth-century Spain had little in the way of a blue-water navy prior to its seizure (on land) of Portugal's navy in the early 1580s. Repeated defeats of Spanish armadas against England then contributed greatly to the destruction of Spain's newly acquired naval power. Late-seventeenth-century France built the leading naval fleet in the 1670s–80s but was no longer competitive at sea by the late 1690s, thanks to redoubled efforts on the part of the English and the Dutch. Even prior to the onset of war in 1914, Germany conceded defeat to the British in the naval arms race and gave primacy to the arms race on land. Germany initiated World War II years before its planned naval preparations might have given it some possibility of competing at sea. The Soviet Union's own ambivalence about sea power is well manifested in its intermittent attempts to build competitive aircraft carriers between the 1930s and 1980s.

HYPOTHESES ON GREAT-POWER ALLIANCE BEHAVIOR

Our argument that hypotheses on balances and balancing are valid for the European system but not for the global system is ultimately an empirical question, and our aim is to test these hypotheses empirically. In an earlier article, we tested the counterhegemonic balancing proposition for the last five centuries of the European system.[42] We found that European great powers have exhibited a strong propensity to balance against states controlling a disproportionate amount of the politically relevant resources in the system, which we operationally defined as the control by one state of a third or more of the total military capabilities in the system, but only a weak tendency to balance against leading states controlling fewer resources.[43] We also found that higher

41. William R. Thompson and Gary Zuk, "World Power and the Strategic Trap of Territorial Commitments," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (September 1986), pp. 249–267.
42. Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe."
43. The second finding is as important as the first: there is only a weak tendency for great powers to balance against the leading European state independently of the magnitude of its advantage, even if it is increasing in strength. A state with a modest advantage does not necessarily pose the most significant immediate threat to other great powers, which may be preoccupied with their own traditional rivals, specific threats from neighboring states, and domestic problems. Stacie E.

concentrations of power have usually led to larger balancing coalitions. We emphasized that these findings suggested probabilistic relationships rather than deterministic ones. Not all great powers balance against a state that controls a disproportionate amount of the resources in the system, though at the system level, high concentrations of power almost always lead to some kind of counterbalancing coalition.[44]

Below we summarize our hypotheses about alliance behavior in the global maritime system, with some comparisons with behavior in the European system. The first hypothesis reflects our core theoretical argument.

H1: Great powers generally do not balance against the most powerful sea power in the system, even if it is significantly increasing in strength.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) refers to both the level of power concentration in the global system and to the rate of change in power. Its predictions are diametrically opposed to those of balance of power theory on both counts. Thus a strong implication of H1 is that great powers are less likely to balance against leading sea powers than against leading land powers at comparable levels of dominance in the system.

Whereas the probability of balancing against the leading European power increases monotonically with that state's relative power or margin of advantage in the system (at least up to the point of hegemony), so that counterhegemonic balancing is likely in that system, we have different expectations for alliance behavior in the global maritime system. We predict that the probability of balancing against the leading sea power decreases as that state controls a greater proportion of the resources in the system. First, great powers perceive

Goddard may be right that Prussia's legitimation strategies helped to prevent the formation of a balancing coalition in response to its expansion during the 1860s, but our data show that Prussia controlled only about 22 percent of the European system's military capabilities in the 1860s, and historically there is only a weak tendency for great powers to balance in such situations. Goddard, "When Right Makes Might: How Prussia Overturned the European Balance of Power," *International Security,* Vol. 33, No. 3 (Winter 2008/09), pp. 110–142. Our finding is consistent with Patricia A. Weitsman's argument that different levels of threat produce different alliance behaviors. Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

44. We concluded that although these results provided substantial support for the core counterhegemonic balancing proposition for the last five centuries of the European system, the "best case" nature of that system precludes us from generalizing our findings to other autonomous continental systems. At the same time, weak support for the hypothesis that great powers balance against any leading state, regardless of the magnitude of its advantage, significantly undercuts our confidence that such balancing occurs in other systems. On "most likely" and "least likely" logics of inference, see Jack S. Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science,* Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 2008), pp. 1–18.

fewer threats from leading sea powers than from leading land powers. Second, because the leading sea power tends to be the strongest when it is the leading economic power, other great powers generally anticipate potential benefits from associating with a predominant economic and naval power and with the global political-economic order that it created and helps to maintain. This tendency significantly reduces their incentives for balancing. The causal impact of this public goods logic is greatest when the leading sea power plays a leading role in the world economy.[45] Third, because the economic requirements for naval power are greater than those for land-based military power, fewer states are able to compete with leading sea powers than with leading land powers, particularly when the leading power is increasing in strength.[46] These considerations lead to hypothesis 2.

H2: The stronger the leading sea power's relative capability position, the less likely it is that other great powers will balance against it.

If great powers are less likely to balance against dominant sea powers than against dominant land powers, we should expect that broad alliance coalitions (consisting of multiple members) should be less likely to form against leading sea powers than against leading land powers. This stands in contrast to balance of power theory, which suggests that hegemonic threats deriving from high concentrations of power should generate not only a counterbalancing coalition, but a coalition involving several great powers rather than just two. Multilateral coalitions are particularly significant for balance of power theory, because they facilitate the inference that alliances are driven by considerations of balancing for the collective good of avoiding hegemony as opposed to more limited parochial goals such as gaining support against a particular rival. We have no such expectations, however, for the global maritime system. In addition, given the greater resources required to build strong navies as compared to strong armies, we expect that the stronger the leading sea power, the

45. Historically, this implies that this argument is more applicable to periods of British and U.S. predominance in the last three centuries than to earlier centuries, where the leading sea power (Portugal, England, Spain, the Netherlands, and France) had a less dominant position in the global economy.
46. A secondary factor that might affect decisions on balancing is that engagements at sea are more decisive and therefore riskier than are engagements on land. Battles at sea involve a higher proportion of a state's war-making capabilities than do battles on land, and because navies are more capital intensive than armies, it takes longer to rebuild after a major defeat at sea than on land. Winston S. Churchill, explaining the absence of a major fleet confrontation in World War I, noted that Jellicoe (commander of the Grand Fleet at the beginning the war) was "the only man on either side who could lose the war in an afternoon." Churchill, *The World Crisis,* Vol. 3: *1916–1918,* Pt. 1 (New York: Scribner's, 1927), p. 106.

fewer the number of states that have the economic ability to compete with it. This expectation leads to our third hypothesis.

H3: The stronger the leading sea power's relative capability position, the less likely that large coalitions will form against it.

The logic underlying hypotheses H2 and H3 suggests not only that great powers (and other states) have fewer incentives to ally against the leading sea power, but also that they may have strong incentives to ally with it. The majority of great powers benefit from the trading regime set up by the leading global sea power, and they have an incentive to maintain that system. In addition, they recognize that the expansion of a leading land power poses a potential threat to their own territorial integrity and to the stability of the existing economic regime from which they benefit, and they have incentives to secure support against that threat from the leading sea power.[47]

It takes two to tango, of course, and the leading sea power also has incentives to find regional allies. It bears much of the financial and coordination burden in organizing coalitions to suppress serious challenges to the existing political economy and to its own dominant position by ascending land powers in continental systems, the European system in particular. Given their specialization in naval resources, sea powers find it difficult to fight land powers, and they have strong incentives to acquire alliance partners with strong land-power resources when they perceive threats from ascending land powers. Allies capable of keeping a European challenger fighting on multiple fronts are especially attractive.

Land powers also encounter problems fighting sea powers, but they find it more difficult to acquire the type of allies they need to contend with global sea powers and with other regional land powers. The expansionist threat posed by their large armies makes more enemies than friends among adjacent powers. Naval powers tend to favor the maintenance of the global status quo as long as it is biased in their favor, and thus tend to prefer aligning with the leading sea power than with land powers. As a consequence, European land-expansionist powers have often found themselves fighting with the support of relatively weak allies (e.g., Germany with allies Austria-Hungary in World War I and with Italy in World War II, and eighteenth-century France with Spain).

This logic leads to our next two hypotheses.

47. This is illustrated by the balancing coalitions against the Habsburgs, France under Louis XIV and then Napoleon, and Germany under Wilhelm II and then the Nazis.

H4: The stronger the leading sea power's relative capability position, the more likely it is that one or more great powers will ally with it.

H5: Alliances with the leading sea power tend to be broader than are alliances against the leading sea power.

These two hypotheses about great power alliances with the leading naval power, in conjunction with the finding that great power alliances with the leading land power are relatively rare in the European system, imply that great powers are more likely to ally with the dominant sea power than with the dominant land power at a comparable level of dominance, and that great power coalitions with the leading sea power tend to be broader than coalitions with the leading land power.

Next we construct a research design and test these propositions about the strategic dynamics of the global maritime system for the last five centuries of the modern era.[48]

Research Design

We focus on periods of time rather than war as the unit of analysis, because a test of hypotheses on balancing requires that we systematically examine periods of peace as well as periods of war. The anticipation of balancing sometimes leads to peace, and the omission of balancing in peacetime might underestimate the causal impact of balancing.

We have defined balancing in terms of alliance formation against a specific state. We set aside internal balancing for both theoretical and methodological reasons. Theoretically, most of the balance of power literature conceives of balancing in terms of counterbalancing alliances, especially for multipolar systems, which characterize the vast majority of the European system during the last five centuries. The literature on the absence of balancing against the United States also focuses on coalitional balancing. Although we might expect a trade-off between strategies of internal and external balancing, the few empirical studies of this question have failed to find a significant relationship.[49] Methodologically, it is often difficult to distinguish internal balancing against specific external threats from other sources of arms buildups.[50] A more de-

48. Most historians define 1500 as the beginning of the "modern" period.
49. Benjamin A. Most and Randolph M. Siverson, "Substituting Arms and Alliances, 1870–1914: An Exploration in Comparative Foreign Policy," in Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley Jr., and James N. Rosenau, eds., *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 131–157.
50. For a discussion of this and other methodological problems associated with the analysis of in-

tailed study of the Cold War period would have to include internal balancing, but in a five-century study of balancing that is not essential.

GREAT POWERS AND GLOBAL POWERS

Given our focus on both the leading sea power and the responses of other great powers, most of which have been land powers during the last five centuries, we include global powers as well as the European great powers in the analysis.[51] The European great powers include the Ottoman Empire (1495–1699), Spain (1495–1808), Austria (1495–1918), France (1495–), England/Britain (1495–), the Netherlands (1609–1713), Sweden (1617–1721), Russia (1721–), Prussia/Germany (1740–), and Italy (1861–1943).[52] We extend the dates of the Netherlands to 1580–1810 to capture its longer reign as one of the leading sea powers. Following George Modelski and William Thompson, we add Portugal (1495–1580), the United States (1816–), and Japan (1875–1945), and following Melvin Small and J. David Singer (1982), we add China (1950–).[53]

Identifying European great powers and global powers is unproblematic until 1945. By the end of World War II, the primacy of Europe in the global system had come to an end with the rise of the United States and the Soviet Union and with the decline in the relative status of Britain, France, and Germany.

ternal balancing, see Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe." True, not all alliance formation constitutes external balancing, as states often have domestic motivations for balancing, but this is less a problem for the study of great powers than small powers. See Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962–73," *International Organization,* Vol. 45, No. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 369–395.

51. Many great powers are both land powers and sea powers (e.g., Spain and France). Specifying whether a particular state is more of a land power or a sea power raises difficult analytic questions, but our analyses do not require us to do this. In our analysis of balancing against the leading sea power, we identify the state with the greatest naval capabilities (regardless of whether it also has substantial land-based military capabilities), and then determine how many other great powers (land or sea) balance against it. We followed a comparable approach to the analysis of balancing against the leading land power.

52. This follows Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983). Spain and Austria were joined under the rule of Charles V from 1519 to 1556, and we treat the "United Habsburgs" as a single great power during that period. Russia includes the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1991. Prussia/Germany includes the Federal Republic of Germany from 1945 to 1989. For the last two centuries, see also Melvin Small and J. David Singer, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars, 1816–1980* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1980).

53. George Modelski and William R. Thompson, *Seapower in Global Politics, 1494–1993* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988). These dates for the United States and Japan as global powers are much earlier than the mid-to-late 1890s used by Small and Singer and by Levy for great power status. The sea power shares of the United States and Japan are relatively small prior to the late 1890s, however, and they join few alliances in this period, so the precise timing of U.S. and Japanese entry into the system has minimal impact on our empirical results. Although there is some disagreement about when a state acquires and loses elite power status, there is little disagreement as to the identities of those states.

Still, the basic security problem of preventing one actor from achieving a position of dominance over the European continent persisted,[54] and we can continue to ask whether the leading states balance against potential hegemonic threats from extreme concentrations of power on the continent.[55]

SEA POWER IN THE GLOBAL SYSTEM

The identification of the most powerful state, its relative power, and its increases in power all require the measurement of military capabilities. We measure hegemonic threats in the European system in terms of the degree of concentration of army capabilities, based on Karen Rasler and William Thompson's data on army strength over five centuries.[56] The analogue for sea powers is the concentration of naval capabilities. Naval capabilities, however, have been subject to considerable technological change over the past half millennium. One plausible focus is the changing requirements for first-line warships. Ships that are out gunned or lack adequate defensive capabilities or speed can only be placed on the front line of a naval battle as sacrificial targets. Over time, the number of guns carried and the distance they can fire accurately have increased along with their speed and the thickness of their hulls. Energy sources have evolved from sail to steam, diesel, and nuclear technologies. The range of cannon has been rendered largely obsolete by seagoing platforms for aircraft and by missiles. Our changing indicators of front-line sea power capabilities are reflected in table 1.[57]

Table 2 lists the identity of the leading naval power over the past 500 years and the periods of their dominance at certain thresholds of capability concentration. Only six states (England/Britain, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France, and the United States) have held the lead position, and the duration of their top position has varied. Portugal led for three-quarters of a century,

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54. This is reflected not only in the NATO alliance of the leading European states against the Soviet Union as the strongest land-based military power on the continent (and not against the United States, the leading global power), but also in the comment of Lord Ismay (NATO's first secretary-general) that the aim of NATO was "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."

55. Although Britain, France, and West Germany may not have been global powers throughout most of the post-1945 period, they were the leading powers in the European system (along with the Soviet Union and the United States). We include West Germany because the future of Germany was the central issue in the Cold War within the West as well as between West and East, and because the West German army was the foundation of NATO's conventional defense in Europe. Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

56. Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle, 1490–1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

57. We focus on ships in being, not on ship-building capacity, the effectiveness of naval doctrine, or the quality or training of sailors.

Table 1. Measuring Sea Power since 1495

Years	Indicators
1495–1654	Number of state-owned, armed, sailing vessels capable of undertaking oceanic voyages
1655–1859	Number of ships-of-the-line, subject to an escalating minimal number of guns carried to qualify as frontline fighting vessels
1860–1945	Number of first-class battleships, subject to escalating minimal attributes in terms of ship and gun size (e.g., as in the case of the transition from pre-dreadnought- to dreadnought-class vessels)
1816–1945	Level of naval expenditure, which is used to smooth the several abrupt technological changes experienced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which is given equal weight with the appropriate ship counts in a combined index
1946–	Number of heavy or attack aircraft carriers and, after 1960, the number of nuclear attack submarines and the number of sea-based, nuclear missile warheads weighted according to equivalent megatonnage (EMT) and countermilitary potential (CMP)—with carriers, attack submarines, EMT, and CMP given equal weight in a combined index

NOTE: Justifications for these indicators are discussed at length in George Modelski and William R. Thompson, *Sea Power in Global Politics, 1494–1993* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

Spain for a decade, the Netherlands for half a century, Britain for more than two centuries, and the United States since 1920. There are times during which one country held the lead only briefly (England, 1575–79, 1650–64; the Netherlands, 1665–69). There are also two brief periods in which the strongest European land power was also the leading sea power (Spain, 1580–99; France, 1670–99), although in each case its decisionmakers were ambivalent about investing in naval resources.[58]

PATTERNS OF BALANCING. The patterns of balancing in the global system during the last five centuries are revealing. No European balancing coalition formed against Portugal during its eight decades as the leading naval power in the system (1495–1574). Spain faced one balancing coalition during its two decades as the naval leader (1580–99), a period in which it was also the leading land power on the European continent. The Netherlands was confronted by one balancing coalition in its half century as the leading naval power (1600–49), the last three decades of which coincided with the Thirty Years' War. Numerous coalitions formed against France during its three decades as the

58. This raises interesting questions about the conditions under which states develop war-making capabilities both on land and at sea, how they prioritize their efforts, and whether other great powers feel most threatened by the leading state's land power, sea power, or their combination.

Table 2. Alternative Measurements of Naval Leadership

State	Periods of Naval Leads (of any size)	Periods of Naval Leads with Capability Shares ≥ 50%	Periods of Naval Leads with Capability Shares ≥ 45%	Periods of Naval Leads with Capability Shares ≥ 40%
Portugal	1495–1574	1500–44	1500–44 1550–59	1500–59 1570–74
England	1575–79			
Spain	1580–99		1590–99	1585–99
Netherlands	1600–49	1610–19 1640–44	1605–44	1605–44
England	1650–64			1650–64
Netherlands	1665–69			
France	1670–99			1690–94
England/Britain	1700–1919	1720–24 1810–34 1855–59	1715–49 1810–74 1880–94	1710–74 1805–1904 1910–19
United States	1920–	1945–	1945–	1945–

SOURCE: Calculated from George Modelski and William R. Thompson's annual proportional distribution of global sea power data, which have subsequently been revised and updated. See Modelski and Thompson, *Sea Power in Global Politics, 1494–1993* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 92, 114–124.
NOTE: Periods of naval leadership are denominated in five-year averages.

leading naval power (1670–99), a period coinciding with the growth and expansion of France as the dominant land power on the continent and witnessing two general or systemic wars against France (which account for most of these coalitions). Britain faced numerous opposing coalitions during its two centuries as the leading naval power in the world, most associated with three general wars: the Seven Years' War (1755–63), the Napoleonic War (1802–15), and World War I (1914–18). The United States has thus far faced only one formal great-power balancing alliance (Russia and China, 1950–61) during its first nine decades as the system's leading maritime power.

MEASURE OF DOMINANCE. Given our expectation of systematic patterns of balancing against dominant states but not necessarily against leading states with more limited margins of advantage, we need some measure of leading status that goes beyond simply possessing the largest relative share of capabilities. Even though any threshold below 50 percent is somewhat arbitrary, we use 33 percent to signify a minimally strong threshold for the concentration of

military capabilities by land powers in the European system.[59] Although that makes sense in a system in which there were commonly at least four or five great powers with substantial armies before the mid-twentieth century, it is less useful in the analysis of sea power because the number of great powers with competitive navies (and the economic resources needed to build and maintain them) tends to be more limited, generally including only two or three states at any given time. A 33 percent share could then easily connote rough equality among several naval powers and thus is not useful. We need a higher threshold to reflect a comparable level of relative strength.

A 50 percent share of the capabilities in the system provides a nice focal point because it signifies that one state controls as many naval capabilities as all other great powers combined. For some analyses, however, it would be helpful to use three different thresholds—40, 45, and 50 percent. This enables us to compare empirical outcomes for increasing levels of concentration of maritime power and facilitates a preliminary test of our argument that the propensity toward balancing is a function of the degree of concentration of power in the system. As table 2 demonstrates, moving from a 50 percent toward a 40 percent threshold captures successively larger proportions of the longer eras of leads sustained by the four main leading sea powers (Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain, and the United States). Only when the threshold is as low as 40 percent does one begin to pick up periods of more debatable, or at least short-lived, naval predominance (Spain in 1585–99, England in 1650–64, and France in 1690–94).

Another way to measure leading power status, in addition to relative capability share, is to examine the gap in naval capabilities between the leading power and the number-two power. Thus we analyze the relationship between the magnitude of the lead in naval capabilities and the likelihood of balancing. In addition, given the hypothesis (H1) that balancing is especially likely if the leading power is significantly increasing in strength, we operationally define increase in strength as an increase of 10 percent or greater in a state's absolute capability base.[60]

ALLIANCE FORMATION

We have defined our dependent variable in terms of alliance formation. Given our interest in balancing against the dominant state, we limit our attention to

59. States have only rarely controlled more than 50 percent of European military capabilities. Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe," p. 20.
60. A 10 percent increase in relative capabilities would be too high a threshold for establishing minimal significance.

those alliances that identify the dominant state in the system as the specific threat. If the formal alliance treaty is unclear as to the target of the alliance, we rely on a consensus of historians regarding the intent of the treaty, and we exclude any alliance that does not mention a specific target. We focus on military alliances based on formal agreements that require one state to intervene militarily in support of another in the event that one is attacked.[61]

To construct an inventory of formal alliances for the last five centuries, we utilized several previously constructed data sets and approximately thirty diplomatic histories.[62] The multiple-source focus is necessary given variations across sources regarding both the existence of alliances and their membership and duration. The most serious problem concerned determining the duration of alliances in early modern Europe, because historians tend to give far more attention to the formation of alliances than to their termination. We have information on the duration of most of these alliances (72 percent to be exact), and we can fairly assume that other alliances terminated with the occurrence of a war. In cases for which we have no information (which generally fall in the early years of the system), we assume that alliances lasted only during the period in which they were created. These counting rules pick up most military coalitions formed during wartime.[63] Our unit of analysis is the individual great power and its alliance behavior (alliance/no alliance) in response to concentrations of power, aggregated by half decade.[64]

These procedures led to the identification of 223 alliances, though this number is sensitive to exactly how one counts subsequent joiners and renewals, which we handled on a case-by-case basis. Not all of these alliances are directly relevant for this study, however, because our hypotheses call for a focus on alliances that are explicitly targeted against the leading sea power, or, alter-

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61. Among other things, formal alliances send a relatively credible signal of a state's intent to come to the aid of its alliance partner. James D. Morrow, "Alliances: Why Write Them Down?" *Annual Review of Political Science,* Vol. 3 (2000), pp. 63–83. For further justification of these operational decisions, see Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe."
62. Melvin Small and J. David Singer, "Formal Alliances, 1816–1965: An Extension of the Basic Data," *Journal of Peace Research,* Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp. 257–282; Jack S. Levy, "Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1494–1975," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (December 1981), pp. 581–613; Douglas M. Gibler, "An Extension of the Correlates of War Formal Alliance Data Set, 1648–1815," *International Interactions,* Vol. 25, No. 1 (April 1999), pp. 1–28; and Correlates of War Alliance List, 1993. For updated alliance data, see http://www.correlatesofwar.org/Datasets.htm. A complete list of historical sources is available from the authors.
63. Evidence that nearly all great power alliances during the last five centuries were followed by a great power war within five years (the nineteenth century being an exception) suggests that the time lapse between alliance formation and war was relatively short. Levy, "Alliance Formation and War Behavior."
64. For further details, see Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe."

natively, involve alliances with the leading sea power (or with the leading land power, in our comparisons). This leaves us with 30 relevant targeted alliances against the leading sea power and 77 cases of allying with it.

Given the difficulties of constructing empirical indicators that are theoretically neutral with respect to our conflicting hypotheses about balancing against and allying with the leading state in the global system, a brief discussion of potential biases in our indicators is in order. First, some might argue that by counting formal alliances but not informal alignments, we introduce a bias by undercounting the total number of alliances and alignments, creating a harder test for our hypotheses about counterhegemonic balancing in Europe but a weaker test for our hypothesis about nonbalancing against leading sea powers. Given our theoretical focus on hard balancing, however, the restriction of our empirical analysis to formal military alliances is entirely appropriate, because it is only formal alliances that signal intentions to cooperate militarily.[65] In addition, any attempt to identify informal alignments over a five-century span would be highly subjective and would introduce substantial measurement error.

Second, our indicators provide a particularly hard test for hypotheses H4 and H5 about aligning with the leading sea power. A primary motivation for such alliances is the hope of securing economic benefits from the leading power, which can be accomplished with less costly informal alignments as well as with formal military alliances. Thus informal alignments are theoretically relevant here, but by excluding them, we underestimate the extent to which great powers align with the leading sea power, which works against our hypotheses.[66]

Data Analysis

Contrary to traditional balance of power theory and its argument that states tend to balance against the strongest power in the system, particularly if that lead state is increasing in strength, hypothesis 1 predicts that there is no strong tendency for great powers to balance against the leading sea power in the system, even if it is significantly increasing in strength. As the marginal frequencies in the right column of table 3 indicate, great power alliances have formed against the lead sea power in 88 cases out of a total of 544 possible opportuni-

65. This is the rationale that leads most scholars to distinguish hard balancing from soft balancing.
66. Similarly, the exclusion of informal alignments with the leading power on land favors our hypothesis about the low probability of such behavior, but because leading land powers offer far fewer benefits than do leading sea powers, this bias is relatively small.

ties, or about 16 percent of the time. This is strong evidence in support of H1 about the absence of a systematic tendency toward balancing against the leading sea power. In marked contrast, great power alliances formed against the leading land power in Europe about 43 percent of the time over the same time period.[67] This comparison provides strong support for H1's implication that great powers are significantly less likely to balance against the leading global sea power than against the leading European land power.

Hypothesis 1 also suggests that the tendency not to balance against the leading sea power is unaltered if that power is increasing in strength. We find that great powers are equally likely to form alliances against leading sea powers that are not growing in strength (at a 10 percent rate) and against those that are growing in strength (16.1 and 16.5 percent, respectively). This supports H1's predictions of no systematic patterns of balancing against leading sea powers that are growing in strength. In contrast, for the European system, we found higher (but statistically insignificant) tendencies for alliance formation against lead states that were increasing in strength (48 percent, as compared to 40 percent for those not increasing in strength).[68] These results support our general argument about differences in balancing behavior in land-based systems and in global maritime systems.

Table 3 and the data on which it is based also provide information bearing on H2, which predicts that great powers are less likely to balance against leading global sea powers as their share of the naval capabilities in the system increases. The 16 percent probability of balancing against the leading sea power regardless of the magnitude of its advantage drops to a probability of 8.4 percent against a sea power that controls half the capabilities in the system. If we look at the probability of balancing against leading states that control 45 percent and 40 percent of naval capabilities, we arrive at 10.4 percent and 13.4 percent, respectively.

Thus the stronger the leading sea power, the lower the probability that great power balancing coalitions will form. True, the differences are relatively small, but they trend in the predicted direction. This finding of an inverse relationship between capability concentration and the propensity to balance based on our cross-tabulations is reinforced by a logistic regression analysis, which yields a statistically significant negative relationship.[69] We conclude that the

67. Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe," p. 23.
68. Ibid., p. 24.
69. The two variables are significant at the 0.067 level. In an alternative test of hypothesis 2, we operationalize the leading power's relative capability position in terms of the gap between the naval strengths of the number-one and number-two sea powers rather than the proportion of the naval resources in the system controlled by the leading power. A logistic regression analysis reveals a

Table 3. Allying against the Leading Sea Power

	Naval Leader Share ≤ 50%	Naval Leader Share ≥ 50%	Total
No alliance against naval leader	325 (81%)	131 (92%)	456
Alliance against naval leader	76 (19%)	12 (8%)	88
total	401	143	
Chi square = 8.67 p = 0.003			

Table 4. Size of Coalitions against the Leading Sea Power

Number of Major Powers in Coalition	Naval Leader Share ≥ 50%	Naval Leader Share ≥ 45%	Naval Leader Share ≥ 40%	Naval Leader Share of Any Value
2	6	14	15	23
3	0	0	4	8
4	0	1	2	3
5	0	0	0	1
total	6	15	21	35

evidence provides strong support for H1 about the relatively low probability of balancing against the leading global maritime power and modest support for the hypothesis (H2) that the probability of balancing declines with the strength of the leading power's position. The probability of great power balancing against the leading sea power is low and becomes even lower as the lead power grows stronger.

Hypothesis 3 taps another dimension of alliance behavior—the size of balancing coalitions. In contrast to balance of power theory's prediction that high concentrations of power should precipitate broad counterbalancing coalitions, which finds support for the European system, H3 predicts that broad counterbalancing coalitions are least likely to form against sea powers that control a relatively high proportion of resources in the system.

Table 4 arrays the number of great powers in coalitions against the leading sea power according to varying levels of concentration of naval power in the system. By far the most common size of such coalitions is two (the smallest

negative relationship between this alternative indicator of the relative strength of the lead power and the propensity to balance against it, though not a statistically significant one.

size possible), in which 23 of 35 (65 percent) of the cases fall.[70] Less than 12 percent ($N = 4$) of the alliances mustered as many as four or five members. Perhaps even more significant, no broad coalitions with three or more members formed against leading sea powers with 50 percent or more of the naval capabilities in the system. If we move the preponderance level down to a 45 percent minimal share, only one case with three or more members is found. Only at a 40 percent share threshold does the number of broader coalitions begin to increase. In general, more than 90 percent of the broader coalitions are associated with sea power thresholds below a 45 percent share. Thus, leading naval powers with some level of preponderance do not escape coalitions aimed at them, but those coalitions tend to be very small in size, and the size tends to be smaller as the threshold for preponderance rises. In contrast, in the European great power system 52 percent of responses to dominant leaders (with 33 percent capability share or more) involved coalitions of three or more actors, in comparison to 21 percent for the responses to nondominant leaders.[71]

We have argued that predominant sea powers pose less of a direct threat to other great powers, which are more concerned about threats from other land powers in their region and which may gain economic benefits as well as diplomatic and military support by allying with dominant naval and economic powers. Consequently, we expect (H4) that great powers are more likely to ally with the leading sea power than against it. Tables 5 and 6 address this dual expectation.

Table 5 shows that the tendency to ally with the leading sea power increases as the relative capability position of the leading sea power increases, from about 27 percent at the 40 percent threshold of capability concentration to 31 percent at the 45 percent threshold and 34 percent for the 50 percent threshold, with the second two being statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Although the differences from one threshold level to the next are modest, they are in the predicted direction and (for two of the three thresholds) statistically significant.

Perhaps even more revealing is that the tendency to ally with the leading sea power is much greater than the tendency to ally against it. At the 50 percent threshold level, great powers are more than four times likelier to ally with the lead sea power than to balance against it (34 percent vs. 8 percent as reported in table 3 and in table 6). At the 40 percent threshold level, the difference is less, but great powers are still two times more likely to ally with the lead sea power than against it (27 percent vs. 13 percent).

70. As noted, balancing coalitions form against the leading sea power only 16 percent of the time.
71. Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe," p. 26.

Table 5. Alliances with the Leading Naval Power

	Concentration of Naval Power		
	≥ 40%	≥ 45%	≥ 50%
Probability of alliance with leading power	27%	31%	34%
Chi square significance	$p = 0.065$	$p = 0.000$	$p = 0.001$

Table 6. Alliances and Dominant Powers on Land and Sea

	Dominant Land Power	Dominant Sea Power
Alliances against	55%	8%
Alliances with	13%	34%

It is also instructive to compare the much greater likelihood of allying with, as opposed to balancing against, the lead sea power with comparable tendencies in the European system. The relevant information is presented in table 6, which focuses on alliance behavior involving dominant powers in the European and global systems.[72] In the European system, great powers have allied with the dominant land power 13 percent of the time, while allying against it 55 percent of the time, whereas in the global maritime system, great powers have allied with the dominant sea power 34 percent of the time and against it only 8 percent of the time. Thus great powers ally against dominant land great powers more than four times more frequently than they ally with them, while they ally with dominant sea powers more than four times more frequently than they ally against them. The ratios in the two systems are the same but are inverted, providing a striking contrast between strategic behavior on land and at sea.

The size of alliance coalitions with the leading power is also revealing. Hypothesis 5 predicts that coalitions in which the strongest naval power is a member will tend to be larger than coalitions targeted against the strongest naval power. Table 7 addresses this hypothesis by comparing the frequencies of alliance coalitions of various sizes with the leading naval power and against it, using a 40 percent naval power share as a benchmark to calculate each distribution. The outcome is clear. As the second-to-last row of table 7 indicates,

72. Recall that given the different strategic implications of concentrations of power in land-based systems and in maritime systems, we have defined dominance in terms of 33 percent of the system's military resources in the former and 50 percent of the naval resources in the latter.

Table 7. Size of Coalitions with and against the Strongest Sea Power

Number of Major Powers in Coalition	Number of Coalitions with the Leading Sea Power	Number of Coalitions against the Leading Land Power
2	10	15
3	12	4
4	15	2
5	6	0
3–5	33 (77%)	6 (29%)
total	43	21

three-fourths of the coalitions in which the strongest naval power is a member had three or more members, while only slightly more than one-fourth of the alliances targeted against the leading naval power were this large, confirming H5. This is still another contrast with the European system, where 64 percent of the great power coalitions against a dominant land power involved three or more members.[73]

Our statistical analyses of the last five centuries of the global maritime system provide strong support for all of our hypotheses. Great powers generally do not balance against the strongest sea power in the global system, even if it is increasing in strength (H1), and the probability of balancing declines further as the leading power assumes a stronger relative position (H2). Large balancing coalitions tend not to form against the leading sea power, and the probability of large coalitions decreases as sea powers grow stronger (H3). Instead, the stronger the leading sea power's relative position, the more likely that one or more great powers will ally with it (H4), and alliances with the leading sea power tend to be broader than are alliances against it (H5).

These aspects of great power alliance behavior differ sharply from the last five centuries of comparable behavior in the European system, where great powers have generally balanced against dominant land powers (but not against weaker leading land powers), and where these balancing coalitions have generally been broad. All of this supports our general argument that land powers differ from sea powers and that the strategic dynamics of behavior in the European system have differed sharply from the strategic dynamics of behavior in the global maritime system. Counterhegemonic balancing has been common in the European system, but it is relatively rare in the global maritime system. These patterns have significant implications for contemporary debates

73. Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe."

about the absence of balancing against the United States after the end of the Cold War.

Implications for Theories of Balancing

Our argument and findings suggest that the absence of significant external balancing against the United States is not an anomaly with respect to repeated patterns of great power behavior during the last five centuries of the modern system. Great powers only occasionally form coalitions against dominant global powers, and post–Cold War patterns are consistent with that historical reality. This argument shares some common elements with existing explanations of the absence of balancing against the United States but also differs from those explanations in important ways.

First, we reject the conventional belief—shared by neorealists, defensive realists, and others—in the universal applicability of balance of power theory in multistate systems. This belief neglects the significant differences between land powers and sea powers and between land-based systems and maritime systems. It fails to recognize that the strong tendency toward counterhegemonic balancing in the European system during the last five centuries has not been replicated in the global maritime system. High concentrations of naval power (and in the economic correlates of naval power) tend to generate alliances with the leading power rather than against it. The decision of many of the strongest powers in the contemporary system to ally with the United States rather than against it in the Cold War and post–Cold War periods is fully consistent with behavior in the global system for the last five centuries.

One exception to the realist belief that the absence of balancing against the United States is a puzzle for balance of power theory is offered by Brooks and Wohlforth, who argue that balance of power theory postulates only that states will balance to prevent the rise of a hegemon but says nothing about what happens after a state achieves a position of hegemony.[74] We agree, and we trace this restricted domain of balance of power theory to the theory's development by European and British scholars, whose work reflected the European experience and, in particular, the absence of a sustained hegemony in Europe for at least twelve centuries. For most balance of power theorists, what happens under hegemony is off the equilibrium path and not worth exploring in detail.

Although we acknowledge, along with Brooks and Wohlforth, that the potential risks of balancing against the United States undoubtedly help to de-

74. Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance.*

ter that behavior, we think that they exaggerate the causal importance of this factor. Among other things, this argument focuses only on the costs of balancing and neglects the lack of motivations for balancing. As both balance of threat theorists and offensive realists recognize—for somewhat different reasons—contemporary great powers lack the incentives for balancing against the United States. Despite the unprecedented nature of U.S. power, the United States poses no threat of territorial conquest against other great powers. Moreover, it provides collective goods that benefit other states.[75] With the notable exceptions of China and Russia, other great powers seem more concerned with security threats from their regions than from the United States, and they have sought U.S. support against those threats.[76]

In addition, Brooks and Wohlforth's argument that the balancing hypothesis applies only to states that are growing and threatening to achieve a position of hegemony but not to established hegemons such as the United States raises the question of why other leading states did not balance against the United States when it was a rising great power but before it established a position of primacy—perhaps in the late 1940s. If the hypothesis that great powers balance against aspiring hegemons is unconditionally valid, and if the only issue is the distribution of material capabilities, then there were plenty of opportunities for a counterbalancing coalition to form against the United States throughout the Cold War period. Instead, most of the great powers perceived that the greatest threat to their interests came from the Soviet Union, not from the United States, and they joined the United States in a defensive balancing coalition against the Soviet Union. Brooks and Wohlforth concede that even today the member states of the European Union collectively exceed the United States in gross domestic product, and the combination of the European Union, Japan, China, and Russia, reinforced by nuclear deterrence, could form an effective balancing coalition against the United States if it was seen as so threatening. Brooks and Wohlforth's inability to provide a convincing explanation for the absence of coalition formation against the United States in the early Cold War period, when such behavior would not have been so risky, weakens their explanation for nonbalancing after the end of the Cold War.[77]

Our argument shares some elements with defensive realism and balance of threat theory and some with balance of power theory, and it would be useful to highlight both those similarities and our respective differences. We share

75. Walt, *Taming American Power.*
76. The only formal great-power alliance against the United States since 1945 was the Sino-Soviet alliance of 1950–1961.
77. Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance,* pp. 31–32.

with balance of threat theory and with defensive realism the idea that states balance against the greatest threat to their interests rather than always against the most powerful state in the system. Our distinction between counterhegemonic balancing and other forms of balancing is based in part on the recognition that because of proximity, historical rivalries, alliance patterns, and other factors, leading powers with a smaller margin of advantage are not necessarily the greatest threats to many of the great powers in the system. Offensive realists, neorealists, and others who focus exclusively on power and who deemphasize these other sources of threat have difficulty explaining the presence or absence of balancing behavior in systems in which the leading power has only a modest lead in capabilities. This basic distinction leads to different balancing processes in regional and global systems.

Although we agree with Stephen Walt's emphasis on the importance of threats and also with his specification of some of the key elements of threat—aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions[78]—we think that Walt neglects the extent to which each of these factors is endogenous to categorical differences in types of power. Walt correctly emphasizes the importance of proximity and the loss-of-strength gradient, but he fails to recognize that a proximate threat on land is far more threatening than a proximate threat at sea, especially to other great powers.[79] Moreover, the loss-of-strength gradient operates differently on land and at sea. The military threat posed by nearby armies falls off quickly over distance, whereas powerful navies can still accomplish their missions at a distance.[80] Similarly, the extent of an adversary's "offensive power" is significantly influenced by whether the adversary is a land power or a sea power. Sea powers are significantly less capable than land powers of invading and occupying land powers. Common conceptions of offense and defense on which Walt builds were constructed for warfare on land, and they arguably have a much different meaning for warfare at sea.[81]

Aggressive intentions are the primary source of threat for Walt and for most defensive realists.[82] By neglecting the distinction between land powers and sea

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78. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances,* pp. 21–26.
79. Weaker states are vulnerable to both land powers and sea powers.
80. Mearsheimer recognizes the greater threat posed by armies than by navies. His "stopping power of water" concept fails to recognize, however, that water provides an efficient means of transport and power projection as well as a barrier, as Angell recognized in his analysis in *The World's Highway.* The problem is not so much the stopping power of water as the stopping power of land after traversing water. Sea powers can travel great distances, but they have always had difficulties in conquering distant but powerful peoples once they reach their destination.
81. Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); and Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *Offense, Defense, and War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004).
82. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances;* and Glaser, "Realists as Optimists."

powers, however, Walt misses a significant source of aggressive intentions. As we have shown, sea powers have fewer capabilities to threaten the interests of other great powers and fewer incentives to do so, given their greater interest in access to markets than in territorial aggrandizement. Control over markets may also benefit other states by providing public goods such as the stability of the global political economy. Thus we accept the concept of a "benign hegemon," but argue that the benevolence of a hegemon is significantly shaped by whether it is a dominant sea power in the global system or a dominant land power in the European system. It is much easier for a predominant global sea power than for a dominant continental power to be perceived as benign.[83]

In short, we do not entirely reject Walt's argument that "one cannot determine a priori . . . which sources of threat will be most important in any given case." We believe, however, that the land power/sea power distinction, interacting with aggregate capabilities, is the best single predictor of the magnitude of the perceived threat to a state's interests, and that this factor explains a significant amount of the variance in threat perception across the great powers.[84]

Our argument that predominant sea powers are less threatening than are dominant land powers does not imply that a counterbalancing alliance will never form against a global power that controls half the coercive resources in the system, only that the mere existence of a dominant state will not trigger such a coalition, as it usually does in continental systems. Whereas the threat from dominant continental powers derives from who they are, the threat from dominant global powers derives from what they do.[85]

Conclusion

The many diverse and sometimes contradictory variations of balance of power theory share the two core propositions that great powers balance against the

83. The less-threatening nature of sea power is undoubtedly related to the tendency of global sea powers to be more liberal in their economic and political ideologies and institutions, which lessens the threats posed to other great powers. Liberal ideology promotes trade and finance and the political conditions under which they prosper, and liberal regimes' concerns for domestic liberty leads them to prefer strong navies over standing armies. These factors are difficult to tease out, and this question deserves more analysis. It is interesting, however, that fewer coalitions formed against nonliberal Portugal in the sixteenth century or against the quasi-liberal Netherlands in the seventeenth century (when the latter controlled more than 45 percent of the systems' naval resources) than against more liberal Britain during its period of global dominance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. True, multiple coalitions formed against sixteen-century Spain and seventeenth-century France, but many of those occurred when one of the two states was simultaneously the leading land power and the leading sea power.

84. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances,* p. 26.

85. Jack S. Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance against and When?" in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann, *Balance of Power,* pp. 29–51 at p. 45.

strongest state in the system and that, as a result, sustained hegemonies never form in multistate systems. These propositions, if formulated as a universal theory, are almost certainly incorrect. Hegemonies frequently emerged in ancient systems and in more recent non-Western systems, sometimes because of the absence of balancing. High concentrations of power also formed in the global maritime system under Britain in the nineteenth century and under the United States in the twentieth century.[86] If we abandon universalist aims and conceive of balance of power theory as subject to certain scope conditions, however, the theory may have considerable explanatory power in well-defined empirical domains.

Any system-level theory needs to specify the system under consideration, the basis of power in that system, and its key actors. A properly specified balance of power theory needs to recognize the distinction between great powers and other powers, between regional continental systems and the global maritime system, and between counterhegemonic balancing and balancing against other threats. We argue that great powers have a strong tendency to balance against hegemonic threats deriving from high concentrations of land-based military power, especially in Europe. Great powers have a weaker tendency to balance against leading powers with a more modest advantage in land-based military power, and they only occasionally balance against high concentrations of economic and naval power in the global maritime system. We make no predictions about the behavior of smaller powers in great power systems.

Continental systems and the maritime system differ in terms of the basis of power in the system, the goals and interests and strategies of the leading powers, and consequently in their power dynamics. Leading continental land powers live by territory and develop armies to protect and expand that territory. Leading sea powers live by trade and the economic empires supported by trade, and they develop navies to protect and expand their trading systems. Large armies pose greater threats to the territorial and constitutional integrity of other leading states than do large navies. This leads us to hypothesize that high concentrations of land-based military power induce other great powers to form counterbalancing alliances to protect their security, deter future expansion by the dominant state, and, if deterrence fails, defeat that state in war, whereas high concentrations of sea power do not provoke such coalitions.

Even this formulation is too broad, however, given that the European system differs from many other historical systems. Sustained hegemonies have

86. On ancient and non-Western systems, see Watson, *The Evolution of International Society;* Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe;* and Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth, *Balance of Power in World History.*

not formed over Europe in at least twelve centuries, but they have occasionally formed over other systems. Explaining these variations in outcomes and in the differential effectiveness of balancing mechanisms in helping to account for those outcomes is an important research question, but one that we cannot engage here. We focus on the differences between balancing behavior in the European system and in the modern global system during the last five centuries of the modern world.

In an earlier study, we found that European great powers have exhibited a strong, but not deterministic, propensity to balance when one state acquired a third or more of the total military capabilities in the system, but not at lower concentrations of power, and that higher concentrations of power have usually led to larger balancing coalitions.[87] This finding provided strong support for the counterhegemonic balancing hypothesis but only weak support for the hypothesis that great powers balance against the strongest power in the system.

In this study we turned to the maritime global system. We argued that great power alliance behavior is markedly different in the global system than in the European system. We hypothesized that great powers do not generally balance against the leading sea power in the global system, even if it is increasing in strength; that the probability of balancing declines as the leading global power becomes stronger; that the counterbalancing coalitions that form are smaller for higher concentrations of maritime power than for lower concentrations of maritime power; that great powers are more likely to ally with the dominant sea power than against it; and that both the probability of an alliance with the leading sea power and the size of the coalition increases as the leading power becomes stronger.

All of our hypotheses are supported by the evidence, and nearly all are statistically significant. This provides strong support for our arguments that sea powers are different than land powers; that they constitute different kinds of threats to other states and elicit different kinds of responses; that power dynamics in general and alliance behavior in particular are different in maritime systems than in continental systems; and that balance of power theory cannot be generalized to the global maritime system.

Our argument and our empirical findings have important implications for contemporary debates about balancing behavior. The absence of a great power balancing coalition against the United States is not the puzzle that some have claimed it to be, but it is consistent with at least five centuries of behavior in the global system. This is not to say that balancing coalitions never form

87. Levy and Thompson, "Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe."

against leading maritime or global powers, only that the threshold for balancing is both higher and different. We can certainly imagine the United States behaving in such a way as to threaten the interests of other great powers and eventually to provoke a balancing coalition, but the trigger would have to involve specific behavior that threatens other great powers, not the fact of U.S. power. Whereas dominant continental powers are inherently threatening because of their power and system-induced uncertainties regarding their intentions, the threat from predominant global powers to other great powers emerges primarily from their behavior and from what that signals about their intentions.

This study also has interesting implications for the debate between balance of power theory and balance of threat theory.[88] Our findings of a strong tendency for great powers to balance against the most powerful state in the European system if it controls a disproportionate share of capabilities in the system but only a weak tendency to balance against a leading state with a more modest advantage raises questions about both theories. Balance of threat theory underestimates the extent to which threat is endogenous to power at high levels of capability concentration in the European system, whereas balance of power theorists exaggerate the extent to which threat is endogenous to power at lower levels of capability concentration in that system.

Patterns are different if we broaden our focus to include the global system. The single best predictor of whether a balancing coalition will form against a state that controls a disproportionate amount of the resources in the system is whether that state is a land power or a sea power. Balance of threat theory underestimates the extent to which threat perception and each of its key elements of proximity, offensive power, and intentions are influenced by the categorical differences in types of power in conjunction with aggregate capabilities. It is not that balance of threat theory is wrong, only that it fails to incorporate the additional explanatory power provided by the land power/sea power distinction. Neorealism's failure to make this distinction leads to incorrect predictions about tendencies toward balancing in the global system.

Offensive realists who accept Mearsheimer's analytic distinction between global hegemony and regional hegemony and his emphasis on the importance of land power in the latter are relatively immune from this critique.[89] Although our argument has some elements in common with Mearsheimer's, we give greater emphasis to the leading global power's provision of benefits for other

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88. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics;* Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics;* and Walt, *The Origins of Alliances.*
89. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.*

states. Those benefits lower the probability of great power balancing against the leading global power and increase the probability of coalitions with the leading power. We also argue that at high levels of capability concentration in the global system, the probability of great power balancing against the leading power, though low, is influenced primarily by perceptions of its aggressive intentions that are not fully endogenous to its aggregate material capabilities. Hostile intentions are far more consequential for counterhegemonic balancing behavior in imbalanced global maritime systems than in imbalanced regional continental systems, where threat is highly endogenous to power. Thus unconditional statements that states tend to balance against power or that they tend to balance against threats are almost certainly incorrect.

Scholars must reject the idea of a single logic of coalition formation and the undifferentiated conceptions of great powers and of international systems on which it is based. One logic applies on land, and a second logic applies at sea. Regularized patterns of great power balancing against Philip II, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Wilhelm II, and Hitler do not imply great power balancing against the United States in the contemporary system. Balance of power theory can help scholars to understand the dynamics of great power interaction, but only if the theory and its scope conditions are properly specified.